



Università  
Ca' Foscari  
Venezia

Master's Degree

In

**Storia dal Medioevo all'età contemporanea**

Final Thesis

**Journey to Pragmatism: The History of the American  
Religious Right in the '90s and '00s through the analysis of  
the journal  
«Christianity Today»**

**Supervisor**

Prof. Valentina Ciciliot

**Graduand**

Alberto Concina

877746

**Academic Year**

2019 / 2020

## Acknowledgements

This dissertation represents the final endpoint of my academic experience, one that started many years ago when I was still a child. By looking back at these years, I have realized that it's only right to acknowledge the people who have accompanied me through my academic journey and to be thankful for their presence.

The first thanks go to my family. I thank my parents, Serenella and Loris who have always let me the liberty to choose my own path and have supported my decisions through all these years, in good times and bad times alike. I thank my grand-parents, Arnaldo and Egle, who have been a second family as far as I can remember. In particular, I thank my grandmother, who has helped me learning in the first years of my education with motherly patience. I thank those who have become part of my family during the years, Riccardo, Silvia, Sara, Mirko, Paolo, Ermanna, Annalisa and Giorgia, showing that care and love transcend the boundaries of blood. I thank my beloved Rhani, the most beautiful surprise my academic career could ever reserve to me and the person with whom one day I hope to share a future.

The second thanks go to my friends. I thank La Gilda, Davide, Federico, Jacopo, Leonardo and Marco, and Tommaso, whose companionship makes my life better and has helped me through some of the most difficult times. I thank Elena, Eleonora, Enrica and Filippo, who from the first days of highschool have become a stable presence at my side, growing together from fortuitous classmates to close friends. I thank my dear friend Martina, alongside Enrico, Lorenzo, Mara, Milena and Simone, my right hands and my peers who have enriched me through all of our volunteer activities, without whom I would not be the person who I am today. I thank Gaia in particular for the help she has given me with this dissertation, finding time to correct my English.

Finally, a sincere thank goes to professor Ciciliot Valentina, who has not only accepted with enthusiasm to be my supervisor, but has offered her assistance and guidance through all the process this dissertation has gone through. It's not easy to find such a dedicated professor and I cannot be less than sincerely grateful for all the time and energy she has spent for this project. Thanks to my supervisor diligence this thesis has turned out not as a simple writing exercise, but rather as a constant learning process that has bettered me as a graduate.

## Contents

Introduction	p.3
Prologue	p.8
Part I. Evangelicals and Politics	p.19
1. Core Values and Principles of Evangelical Political Activism	p.21
1.1 <i>Understanding Christian America</i>	p.21
1.2 <i>The Values Behind Evangelical Politics</i>	p.25
1.3 <i>Church and State, Religion and Politics</i>	p.31
1.4 <i>Considerations on Part I. Chapter 1</i>	p.36
2. The Religious Right	p.38
2.1 <i>Origins: from Nixon to Reagan</i>	p.38
2.2 <i>Changing Decades: The Nineties and Two-Thousands</i>	p.44
2.3 <i>Anything Left?</i>	p.52
2.4 <i>Considerations on Part I. Chapter 2</i>	p.56
3. Elections	p.58
3.1 <i>Evangelicals and the Republican Party</i>	p.59
3.2 <i>Evangelicals and the Democratic Party</i>	p.69
3.3 <i>Considerations on Part I. Chapter 3</i>	p.76
Part II. Significant Public Policy Issues	p.79
4. Abortion	p.80
4.1 <i>Evangelicals and the Pro-Life Cause</i>	p.81
4.2 <i>The Different Faces of the Pro-Life Movement: Identities and Strategies in the Nineties and Early Two-Thousands</i>	p.87

4.3 <i>Considerations on Part II. Chapter 4</i>	p.96
5. Homosexuality and Gay-Rights	p.99
5.1 <i>An Evangelical View on Homosexuality</i>	p.100
5.2 <i>Gay-Rights on the Public Policy Debate</i>	p.111
5.3 <i>A Comparison between Gay-Rights and Abortion within Evangelical Strategies</i>	p.120
5.4 <i>Considerations on Part II. Chapter 5</i>	p.123
6. New Bioethical Issues: Embryo Research and Stem-Cells	p.125
6.1 <i>Human Embryo, Stem-Cells and Cloning. What are They?</i>	p.126
6.2 <i>Embryonal Research and Stem-Cells as Bioethical Issues for the Religious Right</i>	p.129
6.3 <i>End-of-Life Issues</i>	p.135
6.4 <i>Considerations on Part II. Chapter 6</i>	p.138
Conclusions	p.140
Bibliography	p.142

# Introduction

The rise of the contemporary American Religious Right has historically began in the late seventies, when pressured mainly by the rapid evolutions of the American society and the expansion of bioethical and sexual rights such as abortion and gay-rights, the Evangelical constituency left its traditional political inactivism and joined the political debate on solid conservative grounds. It's in this period that conservative pastors and intellectuals, with already establish fame and clout among the Evangelical subculture, founded those organization that would form the Religious Right such as Focus on the Family (1977), Concerned Women for America (1978) and the Moral Majority (1979) to cite the more influential ones. Becoming politically active with the goal to stop the perceived dangerous secularization of Christian America required Evangelicals to take an active side on partisanship, something they had previously eschewed. The first time Evangelicals mobilized had been in 1976 to support the Democratic presidential candidate Jimmy Carter, himself an Evangelical. The shared religious affiliation had not been enough though for the president to maintain the backing of his co-believers who started to look for new political allies, disappointed by an administration that had chosen not to pursue a strong social conservative stand. In the end, in the run up to the 1980 presidential campaign the Religious Right organizations casted their support for the Republican candidate Ronald Reagan, resulting in the major electoral realignment of the Evangelical constituency and in a new alliance being established between conservative Christians and the Republican party. This alliance, the constant exposure to the world of politics and finally the desire of developing a better and more effective political approach, all concurred in the evolution the Religious Right underwent from the times of the Moral Majority to these very same days. It's indeed this evolution the central topic of this dissertation, the 'Journey to Pragmatism' the American Religious Right underwent from being a thunderous and triumphalist political entity capable of mobilizing a large constituency but unable to capitalize on its own strength, to a more mature political force, exercising notable influence on the Republican and national agenda thanks to the adoption of new pragmatic approaches and the establishment of a nationwide network of organizations. This newly achieved pragmatism is intended as a comprehensive political behavior that, without losing sight of the overall social and political final goals, has manifested itself in the adoption by the Religious Right of a new approach to politics made of give-and-take logics and an acceptance of gradualism as a legitimate strategy. Following the idea that important changes would have been better achieved through gradual but steady victories rather than through landmark decisions, the Religious Right refocused its strategies and changed, not without resistances, its own political nature.

Crucial in these regards have been the nineties and early two-thousands, two decades that represented a turning point for the development of the Religious Right and separates what had been the experience of the Moral Majority and the Reagan era with more contemporary forms of Evangelical political activism. The choice to focus on these years is motivated by mainly three factors. First, these are the years in which Evangelicals strengthened their alliance with the Republican party. Indeed, if during the eighties this religious

constituency politically supported the Republican party, this alliance was by the end of the decade all but a certainty and the American political world wondered whether Evangelicals would return to support a Democratic candidate, uphold their new alliance or entirely retire once again in their traditional political disinterest. History proved that the Religious Right not only remained a presence in the American political scene, but that it even matured into a political force with notable influence. It's indeed in the nineties and early two-thousands that this process has taken place. Second, these two decades have been marked by political equilibrium. They started with the Republican presidency of George H. W. Bush (1988), continued with the Democratic double mandate of Bill Clinton (1993-2001) and ended with the Republican double mandate of George W. Bush (2001-2009). The alternance of Republican and Democratic presidencies offers the opportunity to examine the Religious Right in two very different political positions, both as supporting and opposing the ruling party. Third, the Obama presidency (2009-2017) represents a chronological extreme for the historical analysis of the Religious Right. By the time of the Obama electoral campaign (2008) the Religious Right had already undergone those significant changes that had transformed the movement into a political force significantly different from that of the Reagan era. Furthermore, the Obama presidency saw the unfolding of the 2008 financial crisis, an event that changed dramatically the world. Beyond the economic and financial fallouts, the cultural legacies of the banking crisis are still manifesting in today political and social developments, such as diffidence towards globalization and rising protectionist if not sovereigntist attitudes. Thus, the financial crisis of 2008, with its short-term and long-term outcomes, represents a significant turning point for contemporary history and an endpoint as far as the goals of this dissertation are concerned.

In order to understand the political journey of the Religious Right, attention has been paid to those issues conservative Christians themselves considered to be primary concerns, thus mainly abortion and gay-rights. Both abortion and the advancement of gay-rights, which in the decades considered mainly meant same-sex marriage, were met with staunch opposition by conservative Christians, who saw these policies as the result of an encroaching secularization threatening the American social and moral tissue. These issues received much of the attention of the Evangelical constituency and emerged as central point of negotiation and litigation also between the Religious Right and its political allies whenever the latter were perceived as not being invested enough in their opposition. Next to these two issues, new bioethical discussions emerged following scientific breakthroughs on the field of cellular research. These discussions revolved around the advancement of embryonic research and the medical use of embryonic stem-cells and soon were added to the bioethical agenda of the Religious Right as matters of concern, alongside the contemporary end-of-life issues such as assisted-suicide. Although embryonic research received less political attention from the Religious Right than the two aforementioned issues, new bioethical concerns will also be taken into consideration in this dissertation as public policy issues the Religious Right campaigned on, especially because of the relations it perceived between these and abortion. Conservative Christians did not exclusively focus on bioethical and homosexual issues but also showed interest for broader and different concerns, such as economy, environmental regulations, foreign policies and the broader role of the U.S. in the post-Cold War World. Keeping this into consideration, in order to understand the political evolution of the Religious Right bioethical and homosexual

issues have been prioritized both for the importance the very same conservative Christians bestowed upon them by making them deal-breakers in political negotiations, something that has not happened with other policy areas, and for the fact that it's around these issues that much of the contentions between the Religious Right and the political world at large have happened, struggles that have largely contributed to the emergence of a more mature political movement.

The main primary source on which this research has been based on is *Christianity Today*, the flagship magazine of American Evangelicalism. The printed magazine has a circulation of 130.000 copies per issue but represents just one of the today's products of *Christianity Today*. All the media products of *Christianity Today*, spanning from the printed magazine to digital articles, from sponsored literature to podcasts, reach about 2.5 million readers monthly<sup>1</sup>. The magazine has been founded in 1956 by prominent evangelist Billy Graham as a mean to further spread the Evangelical revival American Protestantism was experiencing and as a counterpart of the mainline Protestant magazine *The Christian Century*, accused alongside the broader mainline denominations and their Theological Liberalism to have failed to “meet the moral and spiritual needs of the people”<sup>2</sup>. Although in its beginnings the magazine privileged doctrinal discussions and theological issues, it already paid attention to the events happening in the contemporary American society and tried to address them from an Evangelical perspective, an effort that became more consistent through the years. The source offers some advantages over other Evangelical magazines but has also some limits as far as an historical research is concerned. For the advantages, *Christianity Today* tried to be a comprehensive forum for all the Evangelical world and to this end it offered its pages to the writings of many different Evangelicals, from the Religious Right to the Religious Left, sometime even comparing the different positions through moderated interviews or series of articles. For this reason, it offers a more eclectic point of view which does not conform to the extreme positions of neither ultraconservatives nor ultraliberals but nonetheless reports them. Furthermore, *Christianity Today* has not been the product of an organization directly involved in politics during the considered decades but has instead tried to avoid direct political activism or identification, which allowed the presence of different and sometime contrasting point of views in the articles it published. For the limits and disadvantages of using the magazine as an almost exclusive primary source, the strongest one is that despite trying to avoid political identification, the content published and supported necessarily conforms to one particular political view. Contextualizing the magazine in the broader world of American Evangelicalism of the nineties and early two-

---

<sup>1</sup> Information on the magazine circulation have been found at <https://www.newsweek.com/Christianity-today-subscriptions-rose-after-op-ed-calling-donald-trumps-removal-office-magazine-1478899>;

<https://www.evangelicalpress.com/cti/>; <https://www.Christianitytoday.org/what-we-do/>. Accessed September 20, 2020.

<sup>2</sup> The Editorial Team of Christianity Today. *Why 'Christianity Today'?*, Christianity Today, October 15, 1956, 20-23. In Harp, Gillis J. *Protestants and American Conservatism*. Oxford/New York, Oxford University Press, 2019, 180. The author provides an analysis of the magazine foundation that further contextualize it in the broader American fifties. As far as fundamentalism is concerned, the author demonstrates how the magazine had been founded in order to “break with the severe separatism of Fundamentalists [...] but remain theologically conservative and evangelical”. Furthermore, the author also underlines the crucial financial contribution of oilman J. Howard Pew (1882-1971) in the founding of the magazine, stressing how Graham himself to convince the friend to invest on *Christianity Today* defined it as “conservative, evangelical and anti-communist”.

thousands, it can be assumed that the overall position of *Christianity Today* is moderately conservative, thus supporting the arguments behind the need of a social and moral conservative agenda for the U.S. but without adhering to all the projects of the Religious Right or to all the statements made by influential conservative Christian leaders. Having an identifiable ideological position on a variety of issues that conforms to much of the arguments in favor of social conservatism poses a limit on the objectivity of the magazine's articles, which for how detailed they might be still remain ideologically connotated products. Further complicating the issue even more is the fact that the Evangelical world is a very complex and not unified one, where leaders maintain different and sometime antipodal views. Taking one magazine, for how much read it might be, will not exhaust all the positions and argumentation on a specific debate, and even the generalization that *Christianity Today* might provide comes with its own limitations. Indeed, when the magazine reports on a topic and integrates it with a statement expressed by an Evangelical leader who holds more liberal views, it does that through its own lens thus resulting in a product that it's no more the original one, but rather an interpretation. Therefore, the argumentations of the following dissertation must be taken not only based on *Christianity Today*, but through *Christianity Today* and its point of view. Beside these limits, *Christianity Today* still remains a precious primary source on the Evangelical world both for its wide circulation, being the most read Evangelical magazine, and for the variety of perspectives it presents through its pages, thus offering a wide view on Evangelicals and on the evolution of the movement through the decades.

This dissertation will be opened by a Prologue in which the main traits of New-Evangelicalism will be discussed, thus identifying the religious group at the center of this historical analysis. The Prologue will focus on New-Evangelicalism in the broader context of American Protestantism and Fundamentalism in particular, thus it will deal with the more theological and doctrinal aspects of the Evangelical identity. Nonetheless, it will also provide arguments in favor of a more complex Evangelical identity encompassing religious as well as social assumptions as central parts of the Evangelical identikit.

After the Prologue, the dissertation will move forward into Part I: Evangelicals and Politics. Since in this part Evangelicals will be considered as a political constituency, the first chapter will define the political values behind their activism. Furthermore, it will also define the very same political understanding Evangelicals developed, thus presenting the theoretical framework for the rest of the dissertation. The second chapter will deal with the Religious Right proper, presenting how its historical antecedents had already manifested during the Nixon presidency and fully matured under the Reagan Era. Thus, the central thesis of this dissertation will be discussed by observing the political developments of the Religious Right in the nineties and early two-thousands. Concluding the second chapter, an analysis of the Religious Left will be presented not only for its historical presence on the American scene, but also because a comparison between the two wings of Evangelical political activism will further clarify the main points behind the pragmatic evolution of the Religious Right. Finally, attention will be given to national elections as moments to better understand the relations between Evangelicals and the two main American parties.

Having dealt with politics proper, the dissertation will move forwards into Part II: Significant Public Policy Issues. Here, the three main issues of abortion, gay-rights and new bioethical issues will be discussed



in detail as compelling cases for the pragmatic evolution of the Religious Right. Occupying the first chapter of this second part, the discussion on abortion will start from the relation between Evangelicals and the pro-life cause, explaining how their attitude towards reproductive choice evolved from indifference or even support, to staunch opposition. Then the different identities and strategies adopted to contrast abortion will be analyzed with the intent of showing how different the Evangelical political approach has evolved following political exposure. The second chapter will address homosexuality and gay-rights, starting from the view Evangelicals had elaborated on same-sex attraction. Gay-rights will be then addressed as a public policy debate, thus providing another compelling case for the Evangelical political evolution. Finally, a comparison will be drawn between abortion and gay-rights within Evangelical strategies. Concluding Part II will be the chapter on the new bioethical issues of embryonic research, stem-cells and end-of-life issues. In the beginning, considering the more scientific nature of the topic, a contextualized introduction to the scientific debate will be provided. Then, these new bioethical issues will be addressed as new concerns for the Religious Right, analyzing the debate they sparked and how Evangelicals took part in it, especially considering their strong pro-life position.

Finally, the Conclusions will close this dissertation. As every chapter will be closed with punctual and on topic considerations, the final Conclusions will highlight the main arguments brought forward to defend this dissertation and will provide a brief summary of the same, thus reaching the final stop of the Journey to Pragmatism of the Religious Right.

## Prologue

The 1976 presidential election of Jimmy Carter (born 1924) marked for the first time an openly ‘born-again’ candidate at the highest political office in the United States. Suddenly, Evangelicals were put on the forefront of America’s public life with the *Times* and *Newsletter* proclaiming for 1976 to be the “Year of the Evangelical”, a label they borrowed from a poll conducted the same year by George Gallup Jr.<sup>3</sup> In the following years, Evangelicals became key actors among the American public, not only openly voicing their concerns on a wide and yet consistent variety of social issues, but also strongly participating in the political life of the States in order to enact through political means the changes they advocated for. So loud were their voices, so evident their presence that even “The Simpsons”, that countercultural and satirical depiction of the late eighties early nineties American society, considered them to be important enough to be granted a stable place in the series in the character of Ned Flanders, who is not simply an Evangelical but the neighbor of the most famous yellow family<sup>4</sup>. However, when looking at reality, the next-door Evangelical seems to become more a caricatural topos rather than a stable presence in the American life, with polls and inquiries about the number of Evangelicals in America presenting findings that come in various shades of gray. The 2018 General Social Survey, one of the most reliable surveys when it comes to religion in the American society, found out that evangelicals made up about 22.5% of the population<sup>5</sup>. The 2014 Religious Landscape Study by the Pew Research Center almost confirmed these numbers by pointing out that Evangelical Protestants made up 25.4% of the Christian population<sup>6</sup>. On the other hand, while monitoring the voting patterns of religious groups in the 2008 presidential elections, the Barna Group counted Evangelicals as about 7% of the national adult population<sup>7</sup>, a very low percentage when confronted with a Pew study from the previous year counting as Evangelical 34% of the population, a percentage that fits with the estimates made by Wheaton College<sup>8</sup>. When combined, these estimates give us a very unclear image of the numbers of evangelicals among the U.S. population, a wide range that spans from 7% to 34%<sup>9</sup>, making Evangelicals both an overestimated presence and the everyday next-door

---

<sup>3</sup>Heath W. Carter and Laura R. Porter eds. *Turning Points in the History of American Evangelicalism*, Grand Rapids, Eerdmans, 2017, Xiv.

<sup>4</sup> Further information about the character can be found at [https://simpsons.fandom.com/wiki/Ned\\_Flanders](https://simpsons.fandom.com/wiki/Ned_Flanders). Accessed September 1, 2020.

<sup>5</sup> Burge, Ryan P. *Evangelicals Show No Decline, Despite Trump and Nones*, Christianity Today, March 21, 2019. <https://www.Christianitytoday.com/news/2019/march/evangelical-nones-mainline-us-general-social-survey-gss.html>. Accessed September 1, 2020.

<sup>6</sup> The Religious Landscape Study Can be found at <https://www.pewforum.org/religious-landscape-study/>. Accessed September 1, 2020.

<sup>7</sup>Barna Research Group. *How People of Faith Voted in the 2008 Presidential Race*, January 28, 2009. <https://www.barna.com/research/how-people-of-faith-voted-in-the-2008-presidential-race/>. Accessed September 1, 2020.

<sup>8</sup> <https://web.archive.org/web/20160130062242/http://www.wheaton.edu/ISAE/Defining-Evangelicalism/How-Many-Are-There>. Accessed September 1, 2020. Wheaton College is an Evangelical Protestant liberal arts college located in Wheaton, Illinois.

<sup>9</sup> This gap resulted by the adoption by the two institutions of different criteria to define an Evangelical. While the Pew Research Center simply counted as Evangelicals all the responders who described themselves as born-again, the Barna

neighbor. The enormous difference in these percentages might be an impasse when dealing with the weight of Evangelicals in American society, but it's not an useless data in itself since it does tell us something very important: the term Evangelical as well as the group it defines is not referable to a monolithic and stable entity, but rather to a coalescence, a movement, that goes from individuals all the way up to denominations and has formed around a consensus on some important notions and stances, being them religious in nature but spanning from the theological field to the socio-political one.

While plenty of space will be given through all the dissertation to the social, cultural and political themes that have interested the Evangelical movement, this prologue will analyze the theological aspects that Evangelicals share and will contextualize the historical rise of the Evangelical movement within the American religious landscape as an endogenous experience. It is the goal of this part to show the historical journey of the Evangelicals and to present a clearer definition of this group using not only historians' analysis, but also self-representations by Evangelicals themselves.

### *From Fundamentalism to New-Evangelicalism*

The rise of New-Evangelicalism fits into that pattern of awakenings and revivals that have long characterized the American Protestant world. It consists of a religious group who has distanced itself from the separatist aspects of Fundamentalism while maintaining its core beliefs. Therefore, when describing the history of New-Evangelicalism, we cannot disregard the history of Fundamentalism, its core principles and the reasons behind the "soft" secession between Evangelicals and Fundamentalists since not only the historical roots of New-Evangelicalism are to be found there, but also many of the characteristics of Evangelicalism are either borrowed from Fundamentalism or developed as response to its perceived inadequacies.

The history of Fundamentalism begins in the early decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, with changes in American theology rapidly polarizing the Protestant world into those open to the possibility of adopting a modernistic approach to faith and the Bible, and those who instead reacted conservatively, staunchly defending the inerrancy of the Scriptures. This conservative reaction had been facilitated by the adoption among many conservative intellectuals of the doctrine of Dispensationalism, a theological idea that privileged a literal interpretation of the Bible and conceived history as divided into different segments called dispensations, each characterized by an increased worsening and corruption of times culminating in the apocalyptic judgement by God. Dispensationalism became popularized among conservative denominations thanks to the circulation

---

Group presented a list of nine short religious statements and counted as Evangelicals only those who strongly agreed with all them. Such statements are: 1. Being a born-again Christian who made a personal commitment to Jesus; 2. Believing they'll go to Heaven because they have confessed their sins and accepted Jesus as their Lord and Savior; 3. Stating that faith plays an important role in their personal life; 4. Believing they have the responsibility to share their religious beliefs with non-Christians; 5. Believing Satan exists; 6. Believing in personal salvation being possible only through faith, not works; 7. Believing Jesus lived a sinless life on Earth; 8. Believing in Bible-inerrancy; 9. Describing God as all-mighty and perfect. <https://www.barna.com/research/survey-explores-who-qualifies-as-an-evangelical/>. Accessed September 1, 2020.

between 1910 and 1915 of a series of booklets known as “The Fundamentals”, containing various essays from dispensational intellectuals that although did not primarily indulge in premillennialism, nonetheless contained a strong defense of the literal interpretation of the biblical text against the higher criticism that was being developed in some more liberal northern universities<sup>10</sup>. The term “Fundamentalism” originated in the midst of a confrontation between liberal and conservative theologians in the Northern Baptist Convention, being coined in 1920 by conservative Baptist Curtis Lee Laws to designate his side of the belligerents. Fundamentalists referred to those willing to fight to defend the fundamental biblical doctrines against those whose approach to the Bible was more liberal and open to higher criticism and modernistic interpretations. It should be noted that at that time Fundamentalism was not a single movement but rather the attitude of anti-modernist of many sorts, spreading across different Protestant denomination that were coming into terms with the internal division between those who advocated for new modern lines of interpretations and those who refused them<sup>11</sup>.

If Fundamentalism was characterized by the reaction against the spreading of modernist forms of theology in Protestant denominations, Fundamentalists also reacted to the changing cultural trends of the Roaring Twenties. One battle above all characterized this decade, i.e. the battle against the teaching of evolution in public schools, a scientific theory that Fundamentalists believed having been created by secularists to undermine the teachings of the Bible and discredit its message. Building on the historical direct involvement of Protestants in politics and their ever increasing network of alliances, Fundamentalists managed to pass in the early ‘20s a series of laws in the southern states that prohibited the teaching of evolution in public schools, culminating in the Scopes Trial of 1925<sup>12</sup> that brought Fundamentalism in front of the national audience<sup>13</sup>. Despite winning this trial, Fundamentalism was now being associated by northern liberal press with obscurantism and ridicule. The aftermath of the Scopes Trial led to a closure in the Fundamentalist movement, prompting conservative Protestants to separate from liberal denominations and to promote even stricter moral codes. As a result, the process of creation of a separated subculture made of parachurch organizations, missionary associations, bible studying groups, schools and universities such as Bob Jones and Wheaton, intensified and helped to spread the teachings of Dispensationalism and Fundamentalism alike, sometime coalescing the two around an alarmist characterization of cultural trends and uncompromising gatekeeping. The spirit of fighting back against the liberalization of theology and the permissiveness of culture brought many denominations and churches to autonomously label themselves Fundamentalist on the ground that they also shared the same mood for militancy. Between the ‘30s and the ‘40s, churches and groups that defined

---

<sup>10</sup> Marsden, George M. *The Rise of Fundamentalism*. In Heath W. Carter and Laura R. Porter eds. *Turning Points in the History of American Evangelicalism*, 141.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid. 144-145.

<sup>12</sup> The Scopes Trial, officially known as *The State of Tennessee v. John Thomas Scopes*, was a highly publicized trial of a highschool teacher charged with violating the state laws about the teaching of evolution. Further information on the trial can be found at <https://www.britannica.com/event/Scopes-Trial>. Accessed September 1, 2020.

<sup>13</sup> For further information on the impact of the Scopes Trial, see; Larson, Edward J. *Summer for the Gods: The Scopes Trial and America’s Continuing Debate over Science and Religion*, New York, Basic Books, 1997; Moran, Jeffery P. *The Scopes Trial: A Brief History with Documents*, Boston, Bedford/St. Martin’s, 2002; Israel, Charles Alan. *Before Scopes: Evangelism, Education and Evolution in Tennessee, 1870-1925*, Athens, Georgia, University of Georgia Press, 2004.

themselves as Fundamentalist definitely broke fellowship with their liberal counterparts, isolating themselves within their closed subculture<sup>14</sup>.

It is from this religious universe that in the late '40s and early '50s a new generation came to age and the New-Evangelicals emerged, eager to surpass the Fundamentalist isolation and its more legalistic aspects. In the beginning, the distinctive trait between a Fundamentalist and a New-Evangelical was basically the willingness in displaying a broader religious outlook open to cooperation with other mainline denominations that had adopted more liberal theologies, refusing the closeness that had come to characterize the Fundamentalist subculture. Important preachers and theologians such as Harold Ockenga (1905-1985) and Charles E. Fuller (1887-1968) pioneered the theological evolution of Fundamentalism and founded in the '40s those institutions that would become prominent for the future of the movement, such as the National Association of Evangelicals (NAE) as the comprehensive body of American Evangelical denominations, organizations, schools and individuals, and the Fuller Theological Seminary as the leading theological and intellectual body of the new movement. They also pioneered the use of new technologies to improve the reach and effectiveness of their preaching, mainly consisting in the extensive use of the radio. The standard bearer of this new era was Billy Graham (1918-2018), whose crusades attracted oceanic flocks of people and were open to all Christians from all confessions and denominations. This compromising strategy gradually broke the previously compacted Fundamentalist world between those who followed Graham's footsteps and those who broke fellowship with the compromisers, an attitude known as 'second-degree separatism' which increased as the decades went by<sup>15</sup>. This definitive division lasted until at least the political turn of the late seventies, when divisions along denominational lines started to blur in favor of a new realignment characterized by cross-confessional cooperation among conservative groups, whose conservatism was being increasingly defined more and more through social, cultural and political terms rather than in theological ones<sup>16</sup>.

Although New-Evangelicalism rose from the rejection to the closeness of the Fundamentalist sub-culture of the '40s, long lasting Fundamentalist legacies can be found in the New-Evangelical movement. These legacies are not a collateral product, nor some unwanted vestiges of an intellectual background too deeply rooted to be erased, but rather a heritage that the Evangelicals eagerly adopted and defended as their own. Evangelicals did not preserve just the core fundamentals of faith, but also the pessimism, derived from the dispensational theology, towards the increasing moral decadence of American society, a trait that fully emerged when Evangelicals directly and strongly began to engage in the realm of politics.

---

<sup>14</sup> Marsden, George M. *The Rise of Fundamentalism*, 150.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.* 151.

<sup>16</sup> For further information on the history of Fundamentalists and Evangelicals see Carpenter, Joel A. *Fundamentalist Institutions and the Rise of Evangelical Protestantism*, in *Church history*, Vol. 49, No. 1, March 1980, 62-75; Marsden, George M. *Understanding Fundamentalism and Evangelicalism*. Grand Rapids, Eerdmans, 1991; for a more theologically focused, Harris, Harriet A. *Fundamentalism and Evangelicals*. Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1998; Collins, Kenneth J. *The Evangelical Moment*. Grand Rapids, Baker Academic, 2005.

## *An Evangelical Identity: Foundation and Theology*

The history of how New-Evangelicalism rose from Fundamentalism and became one of the most important religious phenomena in the contemporary history of the U.S. is largely connected with the history of its most prominent member and basically founder Billy Graham<sup>17</sup>. Such has been the importance of this Evangelical preacher that in the early '50s the line between Fundamentalists and New-Evangelicals was often drawn on whether or not one followed him. Graham's ministry and New-Evangelicalism proceeded side by side to the point that one became indistinguishable from the other.

In order to understand New-Evangelicalism, it's useful to pay attention to the first major event that Graham ever hosted, the Los Angeles Crusade of 1949, considered by himself to be the fulcrum of his ministry. The Los Angeles revival consisted in a series of moments of prayer and preaching conducted by Graham himself that should have taken place over an initial period of time of three weeks, but the event was so successful that people just kept coming, demanding for more and more opportunity to listen to Graham, thus resulting in the decision by the organization board to extend the event to a whopping eight weeks. With the revival more than doubled in its length, Graham ended up preaching to a public estimated to having been of 350.000 / 400.000 people<sup>18</sup>.

Regardless of the reasons behind Graham's success, it's the content of preaching what truly matters in order to shed light over New-Evangelicalism: the sermons Graham preached started with a litany of national and international problems, spanning from Communism to immorality, from depression to crime. Behind all these problems there was always the same culprit, the sinful heart. The sole remedy for this sinful behavior was accepting Christ as savior, receive new life in Christ and live accordingly to his teachings<sup>19</sup>. As straightforward as they might seem, these were the principles Graham preached: a simple, not elaborated theology centered around the born-again experience and the acceptance of Jesus as Lord and Savior. Alongside these core theological principles, the revival also set the stage for the cordial relation between Evangelicals and other denominations: rather than a closed event in full Fundamentalist fashion, Graham wanted a revival open to members of other conservatives and liberal denominations alike, focusing a lot on presenting his revival not as a competition to 'steal' fellows from other pews but rather as a cross-denominational effort to bring people closer to God.

After the 1949 crusade, Graham became at first a national phenomenon and later proceeded to expand the reach of Evangelicalism all around the world<sup>20</sup>. The history of his success is one that has been zealously told in almost mythical terms by Evangelicals themselves. The narrative adopted presents Graham as a child

---

<sup>17</sup> On the life of Billy Graham, see Miller, Steven P. *Billy Graham and the Rise of the Republican South*, Philadelphia, University of Pennsylvania Press, 2009; Graham, Billy. *Just As I Am*, New York, Harper One, 1999.

<sup>18</sup> Wacker, Grant. *Billy Graham's 1949 Los Angeles Revival*. In Heath W. Carter and Laura R. Porter eds. *Turning Points in the History of American Evangelicalism*, 228.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.* 237.

<sup>20</sup> On the global diffusion of Evangelicalism see Stanley, Brian. *The Global Diffusion of Evangelicalism: The Age of Billy Graham and John Stott*, Downers Grove, InterVarsity Press, 2013.

of two worlds of Fundamentalism, born in the southern Fundamentalism but educated in the northern, managing to distill out of them the positive traits of both meaning the attention to doctrine of the former, and the more open nature of the latter. He not only preached Evangelicalism but embodied the core principles of the movement by stressing how the importance of personal conversion and born-again experience stood over the denominational lines that have divided Christianity in an unprecedented ecumenical effort. He associated with famous politicians from different sides and cautiously supported a series of progressive reforms, helping the Evangelical constituency to familiarize once again with the public square from which it had separated. While his appeal backed the feelings and aspiration of the American middle class, his spiritual message was transcendental in essence and managed to overcome classist and national boundaries. His preaching also overcame denominational divisions and helped in shaping a grassroots ecumenism to reconstruct a Christian fellowship beyond denominational lines<sup>21</sup>. For how mythical it might seem and despite some lacunas such as the disillusionment with politics after the ungracious fall of his champion Richard Nixon (1913-1994), who Graham once defined as a man sent by God, this narrative effectively reaffirms some core principles of Evangelicalism itself such as its Fundamentalists roots, the centrality of the born-again experience, its active engagement with the contemporary world and its cross-denominational nature.

With time New-Evangelicals attracted the interests of researchers, from political analysts to historians and sociologists who gave their own external definitions of who is an Evangelical. Among all these definitions, the most widely accepted and highly regarded one has been formulated by historian David Bebbington<sup>22</sup>. By focusing on theological principles, he defined four key beliefs to which an Evangelical has to conform in order to be considered as such: Conversionism: the belief that lives need to be transformed through a born-again experience and a life-long process of following Jesus; Activism: the expression and demonstration of the gospel in missionary and social reform efforts; Biblicism: a high regard for and obedience to the Bible as the ultimate authority; Crucicentrism: a stress on the sacrifice of Jesus Christ on the cross as making possible the redemption of humanity.<sup>23</sup>

Bebbington's definition has become central not only for researches from different academic fields, but for Evangelicals too to the point that it has been adopted among other statements by the NAE, precisising that those theological convictions are the defining elements to identify an Evangelical and not social, cultural or

---

<sup>21</sup> Hatch, Nathan O. and Hamilton, Michael S. *Can Evangelicalism Survive Its Success?*, Christianity Today, October 5, 1992, 24. On the history of Graham's ministry, see also Wacker Grant. *Billy Graham's 1949 Los Angeles Revival*.

<sup>22</sup> The label of 'New Evangelicalism' has not been a stable one, with researchers and born-again Christians themselves opting for a variety of labels as 'Fundamentalists', 'Evangelicals', 'New Evangelicals', 'born-again Christians' or simply 'Christians'. For the sake of clarification, this dissertation will use the term 'Evangelicals' or 'born-again Christian' to indicate the group examined, 'conservative Protestant' as an alternative that encompasses a broader group of not necessarily born-again Protestants, 'conservative Christians' as the broadest possible definition for all those Christians holding social conservative positions, being them Protestants, born-again Christians or Catholics.

<sup>23</sup> The definition quotes is the one the NAE has itself adopted through Bebbington words in Bebbington, David W. *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain: A History from the 1730s to the 1930s*, London, Unwin Hyman, 1989. <https://www.nae.net/what-is-an-evangelical/>. Accessed September 2, 2020.

political trends. Based on Bebbington's work, the NAE has also produced four statements to which someone has to strongly agree in order to be considered an Evangelical:

The Bible is the highest authority for what I believe;  
It is very important for me personally to encourage non-Christians to trust Jesus Christ as their Savior;  
Jesus Christ's death on the cross is the only sacrifice that could remove the penalty of my sin;  
Only those who trust in Jesus Christ alone as their Savior receive God's free gift of eternal salvation<sup>24</sup>.

Bebbington's definition has been amplified by other historians, who by working through his work have innovated or clarified some of his statements. Richard Balmer for example has further clarified two of the four points: although Evangelicals are committed to the Bible as the highest authority, their literalism is not absolute but rather selective; the born-again experience not only has to be intended as a "turning away from sin" by embracing Jesus, but also is a very datable moment in the life of one person<sup>25</sup>.

### *An Evangelical Identity: Confronting the World*

More than a decade after *Newsweek* had declared 1976 to be the "Year of the Evangelical", Evangelicals had become a constant presence in the political realm of the United States of America. The place that Evangelicals vigorously revindicated for themselves was not perceived as a secure one from all the corners of this multifaceted movement, and some important theologians and intellectuals actually began to think that never before had the movement lost so much track of its own identity of purpose. The public image of Evangelicals themselves seemed to have been transformed into a maligned and untrustworthy one, following both the manipulation and exploitation that came as corollaries of political involvement as well as a series of televangelists' scandals that shook the reputation of the movement<sup>26</sup>. With this picture in mind in May 1989 more than 350 evangelical theologians and intellectuals led by Carl F.H. Henry (1913-2003) met at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School in Chicago, Illinois, to elaborate a concise definition of Evangelical beliefs and practices<sup>27</sup>. The drafted document known as "Evangelical Affirmations" was later promoted and distributed by the NAE. The document reaffirms those doctrinal beliefs that have traditionally formed the core of Evangelical theology: the "full authority and complete truthfulness" of the Bible beyond any attempt to curtail this

---

<sup>24</sup> The statements can be found at <https://www.nae.net/what-is-an-evangelical/>. Accessed September 2, 2020.

<sup>25</sup> Balmer, Richard. *Evangelicalism in America*, Waco, Baylor University Press, 2016, Xi-Xii.

<sup>26</sup> Two major scandals undermined the public image of Evangelicals. The first regarded televangelist Jim Bakker, who was accused of sexual misconduct and fraud in the late eighties. The second was related to preacher Jimmy Swaggart, accused of having engaged in a sexual relation with a prostitute. See respectively King, Wayne. *Bakker, Evangelist, Resigns His Ministry Over Sexual Incident*. The New York Times, March 21, 1987. <https://www.nytimes.com/1987/03/21/us/bakker-evangelist-resigns-his-ministry-over-sexual-incident.html>. Accessed September 20, 2020; King, Wayne. *Swaggart Says He Has Sinned; Will Step Down*. The New York Times, February 22, 1988. <https://www.nytimes.com/1988/02/22/us/swaggart-says-he-has-sinned-will-step-down.html>. Accessed September 20, 2020.

<sup>27</sup> *What Does it Mean to be Evangelical?*, Christianity Today, June 6, 1989, 60.



truthfulness through historical readings of the text, the acceptance of salvation and redemption as possible only through the sacrifice of Christ, the belief that those who are not born-again are lost. The “Affirmations” are noteworthy when attention is paid to the parallel package of social and cultural affirmations that accompanied the theological ones: if on one hand the “Affirmations” contain an admission of guilt in regard of the recent moral lapses by some Evangelicals and the necessity to live up to the moral standards they profess, on the other hand the signatories affirm that “in the last decade of the twentieth century Evangelicals confront an hostile world”, whose troubles are later clarified into being a multitude of social and economic issues. Moreover, the “Affirmations” also give us a glimpse on the auspicious relations between different Christian confessions: while encouraging efforts to bring churches closer together, Evangelicals must maintain an uncompromising stand on doctrine and beliefs, thus refusing to take part in any ecumenical movement willing to allow concessions in doctrine for the sake of fellowship<sup>28</sup>.

The “Affirmations” are an important document in the way they show us how a purely theological understanding of what makes an Evangelical is not enough to precisely define this group. The ideas they have of their surrounding world and the ways they interact with it cannot be underestimated when defining an Evangelical identity. Just by paying attention to the sentence “[...] Evangelicals *confront* an hostile world” we can infer at least two important pieces of information: the first one is that even after achieving political success Evangelicals have maintained a pessimistic view about the future and society, the second one is that rather than sit and suffer the consequences of history or retreat in their subcultural shell they instead “confront” the world. The choice of the verb ‘confront’ rather than ‘be confronted’ might be a nuance, but it shows us activity against passivity and action against reaction. Even when bearing some second thoughts about how political engagement changed the movement to the point that it was necessary to affirm once again what Evangelicalism was, the idea that the external world must be confronted and that activism has to develop beyond its explicit religious goals did not disappear but was rather reinforced.

This drive to engage with society and the external world in confrontational terms is one of the aspects that indeed have characterized the Evangelical world and often emerges in the descriptions Evangelicals draw of themselves. When the nineties began, *Christianity Today* tried to outline a possible agenda to confront some of the foreseen developments that would have unfolded later in the decade. Firstly, it stated the need to maintain the evangelical zeal in promoting the good news both in the national and international scenario. Secondly, it reaffirmed the need for Evangelicals to maintain their defense and support for the needy and oppressed, broad categories that included both traditionally identifiable figures such as poor and refugees, and new souls that had recently joined the flock of the needy such as AIDS affected people and their families, youth whose families were being torn apart due to divorce, the aging population in need of medical care. Thirdly, the need to recover the identity of “peculiar people” by resisting the currents of materialism and secularism that are plaguing contemporary culture. This could only be achieved through a series of choices in “consumption, entertainment, family commitment” clearly reflecting Evangelical “set-apartness” as people of Christ, an

---

<sup>28</sup> Ibid. 63.

approach that rather than being considered as a retreat or as *laissez-faire*, should be viewed as a selective engagement with culture with a clearly identified set of behaviors, attitudes and positions considered righteous and worthy to be promoted against a more diffused moral and cultural degradation, which should instead be refused and fought<sup>29</sup>.

Moreover, it's increasingly evident that social, cultural and political characteristics should be taken into consideration when defining Evangelicals if we look at the behaviors and ideas they have developed during the raging culture wars, in which Evangelical engagement started in the late 1970s and probably has yet to end. Although Evangelical positions came in different shades of conservatism, from uncompromising last stands to more pragmatic approaches, some basic and common lines crystalized an almost dogmatic agreement on many issues. Those claiming to bear a Christian faith while at the same time taking different positions on the culture wars had their faith looked with suspicion. The most striking example in which this attitude has manifested has been with President Bill Clinton (born 1946), both a devout Southern Baptist – the most conspicuous Evangelical denomination – and a convinced pro-choice: the juxtaposition of his faith and his policies caused many conservative Christians to view him as a walking contradiction, even questioning the sincerity of his faith<sup>30</sup>. If being Evangelical were simply a matter of agreement on a series of theological and doctrinal affirmations, then there would be no surprise when an Evangelical would take a different position from the majority of the group on some social, cultural or political issues. But this is clearly not the case and if it is true that there is no written agreement that an Evangelical must take the conservative side on those issues, it's nonetheless true that there is a strong expectation that one would do so.

The importance of social, cultural and political aspects when defining Evangelicalism has also been underlined in the way Evangelicals themselves have written their own identity and history. In a special number for the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the foundation of the NAE, *Christianity Today* ran an article on the history of Evangelical success. Right after a description of the evolution of the movement theology, it's possible to find a paragraph entitled “Evangelicalism and the Culture Wars”, in which a strong division is drawn between the concerns that form the Evangelical agenda and those instead adopted by the mainline Protestant churches: the former have been concerned by the legalization of abortion, family and morality issues, economic growth and maintaining a defensive posture in the Cold War; the latter by civil rights, economic distribution, nuclear peacemaking, curtailing U.S. military influence abroad and environmentalism. It's also rightful to notice that the paragraph concludes by looking at how the Evangelicals have aligned themselves in these wars, with “most of Evangelicals” in the conservative field, “some” gravitating towards more progressive positions, “many” sharing sympathy with both<sup>31</sup>.

In conclusion, it's difficult not to consider social, cultural and political traits when defining an image of who are the Evangelicals. When drawing the lines between themselves and the others, between “a particular people” and the world, Evangelicals have taken into consideration also their proper stands on a series of

---

<sup>29</sup> *Agenda for the Nineties*, Christianity Today, January 15, 1990, 15.

<sup>30</sup> Yancey, Philipp. *The Riddle of Bill Clinton's Faith*, Christianity Today, April 25, 1994, 24-29.

<sup>31</sup> Hatch, Nathan O. & Hamilton, Michael S. *Can Evangelicalism Survive Its Success?*, 26-27.

contemporary issues far from being immediately theological ones. This said, some clarifications are needed to properly conclude these previous affirmations. While overwhelmingly conservative both in social and political issues, Evangelicals are not a monolithic group and they do not have a supreme authority whose statements are to be accepted as the official ones for the whole group, and therefore followed. There are progressive Evangelicals as well as moderate ones who do not share the agenda and the definition of the conservative majority and have made different choices in their alliances and tendencies on the political sphere. But when we compare the agenda of these two minoritarian groups with the one of the majority, we notice how the differences are more in the order and number of the priorities rather than on the nature of such issues: for example, while conservative Evangelicals have traditionally considered abortion as their top priority, progressive Evangelicals have emphasized how other social concerns such as poor relief programs are worthy enough to share the podium with more traditional pro-family issues. Above all these differences, these groups share some important key understandings both of the nature of the problems – in the nineties and 00's, no progressive Evangelical would campaign for the legalization of abortion in all cases – and in the relation between their group and the contemporary world.

### *So, who's an Evangelical?*

While no definition of who is an Evangelical will encompass all the different facets of the movement, and no set of criteria will be accepted equally by all those who individually consider themselves to be Evangelicals, there are nonetheless some important traits that do qualify this group enough to set it apart from the rest of society in both its secular and religious connotations.

Theologically, an Evangelical is a person who has experienced a second birth in Christ, consisting in a personal moment of deep inner conversion that resulted in turning-away from sin and living a life pleasant to God, at least ideally. This experience is a datable one and it's almost always present in any narrative Evangelicals produce of themselves as the turning point in their life. An Evangelical is a person who considers the Bible to be the ultimate authority and while he defends its inerrancy, he also engages in selective literalism thus subjecting the Scripture to a certain level of interpretation that can change through time. An Evangelical is a person who engages in evangelicalism, literally meaning 'bringing the good news' and thus trying to bring people into accepting Christ. This degree of activism can take many forms, from more traditionally missionary ones aimed at proselytization to more complex ones, adapting the missionary framework to a series of ministries and pastoral initiatives centered around the widest array of issues, from social to bioethical ones. An Evangelical is a person who considers salvation to be possible only through the birth, death and resurrection of Jesus as narrated in the Gospels and only for those who have accepted Christ as their savior. All those who are not born-again and have not accepted Christ are considered lost. Finally, Evangelicalism is not a denomination but rather a movement that stretches above trans-denominational lines and has engaged with other religious actors increasingly more distant from the conservative Fundamentalist center from which it emerged, starting with mainline Protestant denominations and then expanding to cautiously and gradually

cooperating also with Catholics, especially after Evangelicals became more and more engaged in the public square. In the midst of this broader collaboration, Evangelicals are easily identifiable even when they compose smaller groups within mainline denominations, since the strong commitment they manifest for their born-again theology clearly sets them apart from the rest of their fellowship.

Although the NAE cares in clarifying that social, cultural and political trends do not intervene in defining an Evangelical identity, by looking at the representations that Evangelicals have drawn of themselves and especially by looking at their history, it's difficult to wholeheartedly sustain such claim. The idea of an increasingly deteriorating society is a legacy that has been borrowed from Fundamentalism and used repeatedly in Evangelical preaching, becoming the standard framework with which Evangelicals have contextualized the evolving world around them. But if Fundamentalists retreated in their subculture to find refuge from a corrupted and foreign reality, Evangelicals broke with such strategy and engaged in the changing world. While this engagement started in almost purely religious forms and stepped little away from its core born-again theology as the answer to all these problems, it has nonetheless evolved into encompassing more direct forms of activism to challenge these changes on the political arena too. This has not been the trading of one trait for another, but rather the gradual addition of non-theological defining traits to an Evangelical identity. This said, there is an important difference between the theological and the non-theological traits of the Evangelical identity: while the theological traits are the core of the identity and as such are accepted as exclusive by all those who identify as Evangelicals, the social, cultural and political ones are more contingent and while there is an overwhelming majority that shares an agreement even on those, accepting them is not ruled but rather strongly expected. As said earlier, even though most Evangelicals are socially, culturally and politically conservative there still are moderate and progressive fringes in the movement. Despite their differences and their sometime mutual animosities, their activism shares important traits even when on different sides: it's based on religious truths and values, and not philosophical, scientific, or simply secular ones; they consider licit for religion to influence politics although at different levels, from simply giving politicians the right values for public life, to personally offering counselling; they both seek a place at the table in the political arena thus considered an appropriate place for them to stay.

Therefore, the Evangelical identity has been the result of their historical journey, started when they "distanced themselves from separatists and legalistic aspect of Fundamentalism while adhering to the fundamentals of the faith". This identity is founded on a core of theological principles that are well identifiable and exclusive in nature. At the same time, it has been further completed by the understanding they have of the world as an increasingly hostile and corrupted place that must be confronted. Confronting the world began as a religious effort and although this dimension has never been abandoned, it has nonetheless transformed into more direct forms of social and political activism that have tendentially manifested in social, cultural and political conservative positions.

## Part I. Evangelicals and Politics

Facing a world in constant change and perceiving the surrounding society and culture slowly degenerating due to more pronounced forms of secularism, American Evangelicals promptly reacted by becoming more and more involved in the realm of politics. The trajectory of their political activism has not followed a straightforward line but rather a more tortuous path, which resulted in one of the biggest electoral realignment of contemporary American history. Although this change of allegiance appeared as a sudden development in the turn of Regan's first election in 1980, the foundations that made this change possible had been laid in the previous decades through direct electoral calculations by Republican strategists, by the increasing aversion of the Evangelical constituency against the changes in the American society, more often than not either associated with or championed by the Democratic party, and by the creation in the late seventies of a series of religiously connotated conservative groups that gave life to the coalition known as Religious Right. More interesting are the reasons why Evangelicals never abandoned the Republican party ever since. Indeed, despite the shortcomings of the Reagan administrations in delivering on the promises made to these newfound allies, Evangelicals found a new house in the Republican party that they still inhabit to this day, becoming a key electoral constituency that provided the necessary votes to secure some important electoral victories through the years. As a matter of fact, the alliance between Evangelicals and Republicans has not been an easy one and difficulties in finding a harmony between the agendas of the moderate and the more conservative wing of the party— where Evangelicals seated — have produced tensions and contrasts in different occasions. This said, through exposure to the political reality of Washington and to the different level of governance, with their benefits and limits, Evangelicals have slowly better understood the rules of the game and have changed their approach, becoming increasingly more pragmatic in their methods and demands alike. The exposure to politics produced also a deeper and better structured political thought and understanding among Evangelicals themselves, a peculiar political philosophy that is rooted in faith and spirituality, has its main concerns in morality while on the policy side is more focused on social rather than economic concerns.

This first part will be focused on the role Evangelicals have played on the political scene of the United States in contemporary times. While ample space will be given through the dissertation to those specific policy areas that have mobilized the Evangelical constituency, in this part attention will be paid to the relation this group had with the political world *tout court*. The first part of the chapter will deal with the idea of politics Evangelicals had and have developed through their journey, the values they championed, the understanding of the role of faith and religion in the political process and how they interpreted the division between church and state. This will provide the necessary theoretical framework upon which the historical analysis will rest. At this point, the discussion will focus on the large group known as the Religious Right, what it is and how it contributed in defining the political priorities of Evangelicals, how deeply it actually influenced Republican policies and governance and how in turn was influenced by the direct exposure to the political world during the nineties and early two-thousands. The historical depth which is needed to understand such developments will be given by an analysis of the most significant turns in the Evangelical political path, meaning the various

elections that took place from 1988 to 2008. Elections are indeed delicate moments where the Evangelical constituency could actually bargain its support using its electoral weight as the preferred tool to push the Republican party into adopting its agenda. Through lobby groups identifiable in those that formed the Religious Right as well as other forms of collective or individual activism, Evangelicals played a role in shaping the party agendas, platforms and sometime even nominations by casting their votes for those candidates that better fitted their ideal political model. Victories and defeats, achievements and missteps that happened in the political arena of these years will be thus analyzed as those moments of formation that forced Evangelicals into rethinking the characteristics of their political involvement while recognizing the limits of the same.

## 1. Core values and Principles of Evangelical Political Activism

### 1.1 *Understanding Christian America*

It's important to underline once more that the Evangelical approach to the realm of politics is one motivated by the deep belief that the roots of politics are religious in nature. All along the different shades of the political spectrum, Evangelicals consider a duty for each Christian to be involved in politics and to conform to those moral principles that can be found in the Scriptures. While the idea of political involvement as Christian duty is not a peculiarity only of the Evangelical group, since it had been already present both in the Catholic Church and in the mainline Protestant denominations, what strikes the most is the deep connection between faith and politics that Evangelicals have produced. When addressing politics both in theoretical and in practical ways Evangelicals never use the idea of a 'political philosophy' but rather of 'political theology', even though the final product is a political thought in all except name. Among the many products of this theology the most famous and for some extent controversial one is the idea of Christian America, a very broad concept that can span from a somehow inclusive idea that the origins of American values are to be found in the precepts of the Judeo-Christian tradition, to more exclusive forms of identity building along confessional lines used to discredit as non-American a wide set of ideological positions not conforming with the conservative world-view<sup>32</sup>. The idea of Christian America has been at the center of many of the critiques that non-Evangelical pundits have made against the more conservative fringes of the movement, accused at worst of being a threat to the pluralistic nature of American society<sup>33</sup>. Interestingly enough, through the years some of the connotations given to the concept of Christian America have been criticized by Evangelicals themselves: some of them did not agree with the exclusive nature of the definition as formulated by the Religious Right, others did not like the juxtaposition between a religious concept and a political one, others feared that the blending of church and state as implied in the concept might backfire tremendously against the church either by making it lose sight of its religious mission or, even worse, by allowing state exploitation.

The idea of America as a Christian nation has been presented by Evangelicals as a reality that has accompanied the historical journey of the country since its inception. While it is true from one side that religious actors and religious beliefs contributed in shaping the history of the States especially in some of its most difficult times, the marriage between an American and a Christian identity is the result of much more recent developments that unfolded mainly in the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. As widely demonstrated by Kevin M. Kruse in "One Nation Under God", the intense sacralization of American politics and the emergence of the idea of a Christian American identity have been in the making since the thirties, pushed by a coalition

---

<sup>32</sup> For further information on Christian America, see Green, Steven K. *Inventing a Christian America: The Myth of the Religious Founding*, Oxford/New York, Oxford University Press, 2015; Smith, Christian. *Christian America? What Evangelicals Really Want*, Berkeley, University of California Press, 2000;

<sup>33</sup> Durham, Martin. *The Christian Right, the far right and the boundaries of American conservatism*, Manchester, Manchester University Press, 2000, 105.

of corporate America and conservative preachers, only to finally mature during the Eisenhower presidency (1953-1961)<sup>34</sup>. Indeed, the most important and still lasting legacy of this period in relation with the merging of political and religious concepts is the American Pledge of Alliance: following a long political campaign initiated by the Knight of Columbus in 1952 and championed by congressmen from both the Republican and Democratic parties, the pledge was modified in order to include the phrase “One Nation under God” and signed into its still in use form by president Eisenhower on June 14, 1954. While this serves just as a demonstration of how recent the tradition of a Christian America actually is, to understand how this view has been adopted by conservative Evangelicals it’s necessary to move forwards to the late seventies with the formation of the Religious Right. Indeed, central to the political project of the Religious Right was the idea that America was losing its Christian soul to secularism, whose encroaching advance had been made manifested by important changes that had been happening in American society during that and the previous decade such as the legalization of abortion<sup>35</sup> and the ban on school prayers<sup>36</sup>. The leaders of the Christian Right often took the occasion in their sermons and publications to remind their public about the Judeo-Christian roots of America values, narrating them in an history that has logically unfolded since the time of the founding fathers until the very present, when those values actually came under attack. But has this concept maintained its appeal as Evangelicals transitioned from outsiders to main actors of the American political life or has it changed?

As we look at the beginning of the nineties, the idea of Christian America was still being use by the Religious Right and the Republican party as part of their electoral strategy. During the Republican electoral campaign of 1992, president incumbent George H. W. Bush (1924-2018) affirmed in various occasions his belief in the Christian foundations of America as far as moral values were concerned. These pleas came both in tepid affirmations of the strong moral foundation of the country on values as “hard work, personal initiative, individual responsibility and community service”<sup>37</sup>, and in clearer and stronger statements such as those made during the annual Republican National Convention when he stated the party belief in the “Judeo-Christian heritage that informs our culture”<sup>38</sup>. But as this conservative coalition still rallied under the Christian America banner, some voices from within the alliance started to be more critical about the reality and the utility of the concept itself: Don Eberly<sup>39</sup> (born 1953) commented on the 1992 convention criticizing the tone of the Religious Right rhetoric as too much triumphalist, potentially polarizing and insulating since it frames broader cultural and social concerns in terms that only the Christian Right can fully understand; while Richard Cizik<sup>40</sup>

---

<sup>34</sup> Kruse, Kevin M. *One Nation Under God*, New York, Basic Books, 2015.

<sup>35</sup> *Roe v. Wade*, 1973. <https://www.britannica.com/event/Roe-v-Wade>. Accessed July 15, 2020.

<sup>36</sup> *Engel v. Vitale*, 1962. <https://www.britannica.com/event/Engel-v-Vitale>. Accessed July 15, 2020; Durham, *The Christian Right*, 105-106.

<sup>37</sup> Lawton, Kim A. *Bush: Start with revival*, Christianity Today, October 26, 1992, 64.

<sup>38</sup> Ead. *A Republican God?*, Christianity Today, October 5, 1992, 50.

<sup>39</sup> Former aide in the White House for President Reagan, later he would work with President George W. Bush as deputy director of the Office of Faith-Based and Community Initiatives.

<sup>40</sup> Vice President for Governmental Affairs of the National Association of Evangelicals, with the role of lobbying on behalf of the organization the Congress and the House.



worried instead that the church could become just another special interest group<sup>41</sup>. In the following years, consensus on Christian America as a political concept started to falter and by the end of the nineties some of the very same architects of the Religious Rights rethought the meaning of such idea in more cultural defined terms: on a very pessimistic note, in a letter written in 1999 Paul Weyrich<sup>42</sup> (1942-2008), observing the inability of an overwhelmingly conservative Congress to resist the abortion and gay-right policies of the liberal Clinton administration, rethought with disappointment the assumption that America is indeed a Christian nation and called for a retreat of those who still shared some Judeo-Christian values from what seemed a “twilight of an old [civilization]”<sup>43</sup>; on a more optimistic note instead, Don Eberly insisted that while the idea of Christian America represents “a misreading of our times, American history and [...] Scripture itself”, it’s still possible to achieve a moral renewal of the country by changing the debate arena from the political side to the cultural one<sup>44</sup>. This shift should not be viewed as a clear cut with the past and indeed the Christian aspects of the moral foundations of the country had never been denied: what happened is that the idea of Christian America as intended in the early years of the Religious Right became subtler and rather than being thundered by the highest pulpits of American politics as an historical reality, it shifted to identify a moral consensus. When the Lewinsky scandal exploded and president Clinton was impeached on the base of perjury to cover the affair, Charles Colson<sup>45</sup> (1931-2012) declared that the “the values that historically shaped our country’s moral consciousness have been shattered”, a statement that might seem vague in its definition of values but that once complemented by the further look at the sexual and cultural critic Colson moves strongly resonates among a conservative public – non necessarily wholly Christian – shocked by the event<sup>46</sup>. Again, the mixture on a cultural rather than political level of American and Christian values emerged strongly in the aftermath of the terroristic attack on the Twin Towers. In an editorial published by *Christianity Today*, the message to “rally around the flag” resonated as a call to the church to uphold the American values of “national pursuit of liberty and justice for all” in that moment of crisis, while at the same time warning against any kind of “God-and-Country Christianity”<sup>47</sup>. As the years went by, while appeals to the Christian foundations of America sometime re-emerged from conservative pundits and were refused as historically inaccurate by part of the Evangelical world<sup>48</sup>, a broader consensus about the convergence of American and Christian values on the cultural side solidified, resulting in the adoption among conservative Christians of the prospect that any project of ‘re-Christianizing’ America should have passed not through political means made of civic symbolism or God and Country patriotism, but rather through a combination of socially conservative politics and cultural renewal.

---

<sup>41</sup> Lawton, Kim A. *A Republican God?*, 52.

<sup>42</sup> Former Religious Right leader, co-founder of the Heritage Foundation in 1973 think tank and Moral Majority in 1979.

<sup>43</sup> Weyrich, Paul. *Is the Religious Right finished?*, Christianity Today, September 6, 1999, 45.

<sup>44</sup> Eberly, Don. *Is the Religious Right finished?*, Christianity Today, September 6, 1999, 53.

<sup>45</sup> Former special counsellor to Richard Nixon, he became an Evangelical Christian in 1973 and founded Prison Fellowship in 1976. He became an influential voice among conservative Christians especially for his political expertise.

<sup>46</sup> Colson, Charles & Pearcey, Nancy. *Moral Education After Monica*, Christianity Today, March 1, 1999, 104.

<sup>47</sup> *Rally Round the Flag*, Christianity Today, November 12, 2001, 36-37.

<sup>48</sup> *Worship as Higher Politics*, Christianity Today, July 2005, 22-23 (Starting with January 2003, *Christianity Today* has been published monthly instead of biweekly).

The abandonment of the more exclusive and triumphalist rhetoric of Christian America as it had been developed in the late seventies for a more value-comprehensive definition has been most probably the result of Evangelical exposure to a world of politics made of people who did not share their same Christian understanding. Indeed, much of the constructive criticism that came from and for conservative Evangelicals tended in this direction. As early as 1988 Evangelicals began to understand that in order to be effective in politics, they should have formed alliances with constituencies that despite not sharing the same sectarian affiliation or theological world view, shared the same conservative moral tradition. To do so, it would have been necessary to show how particular issues violated values common to Christians and non-Christians alike and frame the discussion in comprehensible terms to non-Christians<sup>49</sup>. An early example of this change of tone can be seen in the anti-gay rights campaign of Colorado for Family Values in 1992, which instead of focusing on biblical and moral grounds to condemn homosexuality decided to confront the issue from a civil right perspective by arguing that homosexuals did not conform to the definition of ‘minority group’ as defined by courts and civil rights authorities, and therefore were not qualified to receive a protected status<sup>50</sup>. Again, the advice of “forge a public moral discourse that connects religious truths to public policies” was welcomed by some within the Religious Right, especially by Christian Coalition executive director Ralph Reed (born 1961) who in organizing the 1994 mid-term electoral campaign pushed the organization to adopt a broader vocabulary and policy agenda, where traditional pro-family Christian concerns encompassed both opposition to abortion and tax relief<sup>51</sup>. Although initially other conservative Evangelical leaders criticized this approach as being too compromising, in the end they also followed the early lead of the Christian Coalition into broadening their agendas and, more noteworthy for the idea of Christian America, their language, either due to complacency or because it proved to be more effective.

To answer the question from which this analysis started, the idea of Christian America maintained its appeal among conservatives even decades after its emergence in the political arena of the late seventies. This said, to equate the definition of Christian America of the late seventies with its understanding in the following decades would not be completely possible since direct exposure to the realm of politics made Evangelicals understand not only the limits of political reach in re-shaping America as a Christian nation, but also the limits of the very concept of Christian America among those allies who did not share the same Christian beliefs. While the defense of America as an historically Christian country has slowly lost traction, with Evangelicals themselves recognizing the fallacy of this argument, the idea that American values and Christian values could be paired in ways that would have made them easier to understand to a broader non-Christian audience increased, as political involvement demanded a certain degree of pragmatism and compromise. In this sense Christian America remained a strong and pervasive concept of Evangelical political theology, as a cultural defined set of values that are intended to be traditionally American and traditionally Christian. The merging of

---

<sup>49</sup> Vogt, Dennis and Brown, Warren S. *Bottom Line Morality*, Christianity Today, April 22, 1988, 32.

<sup>50</sup> Durham, *The Christian Right*, 56-58.

<sup>51</sup> Loconte, Joe. *Will The Religious Right gain Momentum in 1994?*, Christianity Today, February 7, 1994, 53. On the political legacy of Ralph Reed for the pragmatic evolution of the Religious Right, see Harp, Gillis J. *Protestants and American Conservatism*, 220.

these values has followed the trajectory of the broader nature of Evangelical political activism, and as Evangelicals became more closely identified with the Republican party, the definition of their Christian values started to encompass broader concepts, so that for example being pro-family meant not only promoting the sanctity of human life – one maybe of the most famous Christian values – but also tax reduction and government support in terms of non-interference.

## 1.2 *The Values Behind Evangelical Politics*

Any group that decides to get involved in the realm of politics acts according to a political plan that has its origins in a commonly accepted set of political values. In this regard, Evangelicals are no exception and since their policies have been moved more often than not moved by moral and ethical arguments rather than utilitarian ones, they have poured attention into developing a coherent set of values which served both as a foundation for their political involvement, and as a scale to evaluate the ideal citizen and politician. The values championed by Evangelicals are mainly Christian in nature and while there is a core of non-negotiables that forms a backbone shared by all Evangelicals through the political spectrum, the way different groups have focused on particular priorities contributed into differentiating what they thought about these same values: the value of the sanctity of life is a good example because among conservatives it is strongly – and almost only – associated with opposition to abortion, while more progressive Evangelicals argue that sanctity of life also encompasses care for the poor. Since at their bottom Evangelical values are religious ones, this has also meant that Evangelicals – or at least the more moderate component among them – have been able to show admiration and sometimes fully or partially endorsement of political figures from both sides of the spectrum alike, as was the case in 2006 when 51% of Ohio Evangelicals voted for Democratic governor-candidate Ted Strickland against his Republican opponent<sup>52</sup>. Understanding Evangelical politics has to go through understanding Evangelical political values, what they have elevated as virtues and what they have condemned as vices. The most useful way to do so is to look directly at the profiles of ideal citizens and politicians Evangelicals have drawn, and at the various judgements they have made about the surrounding political world. The starting point of Evangelical activism is the widely defended legitimacy of their active political involvement. Rather than pursuing a path of isolationism, Evangelicals have chosen to become deeply involved in politics and have defended their place in the political process as a right both against the more isolationist Fundamentalists, and the more secular groups of society that have often considered political involvement by religious groups as a threat for the pluralistic nature of American society. Evangelicals have presented their activism as a Christian mandate declined in different terms that show a bottom-line duty towards society and themselves. Political involvement has been defined as a Christian responsibility which materializes in taking care of the well-being of those outside of the church, and to absolve this role, Christians should work also with those that despite not being Christians, share their same values and morals<sup>53</sup>. This Christian mandate has been reinforced by a

---

<sup>52</sup> Blunt, Sherley H. *Spoils of Victory*, Christianity Today, January 2007, 54.

<sup>53</sup> McDermott, Geralt. *What Johnathan Edwards Can teach us about Politics*, Christianity Today, July 18, 1994, 33.

combination of scriptural interpretation, such as the commandment of “to be salt and light in this dark world” (Mt 5: 13-16, NIV) or the idea presented in Genesis of cultivating the world God created (Gen 2: 15, NIV), and by a tradition of historical religious activism in some of the biggest political battles of American history such as slavery, injustice and now abortion as well<sup>54</sup>. Moving deeper into the understanding of involvement as a duty, Evangelicals have presented politics also as a necessary path to fulfill the core Christian teaching of loving one’s neighbor, as through political involvement Christian citizens who show a genuine Christian ethic can effectively serve their neighbors<sup>55</sup>. Finally, the strongest connotation given by Evangelicals to the legitimacy of their own political involvement has been to define it as an obligation. While for decades Evangelicals have shared the idea that politics were a worldly affair and that their true place was in the heavenly Kingdom of Christ, as they became more and more involved in the political process they reached the point in which they encouraged fellow Christians to seek political engagement, while discouraging withdrawal from the political realm<sup>56</sup>. Framing the nature of political engagement as an obligation for Christians has been a stronger approach among the leaders of the Christian Right, who argued that involvement in politics became an obligation in the moment in which secular policies threatened families, children and churches. When the mid-term elections of 1998 did not deliver the result hoped among conservatives, disillusionment started to grow among the ranks of the Christian Right leading to three of the most famous leaders abandoning any hope in the political process and calling for a general retreat<sup>57</sup>. But as some members of the old guard exited the scene, others – both old and new activists – reminded to conservative Evangelicals how escaping from politics would mean leaving the political scene to the ‘secular Left’, and how therefore Evangelicals had the obligation to remain politically active to stem the tide of secularists<sup>58</sup>.

If Christian political activism was considered to be legitimate as a scriptural mandate and as a moral obligation, then also religious faith had the same legitimacy to be present in the public scene<sup>59</sup>. While this was an obviousness among Evangelicals, it brought them into direct conflict with those who not only did not share their same worldview, but considered the presence of faith in politics as a border-line violation of the principles of pluralism and church-state separation. Although faith had enjoyed a long-lasting presence in American political rhetoric and deep faith has been promoted as a positive value both from Republicans and Democrats alike, the mixture of faith and politics has sometime sparked mixed reaction from secular pundits, whose

---

<sup>54</sup> Falwell, Jerry. *Is the Religious Right finished?*, Christianity Today, September 6, 1999, 50.

<sup>55</sup> Skillen, James W. *Civic-Minded and Heavenly Good*, Christianity Today, November 18, 2002, 54.

<sup>56</sup> *Worship as Higher Politics*, 23. Here the theological dichotomy between heaven and politics is directly addressed in conciliatory terms encouraging political commitment from Christians as citizens.

<sup>57</sup> I’m referring to Paul Weyrich, who voiced his disappointments in a letter to the Free Congress Foundation whose content can be found in *Is the Religious right finished?*, 44-45; and to former Moral Majority staffers Ed Dobson and Cal Thomas, who co-wrote the book *Blinded by Might*, Grand Rapids, Zondervan, 1999. A contemporary review of the same can be found in Shelley, Bruce L. *Is the Religious Right finished?*, 54-55.

<sup>58</sup> Reed, Ralph. *Is the Religious Right finished?*. Christianity Today, Sept 6, 1999, 48. It should be noted that ‘secular Left’ is a term conservative Christian used to address those groups advocating for social progressivism, which for the decades considered meant championing mainly abortion-rights, gay-rights and feminism. In Ivi.

<sup>59</sup> For a detailed account of the importance of faith and the theological justification behind evangelical political activism, see Collins, Kenneth J. *The Evangelical Moment*, 107-130.

critiques of religious talking in politics often focused on different points such as a being a catalyst for intolerance, how it prevented rational arguments for the sake of emotionality and how it alienated segments of the public<sup>60</sup>. In rallying together to confront secular positions, Evangelicals often underlined how the presence of faith in politics instead played a vital role in the moral formation of politics themselves, as it re-introduced on the public and policy debate moral absolute categories and principles. Indeed, from the Evangelical point of view it was their acceptance of moral absolutes deeply rooted in Scriptures that distinguished them from the ‘anything-goes relativism’ they accused secularists to have, which manifested in the assumption that every person is his/her own moral scale. A deep-rooted faith instead would have worked as a remainder of the presence of absolute truths and judgement from a far higher authority than the individual himself<sup>61</sup>. A faith informed conscience clearly represents a core value for Evangelicals, as made evident by the high appreciation displayed towards those politicians not afraid of showing their faith publicly. This has emerged in the political profiles Evangelicals have come to admire across political lines, such as Republican rep. Henry Hyde (1924-2007) and Democratic rep. Tony Hall (born 1942): indeed, despite the different ways the two congressmen translated their faith in policies, the fact that both based their “inner directedness” on Christian faith qualified them as examples to be followed in the public square<sup>62</sup>. Above all the examples for the period considered, the strongest faith appeal manifested from the political side and appreciated by Evangelicals has been the one coming from George W. Bush (born 1946). The frequent remarks about the centrality of faith and Christ in his life thrilled Evangelicals since the moment when the then presidential-candidate Bush stated that his favorite philosopher was “Christ, because he changed my life”, a message so strongly resonating among Evangelicals that Richard Land (born 1946) of the Southern Baptist Convention’s (SBC) Ethics and Religious Liberty Commission commented only as “wow”<sup>63</sup>. Appreciation on Bush’s easiness with faith increased in the aftermath of 9/11: during an encounter the president organized with twenty-seven religious’ leaders, thirteen of which Evangelicals, on the 20<sup>th</sup> of September 2001, Bush stated that he was better understanding the call he received from God and described the national reaction to the terroristic attack as “part of a spiritual awakening in America”, remarks that augmented his popularity among Evangelicals who looked at him with ever stronger admiration if not as a spiritual leader, at least as a deeply religious one<sup>64</sup>. As this dissertation will further deal with the relation between the Evangelical constituency and the two major Parties of the United States, there it will be discussed the more specific aspects of the use of faith in politics and its appeal. For now, it’s important to underline the reasons behind the success of faith-talking among Evangelicals, which can be ascribed to the high core value they placed on faith itself: for them, a strong faith it’s a requisite for a candidate because it

---

<sup>60</sup> *Free Speech for Politicians*, Christianity Today, May 2003, 30-31.

<sup>61</sup> Muck, Terry. *The Vision Test*, Christianity Today, April 8, 1988, 14-15; Mouw, Richard J. *Tolerance Without Compromise*, Christianity Today, July 15, 1996, 34.

<sup>62</sup> Respectively, Olasky, Marvin. *A Gadfly in the House*, Christianity Today, May 9, 1992, 30-32; Matheus-Green, Frederica. *The Hungry Congressman*, Christianity Today, September 1, 1997, 45-48.

<sup>63</sup> Carnes, Tony. *A Presidential Hopeful Progress*, Christianity Today, October 2, 2000, 62. The SBC’s Ethics and Religious Liberty Commission is the public policy arm of the Southern Baptist Convention. Further information can be found in their website <https://erlc.com/about/public-policy/>. Accessed July 20, 2020.

<sup>64</sup> Carnes, Tony. *Bush’s Defining Moment*, Christianity Today, November 12, 2001, 38, 42.

shows his/her position on and commitment to higher values rather than relativism – a trait associated with secularism –, and works as the foundation of that candidate character. Moreover, there might be another more direct and maybe easier reason why Evangelicals have come to appreciate a strong faith commitment in a politician: simple empathy. Evangelicals, as it has already been demonstrated, are a group connotated by first and foremost religious characteristics that require a necessary deep faith to adhere to. Therefore, when Evangelicals confront politicians who have a deep faith, they understand them either as ‘one of us’ or at least see in them some of their own characteristics, thus empathizing with them. In their own words, strong faith in a politician means that he is “like us in terms of values”<sup>65</sup>, or that he “share[s] their faith experience and conservative values”<sup>66</sup>. On the other hand, a complete lack of faith-talking is welcomed with coldness and apathy, as the case during the 2004 Democratic electoral campaign when president-candidate John Kerry (born 1943) stated that he does not make decisions in public life “based on religious beliefs”<sup>67</sup>, a remark that further incremented already existing doubts about the sincerity of Democratic faith-talking.

The centrality of faith works as a foundation for any Evangelical approach to politics, so that the absence of the faith-factor cannot even be contemplated by this constituency. Beside faith, there are other core values that have formed a non-negotiable set shared by all the various groups around the political spectrum and are directly connected to the attitude shown in regard of different policies and political figures. The first topic about which Evangelicals have been by far most vocal about, it’s the value of the sanctity of life, something that has been associated almost entirely with the defense of pro-life positions and opposition to abortion. Despite an initial indifference about the topic and the pro-life movement, in the eighties Evangelicals became more and more engaged with the anti-abortion battle and by the nineties loyalty to the pro-life cause became a cornerstone of conservative Christians activism. Just as the concept, also the rhetoric behind it basically crystalized in forms that have never been abandoned by the movement through the decades: abortion is presented as a tragedy, a practice which does not leave any ground for discussion as far as morality is concerned since it’s considered to be inherently and completely wrong. The importance Evangelicals have placed on sanctity of life assumed the form of a litmus test for their political support, and while they understood the impossibility of reaching a total ban or eradicating the practice through fast political means, they utterly refuse to support anyone inclined to concede ground to pro-choice options<sup>68</sup>. Defending the sanctity of life is such an important value that it has trumped political divisions, with the Religious Right itself showing admiration for pro-life Democrats such as Tony Hall and deep uneasiness with pro-choice Republicans, to the

---

<sup>65</sup> Muck, Terry. *The Vision Test*, 15.

<sup>66</sup> Carnes, Tony. *A Presidential Hopeful Progress*, 62.

<sup>67</sup> *A Question of Faith*, Christianity Today, March 2004, 28. Kerry’s remarks mirrored those of John F. Kennedy, who cared into separating faith and politics to fend off the anti-Catholic biases held against him. The difference in epoch and especially relation between the different confessions, marked more by progressive-conservative rather than denominational affinities, rendered remarks that once might have helped in appealing to Protestants quite obsolete.

<sup>68</sup> *For Whom Would Jesus Vote?*, Christianity Today, November 2004, 32.

point when in 1996 conservative Christian leaders James Dobson<sup>69</sup> (born 1936) and Gary Bauer<sup>70</sup> (born 1946) threatened to boycott the elections if the GOP platform would have allowed a compromising approach to its pro-choice members<sup>71</sup>.

The second non-negotiable set of values is family-values, a very broad concept that has later been joined by the defense of the traditional – meaning heterosexual – family against the increasing concession of civic rights to gay people, culminating in the long debate around gay-marriage in the nineties and two-thousands. Being pro-family has meant being concerned about the wellbeing of American families from an economic, social and moral point of view, thus representing a very wide and dense concept that will later be addressed more properly in a dedicated chapter. Evangelicals intend family as traditional family and are not inclined to concede this important title to any other form of relationship arrangement. While this comes not as a surprise for a profoundly Christian group, what is interesting is the fact that Evangelicals felt family institutions to be in a state of constant danger, beset by all sides by the secular evils of society and politics. Evangelicals family values are better understood not by the definition they gave of family but rather by the dangers they perceived: the crushing weight of taxes, the culture of no-fault divorce, the challenge to its heterosexual definition by gay-rights activist pushing for the legalization of gay-marriage. Such a versatile concept has therefore often changed its connotations, sometime underling one aspect and sometime another, but despite this there have been come consistent views through the years: the first one is that American families must be autonomous and free in their decisions, meaning limiting to the smallest possible level government's involvement in matters such as education, taxes and even welfare<sup>72</sup>; the second constant idea is that the family institutions is being threatened by the changing surrounding world, overwhelmed by the tide of secularism which followed the sexual revolution, from which it comes that political solutions are not enough and that the change must be cultural, something on which Evangelicals from the left and right strongly agreed<sup>73</sup>; finally, family values became increasingly connected to opposition to gay-marriage and while the history behind this connection and the anti-gay-rights character of Evangelicals will be later addressed, here is sufficient to state that the debate around gay-marriage assumed in the nineties and two-thousands enormous proportions, with Evangelicals from the left and right alike agreeing on the wrongfulness of homosexuality and of its acceptance<sup>74</sup>. Due to the versatility of the concept of family, on top of these three more consistent views Evangelical – and non-Evangelical – groups have built a series of corollaries of what it means to be pro-family, including care for the unborn, fight against pornography and even military strength<sup>75</sup>.

---

<sup>69</sup> Founder of Focus on the Family, 1977, one of the biggest organizations of the religious right. <https://www.focusonthefamily.com/>. Accessed July 20, 2020

<sup>70</sup> Former undersecretary of Education and Chief Domestic Policy Advisor of the Reagan administration. He led as president the Family Research Council, an affiliate lobbying group of Focus on the Family, from 1988 to 2003. <https://www.frc.org/family-formation>. Accessed July 20, 2020.

<sup>71</sup> Kennedy, John W. *Candidates Court Family Values Vote*, Christianity Today, October 7, 1996, 78.

<sup>72</sup> Lawton, Kim A. *Bush: Start with Revival*, 65; Kennedy, John W. *Candidates Court Family Values*, 76.

<sup>73</sup> Cromartie, Michael. *One Lord, One Faith, One Voice?*, Christianity Today, October 7, 1996, 41, 43.

<sup>74</sup> Ibid. 41.

<sup>75</sup> Green, Jocelyn. *Voting Values*, Christianity Today, December 2007, 16.

Another important value, or rather virtue, that Evangelicals have taken into consideration in politics is the well-built character of a leader. The prominence of the character issue is directly connected with the link between a morally informed conscience – founded as it has been underlined on strong faith and assumptions of immutable truths – and the ability to lead<sup>76</sup>. As such, character has been something the Evangelicals have paid attention to when called to choose a candidate to lead the nation and, despite a growing understanding that political know-how and expertise is as important as character, given the choice they have never fully subdued character to expertise, since in their own words “good characters do not always make good Presidents, but bad ones almost always insure failure in office”<sup>77</sup>. When dealing with character, Evangelicals have basically meant the overall moral standing of public figures, adherence to shared values and, maybe most importantly, sincerity. The Evangelical community has showed a heartfelt need for sincerity and strong critique of deception, something that has its origins in the trouble times of Watergate<sup>78</sup> and has only being reinforced by the occasional scandals that have plagued both Evangelical and public leaders<sup>79</sup>. The deep value Evangelicals have placed on sincerity has particularly emerged in what has been the greatest scandal of the nineties, the affair between president Clinton and intern Monica Lewinsky: more than the adulterous nature of the affair, what stroke Evangelicals has been the “failure to tell the truth”, something that in Evangelicals words “[...] have rendered this administration morally unable to lead”<sup>80</sup>. Sincerity has also meant to stick to one’s values and commitments, so that when the discrepancy between one’s talking and acting became evident, Evangelicals quickly framed such difference in terms of insincerity or planned deception, something that has involved critique both against Democrats and Republicans. Clinton once again was critiqued firstly for not following the dictates of his denomination as far as gay-rights are concerned<sup>81</sup>, and secondly for championing to make abortion “safe, legal and rare” but not delivering any significant abortion limiting legislation<sup>82</sup>, something already not tolerated by Evangelicals and made increasingly worse by his faith profession as a devout Christian. Clinton was not the only Democrat who has been criticized as deceptive for the discrepancy between his faith commitment and policy initiative: Democratic candidate John Kerry also drew very harsh criticism due to his “awkward” contrasting positions, such as believing that life begins at conception but supporting abortion, or opposing gay marriage but refusing to support an amendment to define the family as a traditional heterosexual union<sup>83</sup>. Concerns about one’s sincerity were also showed in regards of Republican leaders: president George H. W. Bush, who in 1988 campaigned appealing to pro-life and pro-family values,

---

<sup>76</sup> Coats, Dan. *The Politics of Patience*, Christianity Today, August 10, 1998, 61.

<sup>77</sup> Muck, Terry. *The Vision Test*, 34.

<sup>78</sup> Sidney, Ken. *A Question of Character*, Christianity Today, April 6, 1992, 16. Here the Watergate scandal is explicitly addressed as an ominous memory of deception.

<sup>79</sup> Televangelist Jimmy Swaggart was implicated in a scandal involving a prostitute in 1988; Televangelist Jim Bakker was accused and found guilty of fraud and sexual misconduct in 1987; Democratic candidate hopeful Gary Hart was accused of having an extramarital affair during the primary season of 1988; Democratic candidate Joe Biden was accused of plagiarism during the primary season in 1987.

<sup>80</sup> *The Prodigal President*, Christianity Today, October 5, 1998, 37.

<sup>81</sup> Morgan, Timothy C. *Clinton Draws Ire of SBC*, Christianity Today, July 19, 1993, 54.

<sup>82</sup> *A Question of Faith*, 28.

<sup>83</sup> Stricherz, Mark. *John Kerry’s Open Mind*, Christianity Today, Oct. 2004, 29-31.



shocked many Evangelicals when he not only failed to deliver consistent anti-abortion legislation, but personally invited gay-right activist to the White House to celebrate the anniversary of the Hate Crime bill, events that frustrated Evangelicals to the point of questioning if he had “learned our language to ensure our vote”<sup>84</sup>. Character might seem out of place when confronted to pro-life and pro-family values, since these have formed core principles of activism to be translated in policies, while character has been more a judgmental parameter. In truth, character plays an important role in the understanding of Evangelical political thought first because it figures as one of the traits Evangelical have emphasized when called to choose a leader and as such has deeply influenced the political alignment of this constituency and the reasons behind their party-loyalty, second because it is strongly related to the expectancy of almost direct translation of principles into policies, an attitude that has undergone a significant – and sometime critical – change as Evangelicals began to witness from close distance the political process.

### 1.3 *Church and State, Religion and Politics*

The deep level of Evangelical political involvement and activism compelled this religious constituency to eventually tackle the issue of the separation of church and state. This is one of the core principles that have accompanied the United States republic since its beginning, and has been founded on two different sources: the first is the official First Amendment to the Constitution to the United States, the second is the famous formula ‘a wall of separation of church and state’ given by Thomas Jefferson (1743-1826) as an interpretation of the content of the Amendment. The first amendment opens with what is known as the Establishment-of-religion clause and reads: “Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof.”<sup>85</sup>, and as such has been interpreted as forbidding government to make laws that would have favored one religion over the other, something that has been widely used as a legal tool to contrast the allocation of federal funds to faith or religious based organizations such as schools, universities, charities and churches *tout-court*. This has been the case for example in the unfolding of the faith-based initiative project proposed as part of the electoral campaign of George W. Bush in 1999, who envisioned to lose the regulation behind “charitable choice”, meaning allowing religious-based organizations to compete for federal funds for their welfare-oriented projects. Already during the campaign season, the policy compliance with the principle of non-establishment was being questioned but President Bush rebutted by asserting that “I don’t think it will [blur the line between church and State]. And the reason is we are funding people and programs, not institutions”<sup>86</sup>. The events that unfolded during his first term in office proved to be different, with the legislation stalling in Congress and courts stripping charitable organizations from the grants they had applied for due to the hiring issue: since charity organizations had hiring parameters that excluded those who did not comply with their religious based moral standards, funding them would have meant allocating public funds to

---

<sup>84</sup> Cryderman, Lyn. *Am-Bushed?*, Christianity Today, Sept 24, 1990, 16.

<sup>85</sup> [https://www.law.cornell.edu/constitution/first\\_amendment](https://www.law.cornell.edu/constitution/first_amendment). Accessed July 20, 2020.

<sup>86</sup> *Bush’s Faith Based Plans*, Christianity Today, October 25, 1999, 20.

organizations who practiced discrimination<sup>87</sup>. If the establishment clause played a role mainly in the legal field and was the principle to be upheld in courts from both accuse and defense parties, the wall of separation idea mainly played on the cultural and public scene, with boundaries of the wall passing right through the different understanding of the relation between religion and politics rather than church and state. While non-Evangelicals often looked at Evangelicals with wariness, perceiving their activism as an attempt to breach the wall between church and state, Evangelicals actually almost never included the church in their activism. Political involvement has strongly been underlined as something reserved for Christians as citizens, a task they should carry out as individuals through traditional political means such as voting, organizing, protesting, lobbying and praying, while a marriage between church and state has been explicitly refused<sup>88</sup>. Evangelicals, from the left to the right, have consistently refused to directly engage politics and to endorse parties from the church pulpit, since they consider politics to be not only an inappropriate environment for the church as such, but also one full of dangers and perils. Some of these dangers are theological, since they argue that direct church involvement would definitely undermine its main duty to proclaim the Gospel by twisting its message in order to comply to partisan positions, not to mention that for some Evangelicals to associate the church message with partisan position would resent idolatry<sup>89</sup>. Some of the dangers are more practical, for examples Evangelicals have come to fear church exploitation from the seats of power. This fear originated from the times of the Watergate scandal, which became a warning legacy to any future direct contact and collaboration on an explicit political level between Evangelical pastors and political leaders: when in 2000 megachurch pastor Bill Hybels of the Willow Creek Community Church<sup>90</sup> in South Barrington, Illinois, invited President Clinton during a special service as a guest, many of the Evangelicals present there expressed uneasiness with seeing their pastor sharing the pulpit with the president, and in contextualizing this fear they still recalled the Watergate event, and how Graham later described being too closely associated with President Nixon as one of his biggest regrets<sup>91</sup>. Similarly, despite championing for and endorsing conservative candidates through Christian organizations, Evangelicals have cautiously avoided making endorsement from the church pulpit, so that when the electoral staff of president incumbent Bush mailed Evangelical and conservative churches to ask for their endorsement, the response of these has been cool at best, with the SBC's Ethics and Religious Liberty Commission comparing direct political endorsement as "letting the fox inside the henhouse"<sup>92</sup>. This fear has not been limited to exploitation from parties or politicians, but from the establishment and government itself, to the point in which the Evangelicals came to intend the wall to work also as a protection for them against the

---

<sup>87</sup> Stricherz, Mark. *Faith-Based Legislation Stalled*, Christianity Today, November 18, 2002, 25-26; Carnes, Tony. *The Twelfth of Never*, Christianity Today, January 2004, 28.

<sup>88</sup> The refusal of merging church and state often emerges in the description leaders themselves provided of their own political ideas. Here some examples. Dobson, Edward G. *Taking Politics out of the Sanctuary*, Christianity Today, May 20, 1996, 16-17; *A Crack in the Wall*, Christianity Today, October 7, 2002, 33.

<sup>89</sup> *Gospel Independence*, Christianity Today, July 2008, 20.

<sup>90</sup> The Willow Creek Community Church is a non-denominational Evangelical Christian megachurch. <https://www.willowcreek.org/>. Accessed July 20, 2020.

<sup>91</sup> Cutrer, Corrie. *Love the President, Hate the Policy*, Christianity Today, October 2, 2000, 20.

<sup>92</sup> Moll, Rob. *Rendering Unto Cesar?*, Christianity Today, September 2004, 24.

reach of Washington. When President George W. Bush proposed his federal aid to faith-based organizations, some Evangelicals reacted negatively fearing that accepting state money would have meant allowing the government “to tell us what to do”, something that “liberals would love to get a hold of”<sup>93</sup>. Finally, another very practical danger of mixing church and politics stemmed directly from the possibility for the church to lose its tax-exempt status, since according to the Internal Revenue Service tax-exempt churches are precluded from doing anything that may be “beneficial or detrimental to any candidate”<sup>94</sup>. This said, it should be noted that despite the best proclaimed efforts to keep politics and pulpit separated, this endeavor has come with some very evident limits. First of all, churches and pastors have played an active role in the lobbying mechanism of the Religious Right which went further than the simple overlap of the respective demographics. Beyond personal membership of pastors to one or more of the groups that compose the Religious Right, churches have played a role in the grassroots mobilization plans of conservative Christian lobbying groups. One of the best examples is represented by the voter guides and the controversy it sparked through the years, since it directly challenged the boundaries between activism and neutrality. Voter guides – still in use today – have been firstly produced by the Christian Coalition in 1990 as a new tool for political lobbying on a grassroots level and consisted in bipartisan, educational pamphlets about positions and voting record of representatives on a local, and national level in order to inform voters. The idealistic non-political and educational nature of such pamphlets would have permitted to the Christian Coalition to make these guides circulate through religious organizations without the risk of losing their tax-exempt status. From the beginning though, the effective bipartisanship of such guides had been brought into question arguing that the “non-partisan efforts would have partisan outcomes”, since the public to which these were directed was already leaning towards marked political positions<sup>95</sup>. Following the example of the Christian Coalition, many other conservative lobby groups started printing their own guides, using churches as nodal points for the distribution of such informative material sparking a controversy that started from the 1993 Virginia state elections, when Democrats sued conservative Christians groups over the unconstitutionality of this practice, ending in the state supreme court ruling in favor of conservatives, who by the election date managed to distribute all their material<sup>96</sup>. Aside from the more legalistic discussions that surround such practices, what matters is that the distribution from churches of electoral-oriented material produced by lobbying groups, whose political leanings and partisan affiliations are more than well known, constitutes an evident limit to the Evangelical claim of church neutrality as far as political – and partisan – endorsement is concerned. A second limit is represented by what Evangelicals have come to define as “voting to communicate *biblical* values”<sup>97</sup> (emphasis in original), something shadier than the apparent lobbying process of the voting guides and that therefore requires a little disclaimer.

---

<sup>93</sup> Carnes, Tony.  *Wooing the Faithful*, Christianity Today, October 2004, 34.

<sup>94</sup> The legal reasons behind the controversy can be found in Frame, Randy. *Conservative Christians in the Cross Hairs?*, Christianity Today, July 14, 1997, 58.

<sup>95</sup> *Bringing in the Votes*, Christianity Today, April 27, 1992, 42.

<sup>96</sup> O’Keefe, Mark. ‘*Religious Bigotry*’ *Alleged*, Christianity Today, December 13, 1993, 67.

<sup>97</sup> *The Values-Driven Voter*, Christianity Today, September 2004, 32.

Now, as it has already been stated in the previous paragraph, Evangelical political activism is based on some common non-negotiable values that when translated into policy positions, clearly end up anchoring the group as strongly pro-life and pro-family, with the partisan result of having the overwhelming majority of conservative Christians at ease with their Republican affiliation. The values that form Evangelical political activism are of course the same behind their church's activities, both as religious services and social ministries. Even more, as demonstrated in the opening prologue of this dissertation, such values are also part of the very same Evangelical identity. Therefore, the fact that Evangelicals end up voting for the values they believe in and that such values are also the ones championed by their church it's neither a surprise, neither a compelling argument to why the indication of "voting to communicate *biblical* values" represents a limit to church partisan neutrality. But when such indication is given and promoted by the NAE which reunites evangelical churches and not interest groups, the context changes and receives the necessary officiality to the argument that it does present a limit to church's neutrality. In 2004, the NAE published a document titled "For the Health of the Nation: An Evangelical Call to Civic Responsibility"<sup>98</sup>, in which it drafted a model for public engagement for the Christian citizen. The fact that this document was produced in anticipation of the upcoming presidential elections and that in its preamble directly calls Evangelicals to be engaged in the electoral process further enhances its political nature. While the document made no partisan nor political endorsement – and in truth it presents a broad agenda for political involvement which tends to be comprehensive of concerns associated traditionally both with conservative and more progressive Evangelicals –, it defined the core principles of those "biblical values", among which uncompromising statements are made about the wrongfulness of abortion and the staunch defense of the traditional family and marriage institution<sup>99</sup>. Such uncompromising tone, combined with the electoral call presented in the document itself, cannot hardly be seen as nothing less than a veiled and indirect endorsement of a precise political position. Surely, the document did not make any endorsement, nor it presented information that might be considered biased as the ones in the voting guides, but it did call Evangelicals to vote based on biblical values, and it framed those values in ways that left little choice in their interpretation when related to the political history of the two main American parties. This is another limit of the church's neutrality claim and of the ideal division between pulpit and politics, since the definition of biblical values in terms that would have necessarily led to strong stances as far as certain political areas are concerned definitely proved that the message from the pulpit does indeed leads directly to a certain political path. The fact that this document was formulated not by some lobbying organizations of the Religious Right – which do call Christian to show their biblical values in the elections but they're still not churches nor association of churches – but by the NAE and thus indirectly by the churches it represents further shows the limit of keeping politics out of the pulpit.

As political involvement became more and more pronounced, with the Religious Right growing as a strong presence in the Republican party and its organizations maturing into more effective lobbying formations, Evangelicals closely witnessed how politics were far from being the all comprehensive answer to

---

<sup>98</sup> <https://www.nae.net/for-the-health-of-the-nation/>. Accessed August 1, 2020.

<sup>99</sup> *For Whom Would Jesus Vote?*, 32-33.

the problems they wished to solve, since despite all the efforts abortion remained a constitutional right, *Roe* was not overturned and gay-rights were slowly being advanced. Direct exposure to the government palaces and to the political process made Evangelicals realize that political means came with a series of limits that simply could not be overcome from within the political process itself. It thus became increasingly clear that the churches, and of course Christian activism itself, should have engaged such problems on a different level, one that was not in opposition to politics but rather its parallel, thus meaning confronting problems and finding solutions on a more cultural and social plan. Political disenchantment started with what Evangelicals considered to be the roots of all these problems, i.e. the encroaching secularization of the American nation and culture – an argument reoccurring every time Evangelicals tried to understand why some policies were being supported and implemented, as the case with abortion on demand and gay-rights. Therefore, Evangelicals have remarked that political means would have not delivered the long-sought victory for the pro-life, pro-family battles if these were not accompanied by a large cultural renewal plan, remarks that have been all but veiled and sometime even reached the point to look like critiques on the forms of engagement of some Evangelical leaders. Through bottom-line communalities shared in these remarks, a consistent narrative of the limits of politics can be constructed and it follows these lines: politics do not offer complete solutions because they're founded on the assumption that right representatives will promulgate right laws which in turn will form a right society, but since society is riddled with sin and advanced secularization, it can be changed only from within and not from outside<sup>100</sup>; the state is just one of the institutions “ordained by God” and goes alongside the church and the family without trampling them, therefore its potential it's limited and it becomes impossible for legislation alone to produce all-comprehensive moral changes<sup>101</sup>; finally, since without the assumption that change is possible the very same *raison d'être* of activism would crumble, the most effective way to produce the sought cultural change is for the church to “live its values in the world”, which has meant to develop autonomous religious ministries to solve those problems, without over-reliance on the legislative process<sup>102</sup>. Indeed, Evangelical ministries have been developed for most of the policy areas that they considered to be lacking in terms of legislative gains, and the realization that the legislative process might have never produced the sought changes might have been one of the drive behind the endeavors of Evangelical cultural and social activism. One important thing should be underlined: while such limits might have compelled a more Fundamentalist group into retreating and isolating once more in a religious subculture, a traditional behavior that indeed in small part happened in the nineties, the overall majority of Evangelicals and especially Evangelical leaders, from the left to the right, came to the conclusion that abandoning the political field would have been even worse, since it would have precluded them from having a voice in the political process and would have left this firmly in the sole hands of the secular elites.

---

<sup>100</sup> Dobson, Edward G. *Taking Politics out of the Sanctuary*, 17.

<sup>101</sup> Colson, Charles. *Is the Religious Right finished?*, Christianity Today, September 6, 1999, 59.

<sup>102</sup> Bock, Darrell. *The Politics of the People of God*, Christianity Today, September 2005, 86.

#### 1.4 Considerations on Part I. Chapter 1

This first chapter has been focused on the theoretical nature of Evangelical political activism, thus highlighting the core concepts and values that have formed it. Starting from the formers, the first major concept produced by Evangelical political theology has been Christian America, one that slightly but importantly changed its meaning between the time of its first major use by the leaders of the Religious Right in the late seventies, and the more politically accustomed new leaders of the nineties and two-thousands. Decades of political exposure made Evangelicals understand not only the strong limitations of re-Christianizing America through political means, but also that the concept they were so eagerly defending was not being shared or understood in the same way by their Republican allies. Thus, if in the beginning Christian America was thundered by conservative Christian leaders as an historical reality to reestablish, with an emphasis especially on the *Christian* part of the binomial, later leaders started to frame the concept more as a cultural defined set of values that are intended to be traditionally Christian and traditionally American, thus striking a balance between the priorities of socially conservatives and economically conservatives within the same party. The second important concept analyzed has been the legitimacy of Christian involvement in politics, something that Evangelicals had to justify both to their own traditionally isolationist history and identity, inherited by their Fundamentalist roots, and to those groups that considered the strong involvement of such a deeply religious constituency a threat to American pluralism. Evangelicals found many ways to justify their involvement: they presented it as a scripturally mandated duty enshrined in both the Old and New Testament, then as a necessity to fully and effectively absolve the call of Jesus to care for one's neighbor, and finally as an obligation to all Christians to stop the menacing advance of secularism, a call coming especially from Religious Right leaders. Finally, direct political involvement required Evangelicals to confront the principle of church and state separation, something they did by developing their own understanding of the meaning behind such formula. Contrary to what one might have expected from a group so eager to champion Christian policies and politics, Evangelicals kept in high regard the division of the two institutions, but they did so out of fear that not the state, but the church would suffer if the division disappeared, as it would have lost sight of its evangelic mission, it would have been exploited by politicians or by the establishment and it would have had its tax-exempt status revoked. Therefore, Evangelicals intended for the church to address policies and contemporary problems without making political endorsement and without getting dragged into any political game, a claim of neutrality that came with all the limits above addressed.

The division of church and state has never meant for Evangelicals a division between religion and politics, as it has been cleared by the analysis of the values on which they have constructed their political activism. The relation between religion and politics has been the strongest as far as the first value analyzed is concerned: faith, not simply a desired but a required trait of the ideal politician and by extension citizen. The reasons why Evangelicals have placed such an importance in leaders with a strong faith is double, since from one side it testifies the adherence and commitment of such person to a set of everlasting truths far beyond the moral relativism they've come to despise, and second because it makes these leaders easier to empathize with,

someone Evangelicals can look up to as one of their own and thus able to understand their concerns. Moving from personal to more policy-oriented values, it has been underlined how two areas have received particular attention, being them the sanctity of life and the defense of the family. The first one has materialized in Evangelicals becoming more and more involved in the pro-life movement, stalwart opposers of abortion to the point of making it a deal-breaker for their support even when negotiating with their own allies. The second one has instead taken more tortuous turns, and the pro-family etiquette has found many declinations through the years and across the different groups. For all these differences, Evangelicals have also found some common and shared agreements on what it means to be pro-family. These have been championing the autonomy of the American family from any form of government interference, knowing that its defense from the products of a secular culture is a task that requires Christians to be involved on a social and cultural level and not merely on the political one and fighting against the expansion of gay-rights and especially gay-marriage, seen as a terrible attack on the traditional family. Last but not least, character has been analyzed as a more comprehensive value related to the ability of the leader to morally lead and its commitment to translate principles into policies.

It has been the intention of this opening part to provide the necessary understanding of the core principles of the Evangelical political theology, the idea of America they had and the values they sought to defend. Understanding the Religious Right and its historical evolution in the decades nineties and two-thousands would not be possible without adequately address those values that have formed evangelical activism. Indeed, this overall analysis has already hinted to one of the main characteristics of Evangelical political involvement in the decades examined, meaning the uneasy coexistence of non-negotiable principles with necessary compromises to be made in order to achieve success in the political sphere. Showing the changing attitude that resulted from this uneasiness, with some leaders ready to adopt a more pragmatic approach and others uncompromisingly anchored on principles, will be the main goal of the following chapter, focused on those lobbying groups that have formed the political arm of Evangelical activism.

## 2. The Religious Right

### 2.1 *Origins: from Nixon to Reagan*

The Religious Right, or Christian Right, is the label given to comprehensively identify all the conservative Christian groups that actively work and lobby to influence the political process in order to push an agenda which, as previously discussed, revolves around a conservative Christian understanding as far as values, principles and policies are concerned. While these groups are characterized by heterogeneity in confessions, being formed by a core of Evangelical Protestants and Catholics accompanied by a smaller presence of mainline Protestants and Mormons, and while they do not necessarily collaborate one with the other, they do share a homogeneous political position strongly anchored on common social conservative agreements. Although most of the principal groups that form the Religious Right have been founded in the late seventies and during the eighties, the premises for such an interconfessional alliance to happen were laid down in that turbulent decade that were the sixties<sup>103</sup>.

The most important event that happened in this period has been the change of attitude of Evangelicals towards Catholics, a surprising development especially when considering the rapidity with which long enemies were re-discovered as new allies. It is no secret that Evangelicals have felt for a long time some sort of uneasiness if not straight antipathy for Catholics, a common trait among many Protestant and especially Fundamentalist denominations. The antipathy was not limited to confessional disputes nor it stopped on the church threshold, rather it crossed that line and directly moved into the public square as a deep suspicion of Catholic citizens and politicians, to the point in which Evangelicals seriously considered Catholic and American two mutually exclusive identities<sup>104</sup>. This deep-rooted anti-Catholic bias produced its most contemporary example right at the beginning of the decade when the Democratic party produced John F. Kennedy (1917-1963) as its president candidate for the 1960 electoral campaign, the second Catholic to run for the presidency and the first – and as today only – one to reach the highest office. The election of Kennedy increased Evangelical prejudices so much so that those supreme court rulings against school prayers that happened in the beginning of the decade – *Engel v. Vitale* 1962 and *Abington v. Schempp* 1963 – and that would later be addressed as worrisome products of the secularization of the American society, were initially welcomed with relief by Evangelicals, who saw them as protections against the imaginary threat of Catholics being able to religiously influence the Protestant dominated public schools<sup>105</sup>. By the middle of the decade

---

<sup>103</sup> For a detailed study on the early politicization of Evangelicals in the sixties, see Harp, Gillis J. *Protestants and American Conservatism*, 189-194.

<sup>104</sup> On the anti-Catholic bias, see Fenton, Elizabeth. *Religious Liberties: Anti-Catholicism and Liberal Democracy in Nineteenth-Century U.S. Literature and Culture*, Oxford/New York, Oxford University Press, 2011; Casey, Shaun A. *The Making of a Catholic President: Kennedy v. Nixon 1960*, Oxford/New York, Oxford University Press, 2009; Shea, William M. *The Lion and the Lamb: Evangelicals and Catholics in America*, Oxford/New York, Oxford University Press, 2004; Massa, Mark S. *Anti-Catholicism in America: The Last Acceptable Prejudice*, New York, Crossroads, 2003.

<sup>105</sup> Williams, Daniel K. *Richard Nixon's Religious Right*. In Gifford, Laura Jane & Williams, Daniel K. ed, *The Right Side of the Sixties*, New, York, Palgrave Macmillan, 2012, 147-148.



tough something changed, and as the sexual revolution for a new reconsideration of equality in gender relationship translated into younger generations being more sexually free, Evangelicals came to see the society in front of them on the verge of moral collapse and discovered that their concerns were being shared also by conservative Catholics. Prominent Evangelical leaders such as Timothy LaHaye<sup>106</sup> (1926-2016) and Billy James Hargis (1925-2004)<sup>107</sup>, started to timidly collaborate with conservative Catholics on shared socially conservative grounds in order to tackle those problems that they considered to be devastating, such as drug abuse and sexual freedom brought by cultural liberalism<sup>108</sup>. These first collaborations started to cement into a potential alliance when politics came into the picture, since now it would have been possible for a candidate to successfully frame his policies in conservative terms appealing both to Evangelicals and conservative Catholics, without the risk of alienating one of the two constituencies. This opportunity did not pass unobserved to Republican candidate and then president Richard Nixon: during his electoral campaigns (1968) and terms in office (1969-1974), Nixon positioned himself as the stalwart defender of the country's morality and traditional values against the cultural liberalism and secularism that had manifested in the sixties, thus not only managing to maintain a strong support from Evangelicals and conservative Catholics alike, but also cementing the alliance between the two groups along these social conservative lines. It should be noted that Nixon did not only harvest a pre-existing consensus that has been forming since the middle of the decade, but played an active role in bringing these two groups together under his banner thanks to a well thought Catholic-Evangelical strategy to which contributed a later to be leader of the Religious Right Charles Colson and the president's speech-writer Pat Buchanan (born 1938), a conservative Catholic who knew how to appeal to his conservative fellows<sup>109</sup>. If Nixon's political career ended abruptly following the Watergate scandal, the alliance he helped to forge between Evangelicals and conservative Catholics based on shared social conservative positions did not follow his downfall but rather persisted, and years later materialized into a well-defined political reality, loyal to the Republican party and capable of influencing its agenda. Thus, the sixties represented that turning point in the relation between Evangelicals and Catholics that would later be crucial to the emergence of the contemporary Religious Right: a decade that had started with the most recent example of ancient anti-Catholic bias ended with the two groups rediscovering their similarities and managing to put their animosities aside in order to focus on common goals. The idea that the battle for traditional values was no more one to be fought against each other but rather between conservative Christians and liberals was further cemented by the political acumen of Nixon and his staff, as displayed in the consensus building strategy

---

<sup>106</sup> Tim LaHaye has been an influential Evangelical preacher and author who engaged in political activism and sat on the Moral Majority Board of Directors. His wife, Beverly LaHaye, founded Concerned Women for America in 1978. For a brief biography, see Bates Stephen, *Tim LaHaye Obituary*, The Guardian, July 28, 2016. <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2016/jul/28/tim-lahaye-obituary>. Accessed August 15, 2020.

<sup>107</sup> Hargis fame as a conservative televangelist peaked in the fifties and sixties, when he promoted anti-communist, segregationist crusades. For a brief biography, see Carlson, Michael. *Billy James Hargis: Rightwing preacher laid low by sexual scandal*, The Guardian, December 10, 2004.

<https://www.theguardian.com/news/2004/dec/10/guardianobituaries.religion>. Accessed August 15, 2020.

<sup>108</sup> Williams, Daniel K. *Richard Nixon's Religious Right*, 149.

<sup>109</sup> *Ibid*, 151.

previously addressed. While the collaboration between Evangelicals and conservative Catholics in the mid to late sixties did not result in the formation of lobbying groups and their relation with the political world was mostly unilateral, thus being very far from what the Religious Right would later be, it represents the seed of conservative Christian activism and already shows in potency some of its principles: a collaboration between Christian conservative groups along cross-confessional lines with a vision of them against an increasing secularizing society, its focus on social issues as matter of common concerns, its leaning towards a well-defined party positions<sup>110</sup>.

As stated, the sixties represented the moment in which many of the premises for the future Religious Right were laid down. It was not however until the mid to late seventies that these potentialities fully blossomed into what has been known as the Religious Rights, a constellation of conservative Christian groups lobbying to push their agenda of social conservatism. Indeed, the major groups of the Religious Right were formed around this period: The Stop ERA group was founded in 1972 by Catholic activist Phyllis Schlafly (1924-2016) and then reorganized in its current form as the Eagle Forum in 1975; Focus on the Family was created by dr. James Dobson in 1977, who then proceeded to create the Family Research Council in 1983 firstly as part of the wider Focus on the Family group, then as an independent entity in 1992; Concerned Women for America was created in 1979 by Beverly LaHaye (born 1929), wife of the already famous Evangelical minister Timothy LaHaye; finally, the most famous Moral Majority founded in 1979 by Fundamentalist minister Jerry Falwell (1933-2007) and conservative Catholic Paul Weyrich, disbanded in 1989<sup>111</sup>. These groups represent only the most numerous and influential among the many that have formed the Religious Right of the late seventies, and it should be noted that their level of engagement varied consistently from one group to the other: while the Moral Majority represented since its inception an attempt to mobilize the highest number of Christian voters and channel their electoral preference towards the Republican party and its conservative agenda, other groups such as Focus on the Family have been developed initially as organizations providing a wide array of pro-life and pro-family material to American families, churches and schools through sponsored publications, radio broadcasted programs and ministry projects. Again, while some of these groups were founded as lobbying groups since their very beginning such as Concerned Women for America, others decided to created affiliated lobbying organizations in a second moment, as the case with Focus on the Family creating in 2004 the Focus on the Family Action – now Family Policy Alliance – as its lobbying branch and with Family Research Council, launching in 1992 the Family Research Council Action. This said, beyond their legalistic and organizational differences these groups share a common vision and mission, which is a quite simple and direct one: to defend biblical values and truths at all level of public policy and society<sup>112</sup>, which on the practical

---

<sup>110</sup> Ivi.

<sup>111</sup> For a comprehensive history of the groups forming the Religious Right, see Martin, William C. *With God on Our Side: The Rise of the Religious Right in America*, New York, Broadway Books, 2005; Fitzgerald, Frances. *The Evangelicals: The Struggle to Shape America*, New York, Simon & Schuster, 2017.

<sup>112</sup> Such are the core principles contained in the self-statements made by Concerned Women for America and Focus on the Family. <https://concernedwomen.org/about/who-we-are/>; <https://www.focusonthefamily.com/about/foundational-values/>. Accessed July 20, 2020.

level has largely meant promotion of pro-family, pro-life policies and thus opposition to pro-choice and pro-gay rights groups.

It has been largely accepted among historians that the main reasons behind the formation of the Religious Right in the late seventies are to be founded in their social conservative concerns and opposition to the products of the sexual revolution, which urged conservative Fundamentalists, Evangelicals and Catholics to join forces together to directly engage the political sphere, surpassing their previously owned confessional biases<sup>113</sup>. As far as the Religious Right is concerned, the history of the Moral Majority can be taken as a comprehensive description of the aspects and trajectories of Evangelical political activism of the period, because it represented the biggest group in terms of numbers, because its cross-confessional composition came as a consequence of that previous Evangelical-Catholic timid approach that took part in the mid to late sixties, and because it provided a model for political engagement with which future Evangelical groups often felt compelled to draw a comparison, in order to understand what functioned and what failed. As stated, the Moral Majority formed around a shared consensus among conservative Fundamentalists, Evangelicals and Catholics against the advancement of a series of public policy developments, which consisted of abortion, gay-rights and feminism and were largely perceived to be attacks on the American family and its values<sup>114</sup>. At the time, the development of such a confessionally ambitious alliance was not an obviousness, considering first that Evangelicals and Fundamentalists thought political involvement to be still as a “dirty” thing not to be involved with<sup>115</sup>, second that the biases between conservative Protestants and Catholics were still running too deep to allow such an intense and strategized political synergy, and third that early seventies Evangelicals were not yet embracing the same visceral opposition to abortion that conservative Catholics instead manifested<sup>116</sup>. Nonetheless, the necessary intellectual change to push the creation of this conservative alliance eventually arrived from Francis Schaeffer (1912-1984), a prominent Evangelical theologian who from the late seventies started to call for Evangelicals and Fundamentalists to become engaged in the public sphere to fight back the tide of secularization, largely represented by the legalization of abortion. These frequent calls were finally organized in two books published in the late seventies and early eighties, which soon became largely successful among conservative Evangelicals and helped both to give a reasoned and intellectual argument to sustain such

---

<sup>113</sup> This argument has been brought forward universally by authors such as Durham, Martin. *The Christian Right*; Williams, Daniel K. & Gifford, Jane ed. *The Right Side of the Sixties*; Griffith, R. Marie. *Moral Combat: How Sex Divided American Christians and Fractured American Politics*, New York, Basic Books, 2017; Williams, Daniel K. *God's Own Party*, Oxford/New York, Oxford University Press, 2010. Balmer, Randall. *Evangelicalism in America*, brings forward the idea that the real drive behind the coalescing of the leaders of the Religious Right came from government interference in Christians schools, while social concerns became a mean to appeal to the broader constituency and later solidified as an almost foundation myth. Although school matters played a decisive role in the mobilization of the Evangelical leadership, this argument does not take into enough consideration the worldview developed by Evangelicals, in which the upholding of certain moral and societal values was considered a matter of national survival.

<sup>114</sup> Dowland, Seth. “*Family Values*” and the Formation of a Christian Right Agenda, *Church History*, Vol. 78, No. 3, 2009, 606-631. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/20618754>. Accessed March 27, 2019.

<sup>115</sup> Banwart, Doug. *Jerry Falwell, The rise of the Moral Majority and the 1980 election*, In *Western Illinois Historical Review*, Vol. V, Spring 2013, 133-157. 138. <http://www.wiu.edu/cas/history/wihr/pdfs/Banwart-MoralMajorityVol5.pdf>. Accessed August 13, 2020.

<sup>116</sup> Dowland, Seth. “*Family Values*” and the Formation of a Christian Right Agenda.

important changes in attitude, such as getting involved in politics and allying with Catholics, and to shape the characters of their political activism: in “Whatever happened to the human race?”<sup>117</sup> he and later to be surgeon general C. Everett Koop (1916-2013) pushed forward the idea of the abortion as the keystone in the larger process of erosion of the sanctity of human life, developing a soon to be popular narrative that put abortion next to slavery, euthanasia, infanticide; while secondly in “A Christian Manifesto”<sup>118</sup> he developed the famous concept of ‘co-belligerency’ as a political tactic, a term that called for Evangelicals to engage with whomever shared their conservative values regardless of their confessional allegiance – meaning mostly with Catholics – in order to fight together for the defense of such values, while at the same time astutely avoiding to brand such a collaboration in terms of an alliance. Schaeffer’s political theology gave voice to the growing frustration of social conservative Evangelicals who started to realize that the defense of traditional family values would have not been secured by standing on the side of politics. Falwell was feeling the same frustration and not only shared many of Schaeffer’s ideas, most importantly that of co-belligerency, but was in contact with the theologian himself around the same period in which he started to seek new solutions to change the status of Evangelical political involvement<sup>119</sup>. This finally led to a series of meetings between Falwell and conservative Republicans, among which Catholic Paul Weyrich, resulting in the creation in June 1979 of the Moral Majority, a group made to reunite conservatives beyond confessional barriers to champion “pro-life, pro-family, pro-moral, pro-America” values with an interest in being involved in the political process of the States<sup>120</sup>. The first major opportunity for the Moral Majority to give a voice to all the conservative Christians it represented came in the 1980 U.S. presidential elections, which saw Democratic president incumbent Jimmy Carter running against Republican candidate Ronald Reagan (1911-2004). Carter, a devout southern Baptist, had been the first born-again Christian to have ever been president, while Reagan had a past as an Hollywood actor, a wrecked marriage resulted in divorce and as governor of California had passed some liberal abortion laws, something he would regret later in his life<sup>121</sup>. With such a scenario it should have been an easy pick for Evangelicals to sustain one of their own fellows, instead they flocked under the Republican banner with the Moral Majority in particular spear-heading Evangelical support for Reagan. Such a change has been by some described as a “one of the great paradoxes of American politics”<sup>122</sup>, but historical events have largely proved that assuming that Evangelicals were going to vote for one candidate only because he is an Evangelical is simply wrong. Carter was only the first of a series of Evangelicals who were deserted by their own, an experience he came to share with Pat Robertson (born 1930) in 1988 and Gary Bauer in 2000, which not only were Evangelicals but also well establish Religious Right leaders thus showing that Carter’s abandonment is not a paradox but rather an example of the fact that Evangelical support goes beyond simple shared confessional affiliation. In Carter’s

---

<sup>117</sup> M.D. Koop, C. Everett & Schaeffer, Francis A. *Whatever Happened to the Human race?*, Wheaton, Crossway Books, 1983.

<sup>118</sup> Schaeffer, Francis A. *A Christian Manifesto*, Wheaton, Crossway Books, 1981.

<sup>119</sup> Dowland, ‘Family Values’ and the Formation of a Christian Right Agenda, 614.

<sup>120</sup> Ivi.

<sup>121</sup> Martin, William. *How Ronal Reagan Wowed Evangelicals*, Christianity Today, August 2004, 48.

<sup>122</sup> Balmer. *Evangelicalism in America*, 130.

case, the beleaguered state of the economy, the perceived softness in the confrontation with the Soviet Union and the advancement of progressive reforms championed by his Democratic party were among the many issues that caused Evangelicals to desert his ticket<sup>123</sup>. From his side, Ronald Reagan perfectly understood the electoral potential of conservative religious voters and directly appealed to them in more than one occasion, showing that indeed he was sharing their same concerns and values more than anyone else on the political scene, as perhaps masterfully demonstrated by the speech he delivered to a crowd of religious leaders in Dallas on the 22<sup>nd</sup> of August 1980, when he famously says “I know you can’t endorse me [...] but I want you to know that I endorse you”<sup>124</sup>, a statement that remained in the hearth of many Evangelicals for decades to come. Beyond the reasons of the appeal of the ‘great communicator’, what is interesting is the way the Moral Majority organized the necessary electoral support to secure the elections of conservative congress representatives: the group used millions of dollars to sustain a vast electoral effort widely resembling the means used by civil right activists in the sixties, carried through the creation of roundtables to assist pastors in spurring their congregations to vote for conservative candidates, the distribution of voting material such as guides on the moral background of candidates, the organization of voter registration drives and transport services to the polls<sup>125</sup>. Reagan ended up winning the election with more than half of the Evangelical vote, causing one of the greatest political realignment in recent American history and, with their champion in the White House endorsing them, Evangelicals surely thought to have finally access to those political leverages needed to push back the tide of cultural secularism thus securing the safeguard of a traditional Christian-America. Instead, the eight years long Reagan presidency produced mixed results. If from one side there were some achievements, for example the administration reached and invited Evangelical leaders to meet with the president at the White House, successfully pushed some limitation on abortion for example by stopping federal funding of family planning facilities and American organizations providing abortion outside of the US, promoted a federal funded sexual education program centered on the value of abstinence and increased law enforcement efforts to tackle the drug problem<sup>126</sup>, on the other hand by looking at the complete picture the Reagan administration fall decisively shorter than the Religious Right expectations. Social concerns came continuously in second place behind economic ones, while Reagan proved time and time again that he simply was not going to push the social conservative agenda as further as the Religious Right might have expected, showing a lack of support

---

<sup>123</sup> On the reasons behind Evangelicals abandoning Carter to join Reagan and the Republican party much has been written, with historians focusing on different issues as being the key behind this realignment. Durham in *The Christian Right*, 10-11, proposes government interference in Christian schools and social issues as abortion and homosexuality as being central concerns, but emphasizes the latter as the truly galvanizing ones for the rise of the right.

<sup>124</sup> <https://www.americanrhetoric.com/speeches/ronaldreaganreligiousliberty.htm>. Accessed July 23, 2020.

<sup>125</sup> Banwart, Doug. *Jerry Falwell*, 148; In Findlay, James F. *Religion and Politics in the Sixties: The Churches and the Civil Rights Act of 1964*, *Journal of American History*, Vol. 77, No.1, 1990, 66-92. <https://academic.oup.com/jah/article-abstract/77/1/66/757627?redirectedFrom=fulltext>. Accessed August 15, 2020. The author states that “the tactics of the liberal churches were a double-edged sword, which could be used to advance conservative as well as liberal ends. It was not long before exactly that happened. Perhaps ironically, then, the political successes of the mainline churches in the 1960s served as a precondition for the emergence of Jerry Falwell, Pat Robertson and the Moral Majority in the 1980s”, 90.

<sup>126</sup> Durham, Martin. *The Christian Right*, 11.

for some of the policy proposals most heart-felted by conservative Christians: both the anti-abortion amendment and the school prayer reinstatement amendment failed during Reagan's first term in office due to the reluctance of the president to throw his support behind proposals that could have potentially jeopardized the support he needed to push economic and financial legislation forward<sup>127</sup>. Even when it came to Supreme Court nominees – considered by the Religious Right a key component behind the strategy to overturn *Roe* since a conservative pro-life majority among the judges would have eventually resulted in the highest judicial institution overruling *Roe* – the Religious Right found itself in dismay by Reagan's decision to appoint as his first chosen judge Sandra Day O'Connor (born 1930), whose position on abortion were ambiguous since the beginning and who would not rule to overturn *Roe* in future pivotal court cases *Webster v. Reproductive Health Services* (1989) and *Hodgson v. Minnesota* (1990)<sup>128</sup>. Although Evangelicals remained strongly supportive of President Reagan, they did acknowledge the shortcomings of the administration and of the Moral Majority project. What's more important however it's that by acknowledging this success they did not find reasons or excuses to abandon the newly found political engagement – something that could have been happened given their historical suspicion of the same and that indeed in small part would later happen following the 1998 mid-term election results – but instead they adopted a constructive self-criticism to better their political approach. This self-analysis made them realize the two major issues that had prevented conservative Christians to achieve significant victories: an overreliance on large organizations with no real grassroots base, something that if from one side permitted to concentrate lobbying efforts in the capital, from the other side both excluded them from forming and maintaining a considerable presence nation-wide, and a clumsiness in the way Religious Right leaders tried to lobby, with unrealistic goals and sectarian rhetoric<sup>129</sup>. When in 1989 Falwell disbanded the Moral Majority, he did so not because of some financial or sexual scandal<sup>130</sup>, but because he claimed that the major goal of mobilizing Christians to make them a powerful voice in the political process had been achieved. Surely, abortion was still legal, gay-rights were slowly advancing and moral decay continued to be seen as infiltrating every corner of society, but Falwell was right for what he was claiming, and soon other and new Religious Right organizations would have continued what the Moral Majority had started.

## 2.2 Changing Decades: The Nineties and Two-thousands

The end of the Moral Majority and the Reagan's presidency meant not the end of conservative Christian political engagement, but rather a new beginning. Having witnessed in firsthand the world of politics and its

---

<sup>127</sup> Banwart, Doug. *Jerry Falwell*, 150 and 152.

<sup>128</sup> The former case upheld a Missouri law that allowed the state to exercise restriction on the abortive practice. O'Connor agreed with the Supreme Court decision because it did not place an undue burden on the right to abortion. The latter case struck down the two-parent notification in case of abortion on a teenager, considered unconstitutional, thus marking the first time O'Connor actually voted against an abortion restrictive practice. For further information, see Greenhouse, Linda. *Becoming Justice Blackmun: Harry Blackmun's Supreme Court journey*, New York, Times Books, 2005.

<sup>129</sup> Martin, William. *How Ronald Reagan Wowed Evangelicals*, 49.

<sup>130</sup> Cyderman, Lyn. *Exit Right*, Christianity Today, August 18, 1989, 15.

underlying logics, Evangelicals realized that objectives and means of their previous engagement were simply not adequate for the achievement of real victories. The Moral Majority provided a model that worked as far as electoral mobilization was concerned, proving that Evangelicals and conservative Christians by extension could be galvanized by appealing to a well-identifiable set of religious and social conservative issues, but that fell short in actually wielding the necessary power to effectively lobbying for the desired legislative changes, and for that reason its priorities were constantly trampled by those of the more expert economic conservative Republicans. Thus, old and new conservative Christian organizations tried new approaches to make their lobbying efforts better and more successful and, through a series of adjustments not without strong resistance, they finally managed to become a more mature political force. This dissertation will argue in favor of the idea that two were the changes that Religious Right organizations had to necessarily make in order to improve its political effectiveness, and indeed both of these were answers to the shortcomings of the Moral Majority model: the first change concerned the construction of a strong grassroots base and the transition from a top-down to a bottom-up structure, capable of electing conservative Christians not only in Washington but all along the political pyramid nation-wide, while the second change concerned the adoption of a better lobbying attitude and rhetoric, more prone to compromise and gradualism rather than triumphalism and inflexibility. As it will be demonstrated in the following paragraphs, the nineties represented the decisive decade in which these changes happened and while the construction of a grassroots base proceeded smoothly in all the major organizations, the abandonment of traditional immovability on certain issues constituted a much more difficult step to make and indeed it required more time. Despite the difficulties on the path, by the end of the decade conservative Christians had established themselves as a mature political force and as a key component of the Republican party, steering it towards social conservatism and reshaping the agenda of both the party and the nation as never before.

The creation of a strong grassroots base went through the development of a decentralized and nation-wide local presence, which moved the conservative battles to state level without at the same time sacrificing the direct lobbying activities in the capital. This meant that beside the more traditional forms of lobbying connected to the electoral seasons, the Religious Right of the nineties would put increased effort in the education of conservative informed citizens and push for their direct involvement all along the political pyramid, from local school boards, to city council representatives and all the way up to state legislature<sup>131</sup>. This approach was pushed forward by Concerned Women for America, which from 1989 focused its efforts into developing local Prayer/Action chapters and assisting local organizations<sup>132</sup>, and especially by the Christian Coalition, a completely new conservative Christian organization founded in 1989 by Pat Robertson and led by Ralph Reed as its executive director. Before dealing with the results of such an approach, it is necessary to discuss the concrete activities that constituted it. As stated, the first trait of this new activism was its decentralization: instead of relying on a strong presence in Washington D.C., the Religious Right organizations put efforts in the development of hundreds of local chapters distributed nation-wide, engaging

---

<sup>131</sup> Robertson Regroups 'Invisible Army' into New Coalition, Christianity Today, April 23, 1990, 35.

<sup>132</sup> Lawton, Kim A. *Whatever Happened to the Religious Right?*, Christianity Today, December 15, 1989, 44.

local politics with the objective to push forward social conservative candidates and agendas. The second trait was its educational purposes, where educational meant first to present sensible electorate with information about the candidates' voting records, highlighting foremost their pro-life and pro-family curricula, and second to present Christian voters with the correct lobbying tools and know-how in order to intensify the scope of their lobbying efforts. The educational trait was by far the most different one since not all Christian right organizations indulged in politics in the same way. Focus on the Family for example voiced pro-life and pro-family concerns in the material it produced and distributed nation-wide to Christian families and churches but spent little of its budget into developing a lobbying devoted apparatus. Concerned Women for America and the Christian Coalition instead put efforts in producing and distributing increasingly bigger numbers of voting guides and other similar literature at every election. Other Religious Right organization such as the Christian Action Network<sup>133</sup> also tried to make the citizens themselves better conservative lobbyists by distributing literature consisting of know-how kits about how to effectively and better lobby local and state representatives<sup>134</sup>. A final trait is connected with the numerous activities these organizations carried during the electoral seasons: while they maintained much of the style of the Moral Majority in organizing drives to elections campaigns, these new organizations expanded the efforts to all kinds of political confrontations and not only to national ones. The Christian Coalition gives probably the most striking example, since it organized through its chapters massive telephonic and mail surveys to gather information about voting patterns, political records and major concerns of the various local electorates in order to maximize any political impact<sup>135</sup>. This new grassroot oriented approach faced its first major challenge during the 1992 electoral season and produced mixed results. If from one side it failed to rally considerable support for president incumbent George H. W. Bush, who received only 55% of the Evangelical vote and lost to Democratic candidate Bill Clinton<sup>136</sup>, on the other hand it succeeded in achieving a conservative victory in the California primaries, where Religious Right organizations partnered with local conservative chapters to elect the highest number possible of social conservatives at all political levels, producing considerable results as eleven out of thirteen targeted pro-life candidate were elected to the state assembly<sup>137</sup>. The Religious Right continued its grassroot oriented strategy and gained momentum through the first half of the decade, proving time and time again to be an indispensable asset for the Republican party as clearly demonstrated by the 1993 Virginia gubernatorial elections: here Evangelicals composed roughly 38% of the electorate and, rallied by Religious Right organizations and affiliates, delivered the first gubernatorial victory in 16 years to a Republican candidate<sup>138</sup>. If the Virginia result proved to be an historical achievement, it paled in comparison with the exceptional victory Republicans achieved in the 1994 mid-term election when for the first time in 40 years the party assumed control of both

---

<sup>133</sup> One of the many organizations of the Religious Right, founded in 1990. See <https://Christianaction.org/>. Accessed 20 July 2020.

<sup>134</sup> Lawton, Kim A. *Whatever Happened to the Religious Right?*, 46; Frame, Randy. *High Stakes for the Religious Right*, Christianity Today, October 3, 1994.

<sup>135</sup> Lawton, Kim A. *The New Face(s) of the Religious Right*, Christianity Today, July 20, 1992, 43.

<sup>136</sup> Ead. *Seeking Common Ground*, Christianity Today, December 14, 1992, 41.

<sup>137</sup> Ead. *The New Face(s)*, 42.

<sup>138</sup> O'Keefe, Mark. *'Religious Bigotry' Alleged*, 68.



Houses of Congress, a ‘Republican revolution’ made largely possible thanks to the efforts the Religious Right put in developing a grassroots base and rallying these conservative electors in support of targeted Republican candidates. By the end of the electoral confrontation, not only no incumbent Republican senator, Republican or governor had lost, but the numbers of pro-life and pro-family Republican high-level politicians increased<sup>139</sup>. The 1994 mid-term election represents a focal point for many of the changes of the Religious Right and of Evangelical political engagement in general, but as far as grassroots efforts are concerned it represented the strongest confirmation of the success of such approach in delivering victories not to simply Republican candidates, but to social conservative ones. Religious Right organizations enshrined the grassroots approach as their standard *modus operandi*, maintaining it through the decades of their political involvement even despite the major political setbacks they endured: the failure to push forward social conservative legislation despite the control of both Houses of Congress for much of Clinton’s presidency, the failure of capitalizing on the 1994 results to elect a Republican president in 1996, and the failure of increasing the congressional majority in 1998 despite the high expectations that the Lewinsky scandal produced. Indeed, while Evangelicals largely ascribed the legislative shortcomings of the Reagan era to some deficits of their own activism, they interpreted the political setbacks of the nineties as a result of the Republican party indecisiveness to give priority to social concerns over economic ones<sup>140</sup>. It has been showed in the first part of this chapter that Evangelical political activism is rooted in a set of deeply conservative Christian values and is characterized by an almost religious approach to politics with a strongly held belief that there are some immutable and irrefutable truths, which led Evangelicals to frame their activism as principle driven rather than policy driven. Abortion and homosexuality were – and still largely are – considered to be undeniable evils, wicked products of a secularized and amoral culture that must be fought uncompromisingly. But while this rhetoric and attitude might have worked in galvanizing the constituency to achieve electoral victories, it nonetheless jeopardized any effective legislative effort since it pursued goals that were not only unrealistic, but also not even completely shared among the same party Evangelicals allied with. Moreover, this very same uncompromising mind-set proved to be one of the major obstacles to the development of better answers to improve Evangelical legislative effectiveness: while some leaders understood that politics required a more subtle and pragmatic approach made of negotiations, give-and-takes and differentiation of agenda priorities, others remained staunchly anchored on traditional uncompromising social conservatism. The Christian Coalition proved to be once more the pioneering group pushing the Religious Right towards a different approach, one characterized by a wider agenda and a more prone to compromise politics-making style, focused on finding common grounds and overlapping goals between social conservatives and economic conservatives, with Reed being one of those leaders who pushed for the pro-family label to expand and include concerns about tax reliefs and government interference, without renouncing to the more traditional battles against abortion and for the defense of the

---

<sup>139</sup> Frame, Randy. *Quick Change Artists*, Christianity Today, December 12, 1994, 50.

<sup>140</sup> Lawton, Kim A. *Christian Coalition Moves Ahead Despite Growing Political Pains*, Christianity Today, October 28, 1996, 84-85; Carnes, Tony. *Republicans, Religious Right Stunned by Voters Rebuke*, Christianity Today, December 7, 1998, 20.

traditional family<sup>141</sup>. The coalition efforts peaked in the mid-nineties, with two initiatives that would have ideally brought to life this more comprehensive conservative agenda. The first one was directly related with the “Contract with America”, a document produced by the Republican party for the 1994 electoral campaign and consisting in an ideal legislative blueprint made of policy proposals and initiatives<sup>142</sup>. The following year, when the new mid-term Congress was formed, the Coalition offered its financial means and lobbying expertise to push such contract forward, expecting in exchange the Republican party to deliver some of the social conservative legislation conservative Christians were expecting. Indeed, the Contract with America proved that the tensions between social conservatives and economic conservatives were still visible and problematic: the *Contract* largely focused on reducing budget spending and implementing conservative fiscal reforms, while it did not address controversial cultural issues such as abortion or the advancement of gay-rights<sup>143</sup>. In May 1995, the Coalition presented its second initiative, the “Contract with the American Family”, a complementarian counterpart of the Republican document highlighting mainly social conservative proposals but in ways that would have made them more appealing to the Republican legislators, fitting the small government ideal and envisioning more affordable goals for abortion such as seeking not an uncompromising constitutional amendment but rather the possibility for the states to uphold their rights not to finance abortion and to place limits on late-term abortions<sup>144</sup>. Now, the efforts of the Coalition to forge a comprehensive agenda and to push evangelicals into adopting a more compromise prone political attitude were not universally shared and, since the very beginning, critical voices from some of the most influential Religious Right groups started to be raised. While the Coalition supported the Contract with America in a give-and-take logic, other influential groups like the Family Research Council and the Focus on the Family showed their discontent both with the Republican party, once again privileging economic concerns over social ones since the *Contract* failed to mention many of the most controversial social policy issues, even refusing to address abortion, and with the Coalition’s own Contract with the American Family, described as “unduly modest” or “too compromising”

---

<sup>141</sup> Loconte, Joe. *Will the Religious Right gain Momentum?*, 51-53; Knippers, Diane. *The Great Right Hope*, Christianity Today, February 6, 1995, 62-63; Also, Reed, Ralph. *Politically Incorrect*, Nashville, W. Pub Group, 1996. This last book represents a manifesto of the ideas and agendas of the Christian Coalition of those years, therefore beyond the ideological biases of the book itself it represents a viable historical document to witness the shift that was then occurring in the Religious Right.

<sup>142</sup> For information on the *Contract*, see Gayner, Jeffrey. *The Contract with America: Implementing New Ideas in the U.S.*, The Heritage Foundation, October 12, 1995. <https://www.heritage.org/political-process/report/the-contract-america-implementing-new-ideas-the-us>. Accessed August 15, 2020. The Heritage Foundation is the conservative think tank that has largely contributed to the drafting of the *Contract*, so it should be taken into consideration that the arguments of the previous source are not without bias and should be read carefully. Nonetheless, it reports the fundamental parts of the document and the reasons behind such political choices. For more historical information, see Riley, Russel L. *Party Government and the Contract with America*, PS: Political Science and Politics, 1995, Vol. 28, 703-707. [www.jstor.org/stable/420521](http://www.jstor.org/stable/420521). Accessed August 15, 2020.

<sup>143</sup> Frame, Randy. *Payback Time?*, Christianity Today, March 6, 1995, 43-44.

<sup>144</sup> Curtis, Carolyn. *Putting Out A Contract*, Christianity Today, July 17, 1995, 54. It’s possible to retrieve the speech Ralph Reed delivered before Congress presenting the *Contract With the American Family* at <https://www.c-span.org/video/?65156-1/contract-american-family>. Accessed August 15, 2020. See also Brownstein, Ronald. *GOP Leaders embrace Christian Coalition Plan*, Los Angeles Time, May 18, 1995. <https://www.latimes.com/archives/la-xpm-1995-05-18-mn-3259-story.html>. Accessed August 15, 2020.

since it did not call for drastic measures against abortion and of homosexual rights<sup>145</sup>. The tension between Religious Right groups, expecting the Republican party to exploit its congressional majority to enact some social conservative legislation, and the party itself being more concerned about economic issues built up during the second half of the decade and peaked in two crucial occasions, the run-up for the 1996 presidential elections and the 1998 mid-term elections. During these electoral seasons, some of the Religious Right groups threatened to abandon the alliance out of frustration, describing the party ‘big tent’ approach as a mean to favor moderates and liberals while exploiting the electoral consensus of conservatives<sup>146</sup>. Moreover, in the aftermath of the disappointing 1998 elections, with the Republican revolution fading away and the party maintaining a slim majority after one of their worst electoral results in decades, conservative Christians ascribed such *debacle* to a growing frustration among their constituency with the apparent Republican hypocrisy on social issues.

Despite the troubles that conservative Christians encountered in reconciling their uncompromising stands on social conservative issues with a more pragmatic approach to politics, by the turn of the decade important changes were already in motion. Spurred maybe by the frustration of not having achieved any significant legislative gain in eight years, or maybe by unhappiness about having lost the previous presidential election even with full control of both Houses, or maybe again by a simple distaste for Clinton and all his administration stood for, Religious Right leaders decided to look at winnability as a decisive factor for the 2000 presidential campaign. Once again it was Ralph Reed, now working as a private political consultant hired by the Bush campaign, to call for the Religious Right to adopt a more pragmatic approach and support George W. Bush given his uncontested lead in the Republican primaries, an argument that was soon embraced by many other local leaders and even by Pat Robertson himself. As a result of the electoral confrontation, Evangelicals now had a leader they mostly respected in the White House adhering to pro-life and pro-family positions, but they also had a Congress with no overwhelming majority thus requiring a certain degree of compromise to be made in order to advance those goals that now seemed much more in reach. It’s during Bush first term that groups previously so eager to have strong stands to be taken for a series of social conservative issues, now demonstrate to have realized the complexity of the political world, with talks about “managing the expectations” and “incremental approach” becoming more present in their political language<sup>147</sup>. While this shift has not meant the complete abandonment of more traditional use of rhetoric and neither giving up on big challenges, it has nonetheless brought a change of strategy that reconciled more traditional means with the more mature understanding that to secure significant victories pragmatism is as important as principles, thus requiring to enter into negotiations for reasonable compromises: taking the famous case of abortion, this has meant pushing the president to appoint pro-life advocates in key juridical and administrative positions, while at the same time settle for reasonable compromise measures to make the practice less accessible.

---

<sup>145</sup> Curtis, Carolyn. *Putting Out a Contract*, 54.

<sup>146</sup> Gardner, Christine J. *Wild Card Election*, Christianity Today, October 26, 1998, 83. A big tent is a party policy “of permitting or encouraging a broad spectrum of views among its members.” [https://www.lexico.com/en/definition/big\\_tent](https://www.lexico.com/en/definition/big_tent). Accessed July 26, 2020.

<sup>147</sup> Stricherz, Mark. *New Congress, New Agenda*, Christianity Today, January 2003, 22.

Now that the two major changes that the Religious Right underwent during the nineties and early two-thousands have been analyzed, some conclusive considerations have to be made in order to understand reasons and motivations behind such important adjustments. First of all, it's clear that the efforts put in the construction of a strong and reliable grassroots base were aimed at improving the political potential and bargain power held by the Religious Right. Since in a democracy the strength of an electoral group largely relies on the sheer number of votes it can rally, augmenting such value and proving the reliability of this electorate on election day largely increases the weight of the same group in relation to the party it rallies for, and to the agenda setting of the same party. Therefore, maintaining and increasing the volume of the grassroots became a valuable effort to spend energy and resources in, and the Christian Coalition growth in numbers is a testament to this commitment. When it was founded in 1989 it counted 25.000 members gathered from the failed Robertson presidential campaign, by 1993 its numbers had rose to 500.000, then just one year it increased trifold to 1,4millions of members and growing, peaking at 2.1millions in 1998<sup>148</sup>. While the electoral weight of Evangelicals through the years will be discussed afterwards, here it is sufficient to anticipate that Evangelicals increasingly became a necessary component of the Republican party consensus base, as their constituency composed around 30/35% of the electorate and voted averagely 70% for the Republicans<sup>149</sup>. Increasing the number of voters rallied by the Religious Right was not the only way in which the construction of a strong grassroots base would have helped Evangelicals gaining a stronger bargain power with the Republican party and in politics in general. The second end of the grassroots strategy was to increase the number of social conservative representatives at all levels of politics, thus gaining a majority in the often mentioned in-party confrontation between social conservatives and economic conservatives. The idea that electing conservative representatives would have resulted in the promulgation of much sought pro-life and pro-family legislation was the cornerstone that led the Moral Majority efforts in the eighties, but while the Moral Majority focused on electing congressional representatives, the Religious Right of the nineties took this idea and expanded it all the way across the political pyramid, aiming at restructuring the same to their favor by reducing the gap between social conservatives and economic conservatives. Indeed, the Religious Right fought some of its early electoral battles to steer the Republican nominations away from moderates towards conservatives: this has been the case especially in the 1994 midterms elections, when social conservatives repeatedly ousted moderate Republicans even in runs for governorship of states like South Carolina and Minnesota, with the latter case marking the first time in the century in which an incumbent Republican governor had been denied the endorsement from his own party<sup>150</sup>. Despite these early successes and the growing strength of the Religious Right grassroots, reshaping the identity of a party was not a task that could have been carried in just one electoral turn but rather a long-term objective, requiring gradual and constant progress to be made in the years. If in the 1996 presidential campaign all the Religious Right could achieve was getting a timid pro-life commitment

---

<sup>148</sup> These numbers have been retrieved from Christianity Today, respectively: December 13, 1993, 66; October 3, 1994, 63; October 26, 1998, 82.

<sup>149</sup> Frame, Randy. *Quick Change Artists*, 50.

<sup>150</sup> Id. *High Stakes for the Religious Right*, 64.

from Republican candidate Bob Dole (born 1923) after some groups threatened to boycott the election, by 2000 it finally had a candidate and then president more open to social conservative concerns and to engage in productive discussion with the Religious Right. This said, despite its best efforts the Religious Right never achieved that full grip on the Republican party that would have permitted the adoption of a strongly committed social conservative agenda, and tensions between different brands of conservatives as well as between the conservative and the more moderate wings of the party eventually resurfaced, causing uneasiness in the relation between the two parts as in the case of the McCain nominee, which will further be analyzed as one of the latest instances in which the in-party tensions arose again and the Religious Right had to reluctantly endorse a candidate they did not recognize as one of their own. Another important consideration has to do with the second change the Religious Right underwent in these years, meaning the adoption of a more pragmatic approach to politics characterized by a broader agenda that kept together economic and social conservative concerns, and by a more prone to compromise attitude, contemplating gradualism instead of all-or-nothing deals. While modalities of such difficult change, its merits and its limits have already been discussed previously, it should be added here that one of the elements that kickstarted such change in the first place and then helped its completion has been a decisive shift in the professional profile of the Religious Right leadership: not only the old guard that had formed in the late seventies was substituted by a new generation of leaders, but these new leaders were insiders of the political world, drafted from already existing organizations or even from the party ranks, thus holding a different know-how more suited to the political landscape. The Christian Coalition provides once more the prime example, as its founder Pat Robertson, televangelist, media entrepreneur and one of the leaders of the Religious Right of the eighties did not assume the role of executive director, leaving the *de facto* leadership of the group to Ralph Reed, an already experienced Republican strategist whose approach was more similar to those of a politician rather than of a preacher<sup>151</sup>. Moreover, when Reed resigned as executive director to inaugurate his private firm for political counselling in 1997, he was replaced by Randy Tate (born 1965), a former Republican congressman who had arrived in Washington with the 1994 Republican revolution, further consolidating the necessity of a leadership well-endowed with political know-how. The necessity to push a professional change in the Religious Right leadership was felt also by some of those organizations that had more vocally opposed the openings made in the nineties by the Coalition, such as Focus on the Family and the Family Research Council. The former appointed ex Secretary of Interior of the Reagan administration Donald Hodel as president and unpaid CEO in 2003, and one year later founded its lobby affiliate arm Family Policy Alliance; the latter replaced its former president Gary Bauer after his failed political campaign as Republican presidential candidate in the 2000 elections, first with Ken Connor, then with Tony Perkins in 2003 (born 1963) who had served as Republican representative of the Louisiana House of Representatives. By confronting these events with the previously described evolution of attitude of such organizations, it's possible to see that the change for a more politically accustomed leadership happened in the moment in which the Religious Right had the possibility of pushing for legislation thanks to

---

<sup>151</sup> Robertson *Regroups*, 35; Knippers, Diane. *The Great Right Hope*, 62-63.

the presence of a sympathetic president in the White House, but also had to carefully measure its attitude not to upset the delicate congressional balance that resulted from the highly divisive 2000 elections. The conjunction of these events pushed these groups to intensify their political efforts, with Focus on the Family establishing a lobbying branch while previously had spent little resources into its political programs, while at the same time adopting a more apt approach, thus requiring a leadership with higher political expertise. Aside from leadership at the highest levels, the Religious Right of the nineties focused on recruiting and mobilizing politically capable citizens for their grassroots initiatives, rather than relying on the network of conservative pastors the Moral Majority had formed<sup>152</sup>, an approach adopted both to improve the lobbying ability and political strength of the movement, both as an answer to those concerns coming from Evangelicals themselves about the danger of mixing church and state, which intensified as the decade went by and the Religious Right grew again.

### 2.3 *Anything Left?*

The alliance between the Evangelical constituency and the Republican party proved to be a solid one, reinvigorated election after election by a demonstration of loyalty that has only increased since the times of the Reagan administration, stabilizing around a solid 70% average in the nineties and early two-thousands. Behind this constituency it is possible to find a constellation of political organization commonly referred to as the Religious Right, able to produce effective mobilization as well as fielding political and legal expert to advance the championed agenda, strongly anchored on the conservative positions previously discussed. The Religious Right embodies the views of a considerable size of the Evangelical world but it does not hold a monopoly on such group and it's possible to find other movements and intellectuals who not only disagree with the methods and sometime policies undertaken by the right, but have organized political groups on the left side of the political spectrum, the so called Religious Left<sup>153</sup>. Just like those on the rights, the groups on the left do not represent a solid and monolithic entity but rather a coalescence of similarly minded organizations sharing ideals and history, led by leaders who despite agreeing with each other on the premises of their activism, have engaged in different manners and degrees the political world. For the decades this dissertation is focused on, the nineties and early two-thousands, three have been the most vocal and influential leaders of the Evangelical left: Jim Wallis (born 1948), founder and editor of the *Sojourners* magazine<sup>154</sup>, Ron Sider

---

<sup>152</sup>Lawton, Kim A. *The New Face(s)*, 44.

<sup>153</sup> The Religious Left is a complex political reality formed by mainline Protestant churches, progressive Catholics and progressive Evangelicals. The Religious left thus encompasses theologically different denominations among which Evangelicals do not form most consistent group. Although the complex nature of the Religious Left does not allow to generalize the group as 'Evangelical', the label has been chosen because of the political connotations it bears, which are at the center of the analysis produced in this dissertation. Therefore, when referring to the Religious Left this dissertation is addressing only and exclusively the Evangelical part of the coalition.

<sup>154</sup> *Sojourners* is a monthly Christian magazine founded in 1971. In 2018, the paper magazine had 60.000 monthly readers, while paper and digital products combined reached 6 million annually. [https://sojo.net/sites/default/files/media\\_kit\\_2018.pdf](https://sojo.net/sites/default/files/media_kit_2018.pdf). Accessed July 26, 2020. In comparison, *Christianity Today*

(born 1939), founder of the organization Evangelicals for Social Action<sup>155</sup>, and Tony Campolo (born 1935), who served as spiritual advisor to president Bill Clinton. Historically, the Evangelical left preceded the right by at least one decade, emerging as many other progressive groups during the sixties by embodying the growing uneasiness with the Vietnam war and with Nixon's corrupt administration<sup>156</sup>. The first comprehensive document organizing the main ideals and principles for progressive Evangelicals was published in 1973, the *Chicago Declaration of Evangelical Social Concerns* drafted as a result of a conference of 50 prominent Evangelical intellectuals, pastors and theologians advocating pacifism, non-violence, racial reconciliation, women rights and care for the unfortunates, encompassing thus discriminated categories and the poor<sup>157</sup>. Ideologically, the Religious Left of the nineties and two-thousands shared many of the core principles of the Religious Right, being those discussed in the beginning of the chapter and revolving around a positive view about the influence of faith in politics, a strong pro-life position that does not contemplate the liceity of abortion, a pro-family agenda that while does not condemn homosexuality as harshly as some of the right leaders, nonetheless does not show unconditioned acceptance and champions the defense of the traditional marriage institution<sup>158</sup>. In spite of all these similarities, which would only increase if theology were to be taken into consideration, the Religious Left has presented some different social concerns and priorities, contributing to the formation of a particular kind of political identity which although minoritarian among Evangelicals, has still maintained a consistent presence through the years, thus preventing the possibility of an eventual confluence within the overwhelming right. The particularity of the Religious Left in relation to the Right emerges when confronting how it intended the two most highly regarded labels of Christian activism at the time, meaning being pro-life and the pro-family. Differently from the direct approach the right undertook, the Religious Left framed these issues by looking at the broader socio-economic picture. For example it confronted the abortion issue by calling pro-choice and pro-life advocates to find a middle ground in proposals to resolve teen pregnancy, increase adoption and change the culture around women and children, while for gay marriage it reaffirmed the religious institution of traditional marriage and family, understanding its breakdown and problems not as ones caused by increasing homosexual rights but by problems that have preceded any talk about gay marriage<sup>159</sup>. The Religious Left has adopted a broader definition of its pro-life and pro-family stands, and while the right broadening of agenda largely consisted in the declination of Christian concerns in conciliatory ways with the economic and financial traits of the Republican party, as in the case of tax-relief being understood as being pro-family, the Left defended what they considered to have been traditional Christian concerns now abandoned by those on the Right, such as care for the poor, for the environment and

---

reaches 4.5million readers monthly by combining paper and digital products. <https://www.Christianitytoday.org/what-we-do/>. Accessed July 26, 2020.

<sup>155</sup>Evangelicals for Social Action was founded in 1973. A story of the group can be found at <https://www.evangelicalsforsocialaction.org/about-esa-2/history/>. Accessed July 26, 2020.

<sup>156</sup> Balmer, Randall. *Evangelicalism in America*, 127.

<sup>157</sup> Ibid.127-128.

<sup>158</sup> For an history of the theological motivations behind the Religious Left, see Collins, Kenneth J. *The Evangelical Moment*, 122-124.

<sup>159</sup>Cromartie, Michael. *One Lord, One Faith, One Voice*, 42.

social justice in general. What stood up the most in the political activism of the Religious Left of the nineties was a strong criticism of the alliance between the Religious Right and the Republican party, often the center of most of the rebukes made by Religious Left leaders, such as Wallis calling to “[...] refuse this Republican agenda of social abandonment of the poor”, or Campolo defining it as a “dangerous liaison of religion with political power”<sup>160</sup>. With the intention of constituting a counterweight to the rise of the Right, many Religious Left organizations and leaders formed in the middle of the decade two new regroupings, being firstly the *Interfaith Alliance*<sup>161</sup> and secondly the *Call to Renewal*. These organizations proved to be largely unsuccessful in rallying a consistent Evangelical and Christian dissent, mainly because the organizations that gave birth to these two regroupings coalesced around a common distaste for the Religious Right rather than around a common agenda, to the point in which not only during one of the first meetings of *Call to Renewal* in February 1996 disagreement arose around key topics such as abortion and homosexuality, but by October of the same year the organization had already abandoned the initial project of developing new ways of political involvement for Christians, opting instead to not participate directly in the electoral confrontation but rather focusing on civic non-partisan initiatives<sup>162</sup>. Aside from the lack of a precise common agenda, another factor prevented the Religious Left from becoming the aspired counterbalance to the Right, being the fact that Religious Left regroupings could not even remotely compete against the colossal Religious Right organizations as far as membership is concerned, since in 1995 the *Interfaith Alliance* challenged with its ten thousand members the then over one million and a half members backed Christian Coalition. The criticism the Left moved against the right, accused of forsaking Christian concerns for the sake of political gains and of dangerously attaching a Christian agenda with a party ideology, has not been accompanied by an over-partisan approach. Just like the Right, the Left maintained that it was a Christian duty and responsibility to be socially and politically engaged, but while the Right sought to cement its alliance with the Republican party, the Left aspired to achieve something maybe similar with the Democratic party, with which progressive Evangelicals had already collaborated at the times of Jimmy Carter<sup>163</sup>. One major factor was although preventing the Left from achieving the same political clout the Right had gained in the decade. Indeed, while the Religious Right electoral support for the Republican party was something the party itself was seeking and could not relinquish without seriously jeopardizing its ability to secure the elections, the Religious Left constituency composed a very small part of the overall electoral base of the Democratic party, and therefore also its bargain potential with the party was weak at best. This explains also the sometime awkward position in which the Religious Left found itself in its relationship with the Democratic party, since it ended up showing support for the Democratic option despite this repeatedly adopting strong pro-choice party platform and sometime even shunning off

---

<sup>160</sup> Frame, Randy. *Quick Change Artists*, 51; Curtis, Carolyn. *Political Partisanship Resisted*, Christianity Today, July 17, 1995, 54.

<sup>161</sup> Founded in 1994, a description of the group can be found at <https://interfaithalliance.org/about-us/our-mission/>. Accessed July 26, 2020.

<sup>162</sup> Olsen, Ted. *Call to Renewal Alliance divided over its own Agenda*, Christianity Today, April 8, 1996, 87; Kauffman, Richard A. *Does Call to Renewal Skirt partisan politics?*, Christianity Today, October 28, 1996, 88.

<sup>163</sup> Balmer, Randall. *Evangelicalism in America*, 127-128.



attempts by pro-life Democrats to steer the party agenda towards a middle ground approach<sup>164</sup>, outcomes that the Religious Left imputed to the Democratic party being “[...] controlled by secular fundamentalists”<sup>165</sup>. Thus, considering that behind the criticism the Left moved to the Right as having tied a Christian agenda to a political ideology it is possible to find a series of repeated effort to achieve a similar political clout but with the Democratic party, it becomes increasingly clear that the activism of the Religious Left of the nineties was motivated more out of fear of being cancelled and muted by a growing Right rather than by a clear set of values to promote and defend. Indeed, not only leaders from the Religious Left criticizing the Right were themselves cultivating deep political relationships, such as Tony Campolo being the spiritual advisor of Clinton, but when the opportunity came for the Left to gain once more a voice in the political process, they eagerly took the chance. In 2008, as part of a broader faith-appealing strategy inaugurated two years earlier, the Democratic party asked some progressive Evangelicals as Campolo and Wallis to contribute in delineating the party platform, an offer the two leaders accepted hoping to push for an abortion-reduction plank, an effort that came with no results since the party followed the pro-choice caucus and defined the practice as a “need”<sup>166</sup>. In an almost ironic twist of faith, the Religious Left leaders who contributed to and supported a pro-choice abortion platform for the Democratic party acted almost as their conservative counterpart had done decades before with Reagan, largely ignoring the shortcomings of their actual political importance thrilled by the attention received, stating that “They [the Democratic party] listened. They took us seriously”<sup>167</sup>. The Religious Left did represent an Evangelical reality anchored on the progressive spectrum, with values and concerns deriving from the experience of its leaders and members as religious Left-leaning activists in the troubled sixties and seventies, but it was nowhere near in matching the Religious Right nor in representation, nor in political strength. In the nineties and early two-thousands, the Religious Left found itself in an increasingly difficult position, pushed from one side by a Religious Right with growing numbers and influence among Evangelicals themselves and from the other side by a party unwilling to compromise on key issues such as abortion thus largely forsaking from the start the support it could have had received from many of the same Evangelicals the Religious Left hoped to be an alternative for. In this situation, without space to construct a reliable consensus base that would have permitted some sort of political bargain power, all the Left could do was to form groups in blatant opposition to the Christian Coalition, not truly intentioned and neither capable to pursue any sort of serious political goal if not affirming their existence in an attempt to maintain some sort of attention hoping that better times would come. When this times eventually came, the Left just like the right took the opportunity to gain some political clout and joined an apparently more open Democratic party, thrilled by a new attention that came without any actual significant relevancy.

---

<sup>164</sup> Frame, Randy. *High Stakes for the Religious Right*, 65.

<sup>165</sup> Stricherz, Mark. *Kerry's Open Mind*, 31.

<sup>166</sup> Pulliam, Sarah. *The party of Faith*, Christianity Today, September 2008, 17; *Can we come to the party?*, Christianity Today, October 2008, 23.

<sup>167</sup> Ivi. While the sentences quoted have been pronounced by Religious Left leaders, it should be noted that the interpretation they received comes from a moderately conservative point of view such as that of Christianity Today.

## *2.4 Considerations on Part I. Chapter 2*

This second chapter has focused on the historical journey of the Religious Right, with particular attention given to the nineties and early two-thousands as the decades in which Evangelical political activism underwent fundamental changes as a result of direct exposure to the world of politics. Aware of the shortcomings of the Reagan administrations in delivering on the high expectations in social matters, some among the Religious Right strategists came to realize that the fundamental difficulties were laying in their own models of political activism and as they looked back and analyzed what had been their previous paradigm for political engagement, the Moral Majority, they acknowledged and maintained its strengths in mobilizing and galvanizing a wide electorate, but they also came to term with its weaknesses and worked to improve what was not working. Thus, especially during the nineties, Religious Right groups were undergoing major changes among which two represented an essential development of Evangelical political activism that both distinguished it from what it had been in the previous decades and shaped its form for the coming future, being the creation of a strong grassroots base and a change politics-making away from triumphalism and all-or-nothing deals towards gradualism and compromises. It has been underlined how both these changes were enacted in order to improve the political influence held by conservative Christian lobbying groups: the creation of a strong grassroots base would have from one side maintained the electoral weight of the Evangelical constituency on a considerable level and from the other side promoted through endorsement and election an higher number of social conservative representatives all through the political pyramid, thus reshaping the composition and agenda priorities of the Republican party towards a more pronounced social conservatism; the adoption of a pragmatic approach to politics characterized by a prone to compromise attitude, a broader agenda combining social and economic conservative concerns and gradualism as a legitimate mean to achieve ambitious goals, would have instead increased the legislative effectiveness of conservative Christians lobbying efforts. While the first of these changes came with a certain easiness as Religious Right groups quickly developed since the beginning of the nineties their own grassroots bases and expanded nationwide with multiple local chapters or affiliates, the second kind of change represented quite a challenge as some among the Religious Right leaders did not consider compromise as a truly viable option and instead maintained for a long time their traditional inflexibility, leading to tensions and clashes amongst Christian conservatives and between them and the Republican party. Nonetheless, it has also been argued that in the early 2000s a conjunction of events finally pushed this difficult change forward, as the presence of a sympathetic administration without a strong majority in the Houses made conservative Christians goals more achievable if pushed with necessary pragmatism and flexibility, while at the same time the substitution of those strong hard-liner leaders with experts well-endowed in political know-how brought on the lobbying scene a different kind of leadership profile.

Finally, this part has also paid attention to the Religious Left both for its importance as an historical phenomenon and especially for the counter-role it wished to assume against the growing Religious Right in the nineties. The critiques the Religious Left made about the right heavily revolved around the strong

connection made between religion and politics, the intermingling of a Christian and a Republican agenda and the lack of attention for a series of traditional Christian concerns in favor of hot-button social and cultural issues. It has been argued that while the Religious Left undeniably could bolster an history of political engagement with values stemming from a progressive Christian understanding of religion and society, the position it came to assume in the nineties was to ascribed more to its dire political situation rather than to a sincere belief in the critiques made, as their political clout began to fade due to both the incredible growth of Religious Right influence among Evangelicals and the uncompromising stand the Democratic party, the political ally of the Left, came to assume on such important matters such as abortion and gay-rights which largely precluded outreaches to most of the deeply religious voters. Indeed, as soon as the tide began to turn and the Democratic party revived its efforts to appeal to religious voters, the Religious Left responded immediately engaging in politics on a not so different level than that of the Right. The relation between the Religious Left and the Democratic party also provides an important confront in order to understand why the changes the Religious Right underwent were so politically important: indeed the Religious Left of the nineties and two-thousands it's a good example of complete or almost complete lack of political influence, as in its relation to the Democratic party it was always subservient to the party agenda and in no way it managed to steer the party away from its strong and decisive pro-choice position, and even when it received the opportunity to contribute to the definition of the party platform, its presence did not result in any significant bottom-line change from the past.

### 3. Elections

Elections<sup>168</sup> are delicate moments in which in-party political negotiations peak, since every support group wishes to steer the party agenda towards favorable positions. The Religious Right is no exception and despite Evangelicals' desire not to be considered a simple interest group, they nonetheless behaved in a similar fashion when trying to secure favorable agendas from their Republican allies by negotiating, pressuring and even threatening to desert the electoral confrontation if the situation required so. Looking at elections becomes thus relevant in order to understand the actual weight the Religious Right held in the relation with its political allies, the means it used to impose its political agenda over the party and the extent of its success once it had become a stable player in the political arena. Moreover, by looking at how the Evangelical constituency has been treated and courted by both Parties it is possible to understand the reasons behind the growing political affiliation of conservative Christians with the Republican party but also the limits of this alliance, which has not resulted in the Religious Right holding a tight grip on the party agenda. In order to effectively analyze elections as a source of information it is important to take into consideration not only the electoral outcomes between 1988 and 2008, but especially the running up to the elections, meaning the establishment of a party platform, the delineation of an agenda and the appointment of candidates, since it is in these moments that political activism acquired meaning, showing potentialities and limits of conservative Christians political power.

Looking at electoral results is a good start to tell Evangelical political history, since it gives an overall view of their political pattern through the years and shows where their allegiance stood, and being politics a matter of numbers, it is not possible to understand the edge Evangelicals held as a political constituency in their relationships with the Republican and Democratic party alike without briefly contextualizing their numerical strength in the American electorate and their voting trends. As stated in the opening prologue, clearly defining who is an Evangelical and therefore how many evangelicals are present in the United States is a task that comes with many limits and produces results subjectable to interpretation, even more when trying to identify what share of the electorate Evangelicals comprise. Despite these limits, polls and statistical analysis have asserted that Evangelicals have comprised around one quarter of the American population and electorate in the decades taken into examination<sup>169</sup>, a presence that has remained stable without strong increases or

---

<sup>168</sup> Before proceeding, a brief disclaimer is necessary. Elections are the result of an intertwined series of issues, spanning from economy to culture. It is therefore not possible to isolate one singular topic as the decisive one to explain the reasons behind an electoral result. The very same profile of the elector is a complex one and difficult to generalize, since the concerns he carries might be defined by his socio-economic status, cultural formation and religious affiliation. Considering the main topic of this dissertation, attention will be placed on social and cultural issues rather than economic ones. Elections will be dealt with through the sources offered by *Christianity Today* and by analysts such as those working for the Pew Research Center, whose polling data have focused on the social, cultural and religious profile of the electors.

<sup>169</sup> For 1988, Kellstedt, Lyman and Green, John and Guth, James and Smidt, Corwin. *Religious Voting Blocs in the 1992 Election: The Year of the Evangelical?*, *Sociology of Religion*, Vol. 55, No. 3, 1994, 307-326. <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/249291433>. Accessed August 12, 2020; for 1996 *Christianity Today*, January 6, 1997, 55; For 2000 and 2004, Pew Research Center publication <https://www.people-press.org/2004/12/06/religion-and-the-presidential-vote/>. Accessed August 12, 2020. Moreover, the Religious Landscape Study produced by the Pew

decreases. The Evangelical vote of the nineties and early two-thousands has also showed a stable trend, maintaining a decisive Republican leaning and reinforcing the alliance forged during the Reagan era, to the point in which Evangelicals substituted mainline Protestants as the most reliable religious voting bloc for the Republican party. As asserted during the chapter about the rise of the Religious Right, the migration of the Evangelical constituency from their traditional Democratic affiliation to a remarkable Republican one happened during the years of the Reagan administration and represented one of the most significant change of party allegiance of the century. Historical developments proved that such a change was not just a result of an infatuation for Reagan, and Evangelicals continued to cast the majority of their votes for Republican presidential candidates in all the elections from 1988 to 2008, peaking in 2004 with 78% of Evangelicals voting president George W. Bush<sup>170</sup>. Furthermore, Evangelicals maintained a high level of commitment to the Republican party even when it produced not wholly liked presidential candidates, as with the John McCain candidacy which despite having been cool received by most of the Religious Right leaders, produced nonetheless notable results as far as Evangelical electoral approval is concerned, with 75% of them casting their preference for him<sup>171</sup>. Notably, Evangelicals remained loyal to their new Republican allegiance also during the difficult times incurred by the party, especially in the rapid downfall of the second Bush administration in autumn 2005 when, following a series of missteps in the conduction of the war in the Middle East and the management of the Katrina disaster, the president's rate of approval fell to 37% among the general public but maintained a 64% level among Evangelicals<sup>172</sup>. Understanding the reasons behind such a strong alliance, whose endurance faced difficult moments of in-party confrontation and disillusionment, requires an analysis that goes beyond the simple electoral results and focuses instead on the relations intercurrent between Evangelicals and the two parties, the opportunities both politicians and evangelicals recognized in a reciprocal collaboration and the strategies adopted to strengthen such an alliance.

### 3.1 *Evangelicals and the Republican Party*

It has been previously shown that Evangelicals represent one of the core electoral bloc for the Republican party, and have since the times of Ronald Reagan consistently casted the overwhelming majority of their votes for Republican candidates. Their electoral history seems to appear as one of deep commitment to the

---

Research Center provides a comprehensive chart of the American religious landscape and the connections between religious and political affiliation. <https://www.pewforum.org/religious-landscape-study/religious-tradition/evangelical-protestant/>. Accessed August 12, 2020.

<sup>170</sup> Gushee, David P. and Justin Phillips. *Moral Formation and the Evangelical Voter: A Report from the Red States*, Journal of the Society of Christian Ethics, Vol. 26, No. 2, 2006, 23-60. [www.jstor.org/stable/23561813](http://www.jstor.org/stable/23561813). Accessed August 10, 2020.

<sup>171</sup> Pulliam, Sarah. *Election Honeymoon*, Christianity Today, December 2008, 15.

<sup>172</sup> Carnes, Tony. *Disappointed but Holding*, Christianity Today, February 2006, 78. For more information on the Bush presidency as a whole see Kelley, Donald R. and Shields, Todd G. *Taking the Measure: The Presidency of George W. Bush*, College Station, Texas A&M University Press, 2013; Wroe, Andrew and Herbert, John. *Assessing the George W. Bush Presidency: A Tale of Two Terms*, Edinburgh, Edinburgh University Press, 2009.

Republican cause, as an alliance that has experienced no critical moments and has been always the same since the early eighties. This assumption holds of course some truths, but also conceals all the struggles that actually happened not so beneath the surface between the Republican party and the Religious Right for decades, struggles that have occurred since the early nineties mainly due to the difficulty of finding an harmony between the party constituencies. When Reagan second presidential term ended, what would have been of the Evangelical-Republican alliance was one of the big questions that dominated the presidential elections of 1988, since Evangelicals were counted among those that the medias referred to as ‘Reagan Democrats’, traditional Democratic voting blocs that had turned Republican mainly because of Reagan’s personal appeal<sup>173</sup>. It became paramount for Republicans to maintain control over the conservative coalition that arose following the tide of the Moral Majority and that had secured a landslide victory just four years earlier, thus the 1988 Republican convention adopted a strong pro-life, pro-family party platform that gave ample space to conservative Christians politicians such as Jack Kemp (1935-2009) and Elizabeth Dole (born 1936) to address a public of delegates comprised by 30% of self-described born-again Christians<sup>174</sup>. On top of that, Republican presidential candidate George H. W. Bush tried his best to appeal to Evangelicals by speaking their own language, releasing interviews in which he referred to the Judeo-Christian American heritage and his view on abortion, where he endorsed the idea of a human life amendment. In the end, Bush won the elections and while he did not achieve the landslide result of his predecessor, he nonetheless gathered roughly 70% of the Evangelical vote<sup>175</sup>. Having proved their loyalty in helping to elect Bush, Evangelicals were now expecting the president to deliver some of the promises he had made, and it was from this point that tensions between Evangelicals and the Republican party started to arise. Of the many flaws and missteps Evangelicals criticized Bush for, two struck so hard that brought them into believing that they have been used only for their votes, firstly his compliance with the idea proposed by Republican National Committee Chairman Lee Atwater (1951-1991) that the Republican party could adopt a big tent strategy comprising both pro-lifers and pro-choicers, secondly his historical invitation of gay-rights groups to the White House to celebrate the anniversary of the signature of the Hate Crime Bill, an opening that Evangelicals perceived to be in highly contrast with his pro-family commitments. Beneath the criticism Evangelicals reserved for Bush’s actions it’s possible to see the emergence of that recurring patterns of tensions and struggles that will characterize the political history of nineties Christian conservatism, which is the aforementioned confrontation between the social conservative and the economic conservative wings of the Republican party, neither of which managed to emerge definitely victorious. The unfolding of this first ‘crisis’ also proved to be the first of a long series of negotiation results within the party, as for the 1992 electoral campaign the Republican party increased its efforts to remedy to the dissatisfaction among conservative Christians by adopting a staunchly pro-life, anti-gay platform with statements coming directly from President

---

<sup>173</sup> Lawton, Kim A. *Democrats Gain Momentum*, Christianity Today, September 2, 1988, 38.

<sup>174</sup> Ead. *Republican or Reganites?*, Christianity Today, September 16, 1988, 39.

<sup>175</sup> Smidt, Corwin & Kellstedt, Paul. *Evangelicals in the Post-Reagan Era: An Analysis of Evangelical Voters in the 1988 Presidential Election*, Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion, Vol. 31, No.3, 1992, 330-38. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/1387123>. Accessed August 10, 2020.

Bush, who personally assured the NAE through a private phone call to its president Don Argue (born 1939)<sup>176</sup>. On top of that, the Republican party also established an “Evangelical desk” to increase the outreach to this fundamental constituency, with a board commission made of former conservative activists from the Christian Broadcasting Network and the Moral Majority. The aftermath of the 1992 election was disastrous for the Republicans, as they were soundly defeated by Democratic candidate Bill Clinton, but came nonetheless with some crucial developments for the years to follow. From one side, moderates and economic conservatives Republicans accused the Religious Right of having alienated part of the moderate vote and therefore precluded any chance of victory thus increasing the already present in-party tensions<sup>177</sup>, from the other side Evangelicals emerged as the leading voting bloc for the Republican party, as 63% of them voted for Bush while their single electoral share exceeded the quarter of all Republican voters. In-party tensions soon arose once again following the 1994 Republican revolution, an event that as previously discussed saw an increase in the number of social conservative Republicans arriving at Capitol Hill, but also the adoption of a party-line for the upcoming legislation known as the above mentioned Contract with America, crafted by Speaker of the United States House of Representatives Newt Gingrich (born 1943), focused on economic conservatism and largely ignoring social conservative issues such as abortion and homosexual rights, an heritage of the Bush *debacle*. While some of the Religious Right leaders took these developments as steps towards the normalization of the in-party relations, other framed these events within the context of a “struggle for the soul of the party” and started to waver at the idea of the party abandoning its strong social conservative planks in favor of a big tent strategy for the upcoming 1996 presidential election<sup>178</sup>. Religious Right leaders started to warn the Republican party about a pro-life plank being a necessary requirement for their support and as the primary season concluded with Bob Dole securing the party nomination, who was perceived as one of those big tent Republicans, tensions peaked to the point in which prominent leaders such as James Dobson and Gary Bauer called for a boycott of the elections if the party allowed a pro-choice opening and did not appoint a pro-life running mate<sup>179</sup>. Tensions were followed by negotiations, and by September the Republican party finally ceded and intensified its efforts to court once again the influential Religious Right, first by appointing a running mate sympathetic to Christian conservatives such as Jack Kemp, second by intensifying social conservative concerns after a campaign mainly focused on economy and finance, with Dole himself pledging if elected to sign the much sought anti-partial abortion bill that Clinton had previously vetoed<sup>180</sup>. Dole eventually lost the 1996 presidential elections, a result that Religious Right leaders largely ascribed to his difficulty in embracing social conservative concerns, as Evangelical still proved to be one of the largest voting bloc for the Republican party that despite casting just a 53% preference for the Republican presidential candidate, nonetheless showed loyalty to the party by securing

---

<sup>176</sup> Lawton, Kim A. *A Republican God?*, 52.

<sup>177</sup> Ead. *Seeking Common Ground*, 41.

<sup>178</sup> Frame, Randy. *Quick Change Artists*, 51.

<sup>179</sup> In the U.S. political and electoral system, the running mate is a candidate chosen for the second of two top position, meaning the vice-presidency. <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/it/dizionario/inglese/running-mate>. Accessed July 27, 2020.

<sup>180</sup> Lawton, Kim A. *Christian Coalition moves ahead*, 85.

once again both Houses of the Congress. Dole demise did not result in an immediate strategy adjustment for the Republican party, which still maintained a majority in Congress largely unchanged from the pre-election one, but did mark a change that would eventually culminate two years later following the poor results of the 1998 midterm elections. At this time Republicans expected to achieve a stunning triumph by capitalizing on the recent Lewinsky scandal and on the impeachment Clinton was enduring, but instead they faced a serious backlash even among loyal Christian conservatives, who deserted the election by a 10 to 20% margin from the previous election and showed just a 54% preference for the party, down 12% points from the 1994 results. As with the Dole *debacle*, religious conservative leaders and Dobson in particular saw in the Republican party reticence to champion social conservative legislation the core reasons for this defeat, and indeed pressure coming from inside of the party forced Newt Gingrich, the key Republican leader advocating for the prevalence of economic issues over social ones, to resign his post as representative. Therefore, the consolidation of Evangelicals as the strongest voting bloc for the Republican party had not gone without its fair share of troubles, and indeed brought much tensions between the constituencies that were already forming the party. Evangelicals who had come to the party as a politically active group faced the prospect of having to share their political position with strong party-affiliated that held different ideological position from their own, while at the same time attempts by economic conservatives to retain full control and to use the Religious Right as a simple electoral bloc did not end up well, as Religious Right leaders demanded results from the Republican party and became more and more vocal as Evangelicals became the strongest Republican voting bloc. These tensions that Evangelicals came to define as a struggle for the soul of the Republican party peaked in the middle of the decade, with the Dole electoral campaign being the last and biggest effort by economic conservative to dominate the alliance but definitely failing, as not only religious leaders leveraged their way through warnings and threats to secure social conservative planks, but also Evangelical voters rebuked the presidential ticket weak pro-life and pro-family position. Finally, with the party unable to capitalize on the opportunity offered by a president under impeachment, pressure from the social conservative wing of the party increased and forced the architect of the previous party strategy to resign and, with him, the reticence Republicans had showed concerning abortion and homosexuality. As seen, the nineties brought many changes in the political evolution not only of the Religious Right itself but also of the Republican party in its relationship with the Evangelical constituency. From this decade, which saw some of the lowest point of the alliance, both Evangelicals and Republicans drew some important conclusions, as Republicans understood that it was not possible to achieve a big tent compromise by sacrificing social issues for economic ones without at the same time incurring in tremendous in-party tensions, while Evangelicals realized they held enough political power to steer the party leanings towards their preferred position but not enough to do it free from harsh confrontation. The beginning of the new century would mark a decisive change in the relations between Evangelicals and Republicans, free from tensions and with Republicans leaders paying attention to social issues and especially to religious values, a much different approach from the big tent strategy that had dominated most of the previous decade Republican experience. This turn happened very suddenly during the electoral season for the 2000 presidential election, as all Republican candidates except McCain rapidly adopted a strong religious



rhetoric and could rely on vast support coming from the Religious Right, something that had lacked in the previous presidential campaign, with major examples being the two frontrunners Elizabeth Dole, who branded herself as a “faith-based conservative” and frequently addressed her listeners as “fellow Christians”, and George W. Bush, who publicly proclaimed his acceptance of Christ as Lord and Savior<sup>181</sup>. Republican candidates went also a step further to captivate the Evangelical audience and refined what among Evangelicals is known as ‘testimony’<sup>182</sup>, a core part of the Evangelical personal experience and theology that consist in the narration of how a person endured a period of profound crisis, repented and came to accept Jesus as Lord and Savior. Among candidates, Bush provided the best story of personal conversion describing how he had overcome alcoholism thanks to Bible studying and a fortunate encounter with Graham, and how he felt that God was calling him to run for president<sup>183</sup>. This faith based appeal, backed by the openings Bush had made about his decisive support for pro-life and pro-family initiatives, granted him a large base on consensus among Evangelicals, who in one of the most divisive elections of the history of the United States casted 68% of their votes for the Republican candidate<sup>184</sup>, with white Evangelicals being his strongest constituency up to almost one third of his electorate<sup>185</sup>. As Bush took office in January 2001, a new season for the relations between Evangelicals and Republicans opened, free from the tensions of the previous decade and instead marked by a stronger willingness to cooperate from both sides. It has been noted in the previous part that with a Republican president in office and both Houses characterized by a thin Republican majority, Religious Right groups pondered both their rhetoric and means to be more effective in reaching the long sought social conservative goals they had long aspired to. From their side, Republicans also adopted an approach more open to Evangelicals and Bush personal religiosity, coupled with his early commitments to some conservative initiatives, played a major role in guaranteeing to conservative Christian leaders that he was a different kind of politician and president, one they could actually rely on as one of their own, sincere in his faith and not willing to forsake social issues for economic ones. Indeed, as Bush took office he earned praises from pro-life pundits by reversing a Clinton era policy that provided federal funds for abortion counselling overseas, by appointing in the fall of 2002 pro-life medic David Hager (born 1946) as a member of the Advisory Committee for Reproductive Health Drugs of the Food and Drug Administration<sup>186</sup>, and by pledging to sign the Partial-Abortion Ban Act that Clinton had vetoed several times if it managed to find a majority in Congress, which

---

<sup>181</sup> Carnes, Tony. *Republican Candidates Court Conservative Early, Often*, Christianity Today, April 5, 1999, 16-17.

<sup>182</sup> Johnson, Emily S. *This is Our Message*, Oxford/New York, Oxford University press, 2019. The author provides notable example of testimonies through the analysis of female leaders of the Religious Right, underlining how all testimonies share common traits which render them a distinctive and identifiable genre among the Evangelical subculture narratives.

<sup>183</sup> Carnes, Tony. *A Presidential Hopeful Progress*, 64.

<sup>184</sup> <https://www.pewresearch.org/politics/2004/12/06/religion-and-the-presidential-vote/>. Accessed August 12, 2020.

<sup>185</sup> Blunt, Sheryl H. *Partisanship in the Pews*, Christianity Today, April 2, 2001, 29.

<sup>186</sup> The FDA is a federal agency whose task is to promote public health through control and analysis mainly of food and medicines, but also a wide variety of other products which might pose a chemical danger. <https://www.fda.gov/>. Accessed July 27, 2020.

happened in the fall of 2003<sup>187</sup>. As 9/11 hit the United States to its core, Evangelicals as well as the majority of Americans rallied around the president and were thrilled by his fusion of personal piety and civic responsibility both deeply rooted in the Christian faith, to the point in which Evangelicals began to look up to him as both a strong national and spiritual leader, not afraid of publicly voicing his faith-rooted morality and often described as a man deeply concerned by moral righteousness<sup>188</sup>. The relation between Evangelicals and Bush solidified as his presidency moved closer to the 2004 national elections, during which the Republican party and Bush staff in particular decided to apply a strategy similar to the one that four years before had secured his margin of victory. Once again, strong faith and God talking remained prominent traits of the Republican rhetoric, as when he addressed foreign policy concerns by framing future projects under the Christian concept of ‘brotherly love’, while from a domestic policy standpoint the president, who had already proven his strong pro-life stance, increased his appeal among pro-family advocates by vowing to sign an amendment codifying marriage as an heterosexual union, all in an effort to mobilize the highest number possible of conservative Christians<sup>189</sup>. It came thus not as a surprise that between 75 to 78 % of white Evangelicals voted Republican, the highest percentage since the 1984 Reagan landslide victory<sup>190</sup> and the highest rate of support Bush would ever receive from his most loyal constituency. Expectation for the upcoming second Bush term were incredibly high among Evangelical leaders, with spokesmen from both the Southern Baptist and the NAE envisioning a period of incredible opportunities to push forward value legislation. Eventually though, discontent would start to emerge not because of a crack in the relation between Evangelicals and the Republican party, as had happened in the nineties, but rather following the general downward spiral of Bush second term, caused mainly by firstly the increased military presence in the Middle East and the high number of American casualties the conflict had resulted in, and secondly by the mismanagements and slow responses to the Katrina hurricane disaster. By the mid-term elections of 2006 the political situation of the United States was going through a major change once again, as from one side Bush rate of approval was plummeting even among conservative Christians, and from the other side for the first time in decades the Democratic party adopted a strategy to court Evangelicals by allowing pro-life and pro-family Democrats to run for high offices in key races, resulting in the Democratic takeover of Congress. The electoral confrontation did not prove that the Religious Right was finished and neither that Evangelicals had abandoned the Republican party, as 70% of them still remained committed to the Republican ticket on a national level, but rather than on a local level shifting alliances were possible and that Evangelicals unsatisfied with Bush or with the tones of the most conservative wings of the Religious Right, were willing to vote for a Democratic candidate holding strong faith values, as happened in the case of Ohio, Missouri and Pennsylvania<sup>191</sup>. The

---

<sup>187</sup> The Partial Abortion Ban act was signed into law by President George W. Bush on November 3, 2003 as Pub. L. 108-105.

<sup>188</sup> Carnes, Tony. *Bush's Defining Moment*, 38-42.

<sup>189</sup> Carnes, Tony. *Wooing the Faithful*, 35.

<sup>190</sup> For the data, see Christianity Today January 2005, 26; <https://www.people-press.org/2004/12/06/religion-and-the-presidential-vote/>. Accessed August 12, 2020.

<sup>191</sup> Blunt, Sherley H. *Spoils of Victory*, 54-55.

unhappy ending of the Bush presidency obscures the important changes it actually brought for the relation between Evangelicals and Republicans, especially when compared with the events that had unfolded in the nineties. Bush's efforts to bring closer Evangelicals and the Republican party took part in a favorable moment in which many developments were converging together: the de-escalation of the in-party tensions, a necessary condition to reinvigorate the alliance, which followed the exit of scene of Newt Gingrich and his side of the Republican party, so focused on economic concerns to sacrifice social ones thus prompting the aggressive reaction of the Religious Right; the American public's need for a leader with solid moral principles, after the shame the Lewinsky scandal had brought onto the presidential office prompted candidates from all sides of the 2000 electoral season to adopt a strong religious rhetoric, which largely facilitated a rapprochement between Republicans and Evangelicals since the latter have always been sensible to candidates showing faith values<sup>192</sup>; the personal experience and religiosity of Bush which made him an ideal candidate for Evangelicals, who considered him as one of their own. All these events concurred to Bush election and, once president, he immediately delivered some – although limited – important pro-life results that proved the new Republican commitment to its Evangelical allies, who in the meanwhile were undergoing that profound transformation previously discussed. From this point forward, Bush emphasis on faith being the major driven behind his politics only increased the admiration Evangelical leaders were feeling for him, and thus the support they casted for the Republican party. Thus, after a period of harsh in-party confrontation had caused the Evangelical-Republican alliance to touch some of its lowest point, with the Republican party having its strongest voting bloc casting just little more than half of its electoral support for the Republican cause, the Bush presidency managed not only to reinvigorate the alliance to its high post-Reagan level, but to secure strong Evangelical support even in difficult periods, as Evangelicals remained the only group showing remarkable loyalty for an administration falling out of favor among the American public, and would later support with overwhelming majority a candidate they did not particularly like as John McCain, something they were not eager to do just little more than a decade earlier with Bob Dole.

The enthusiasm and high expectations Evangelicals had shown through the Bush era cooled down as the second presidential term came to an end, with the presidency rate of approval soaking down more than ever. As Bush exited the political scene, it appeared that the calculated attention and open attitude the Republican party had shown towards Christian conservatives was going to accompany him, as the party primaries saw a rise to prominence of several candidates profoundly different from the model Bush had represented. At the beginning of the primary season, many Evangelicals favored the former mayor of New York Rudolph Giuliani (born 1944), a strange choice for a candidate since he held liberal views on abortion and had a rocky personal history, having been married three times. Interestingly enough, while Giuliani's statement of candidacy earned him support from Evangelical ranks and people, Evangelical leaders showed

---

<sup>192</sup> Conkle, Daniel O. *Religion, Politics, and the 2000 Presidential Election: A Selective Survey and Tentative Appraisal*, Indiana Law Journal, Vol. 77, No. 2, 2002, 247. <http://www.repository.law.indiana.edu/ilj/vol77/iss2/3>. Accessed August 3, 2020; Pew Research Center publication <https://www.pewresearch.org/politics/1999/11/11/section-5-the-clinton-legacy-and-the-next-president/#presidential-qualities>. Accessed August 3,2020.

reservations on him due to his liberal views on abortion and gay civil unions, with prominent voices being raised against him such as Land (SBC), Perkins (Family Research Council) and Falwell<sup>193</sup>. This represented the earliest example of a common character of the 2008 elections, being the presence for the first time of a remarkable difference in the political attitude of Evangelical leaders and the broader Evangelical constituency, something political observers were at the time ascribing to Evangelicals being now apparently more prone to pay attention to a broader agenda encompassing national security, economy and environmental concerns. Giuliani's appeal among Evangelicals was not the only unusual characteristic of the upcoming electoral confrontation, as since the opening of the primary season Democrats and Republicans almost switched their approach about faith-talking: while Democratic candidates pursued the faith driven strategy that had given them the winning edge on many of the 2006 electoral races, with Barack Obama (born 1961) and Hillary Clinton (born 1947) publicly talking about their faith, Republican frontrunner candidates Giuliani and McCain either downplayed the role of faith in their life, or simply eschewed the issue altogether. When McCain secured the presidential nomination, Evangelicals welcomed him with coldness, showing for the first time in almost a decade of enthusiasm for Republican tickets a profound undecidedness regarding their vote preference, with an important conservative leader such as Dobson even declaring that "[...] I will simply not cast a ballot for president for the first time in my life"<sup>194</sup>. The mutual animosities between McCain and Evangelicals, especially Evangelical leaders of the Religious Right, were well known and deeply rooted in those turbulent in-party tensions that had unfolded one decade earlier, as McCain was not only part of that wing of the party unsatisfied with the presence and actions of the early Religious Right, but also one of those Republicans who attempted to push a more open party stance on abortion for the 1996 national election, an attempt that as seen failed following the serious boycott threats coming from influential conservative Christian leaders. The lowest point of his relations with the Religious Right came during his first attempt to capture the presidential nomination for the 2000 presidential campaign, as he not only failed to gather support among conservative Christians due to his secular style and reluctance to talk about his faith beliefs, but was also victim of a defamatory campaign he largely believed having been crafted by the Religious Right, which he vehemently attacked describing it as an "evil influence"<sup>195</sup>. McCain was thus the less likely Republican candidate who could have possibly galvanized conservative Christians, but nonetheless he understood that to win the Republican primary and eventually the presidential race he needed support from the party's most loyal voting bloc and he started to be more open about his faith, to frequently attend service to a Baptist church and to talk the Evangelical rhetoric, calling America a "Christian Nation" and stating his belief that life begins at conception<sup>196</sup>, efforts that did not produce the expected results as Evangelicals remained largely unconvinced about him even when showing support, with Land declaring that "[McCain] is not the first choice, not the second choice, not even the third choice of many evangelicals"<sup>197</sup>. Thus, in a turn of events largely reminiscent of the 1996 electoral campaign,

---

<sup>193</sup> Blunt, Sheryl H. *The Giuliani Choice*. Christianity Today, June 2007, 20.

<sup>194</sup> Pulliam Sarah. *Not Easy to Command*, Christianity Today, March 2008, 19

<sup>195</sup> Carnes, Tony. *Talking the Walk*, Christianity Today, October 2008, 34.

<sup>196</sup> *Ibid*, 35.

<sup>197</sup> *Ibid*, 36.

the Republican party ultimately resorted to nominate as running mate the then governor of Alaska Sarah Palin (born 1964), who although young and inexperienced for the role she was called for nevertheless had strong connections with the Religious Right and had consistently voiced social conservative concerns through her political career<sup>198</sup>. The outcome of the 2008 presidential race presented an unexpected and interesting development of the relation between Evangelicals and the Republican party: while the Republican ticket failed in winning the presidential confrontation, the much anticipated Democratic inroad among conservative Evangelicals did not happen and the constituency remained deeply loyal to its traditional political ally, with white Evangelicals casting 73% of their votes for McCain<sup>199</sup>. The fact that Evangelicals maintained a high commitment to the Republican party and that their vote resembled that of four years before it's not a nuance considering the ill-fated traits of the McCain electoral strategy, as not only the relation between him and the Religious Right was already largely strained, but the Republican candidate did little to no effort in reaching out to Evangelicals if compared both to his predecessor Bush and especially to his opponent Obama, who repeatedly met or at least contacted Evangelicals from across the political spectrum to discuss matters of common concern together<sup>200</sup>. The 2008 presidential election largely mirrored from the Republican side the 1996 electoral confrontation, as in both cases the candidates had been part of that moderately pro-life Republican wing open to compromise with pro-choicers in a big tent strategy, in both cases the Religious Right showed its malcontent with the Republican choice and in both cases the compromise solution adopted by the party had been to appoint as running mate a candidate well regarded among conservative Christian circles. The differences, more than the similarities, between the two races represent what is truly indicative of the changes that the Religious Right and the Republican party had undergone in these decades: while in 1996 a compromise on the strong pro-life stand of the party was a real possibility championed by a certain wing of the Republican party, in 2008 McCain paid attention to proclaim his firm belief in life beginning at conception and to assure his commitment to the appointment of pro-life judges; again, while in 1996 the discontent of Religious Right leaders exploded in the threat of a possible boycott of the elections, the 2008 discontent appeared more as wide dissatisfaction with the candidate than with the party, and no threat of boycotting the elections ever came; finally, while the 1996 electoral race ended with evangelical support for the Republican party at just 53%, the 2008 campaign showed once again the unremitted commitment to the Republican ticket by the overwhelming majority of born-again Christians. From the differences between the two elections and by taking into consideration the events that unfolded in the decade that separated them it is possible to draw some important considerations about the relation between Evangelicals and the Republican party. The absence of tensions following McCain ascendance and at the same time his rush to secure his strong pro-life commitments can be largely interpreted as a result of the steady transition of Evangelicals into becoming the biggest, most reliable and therefore indispensable constituency of the Republican party, a position of power that precluded any

---

<sup>198</sup> Golberg, Michelle. *Palin and the Christian Right*, The Nation, September 24, 2008. <https://www.thenation.com/article/archive/palin-and-christian-right/>. Accessed August 13, 2020.

<sup>199</sup> Pew Research Center publication, *How The Faithful Voted*, <https://www.pewforum.org/2008/11/05/how-the-faithful-voted/>. Accessed August 10, 2020.

<sup>200</sup> Kennedy, John W. *Preach and Reach*, Christianity Today, October 2008, 28.

serious possible return of *big tents* strategies even when the party produced as its presidential candidate one of those politicians who had previously advocated conciliatory approaches towards pro-choicers. At the same time, the fact that a candidate with no connections with the Religious Right managed to win the primaries and to run for president demonstrated that the grip conservative Christian held on the Republican party was not absolute, but neither was it negligible as it became necessary to place a strong conservative running mate to balance the various party interests and to galvanize a constituency to this point largely unresponsive. Finally, the commitment Evangelicals showed to the Republican party went beyond the presidential candidate and once again reached overwhelming levels of support comparable to those of the 2004 campaign, thus demonstrating that the efforts the Bush era had put in solidifying the Evangelical-Republican alliance had paid back, since now Evangelicals were ready to assure their strong support despite the absence of strongly liked candidates, something that had instead not been possible in 1996 when even after Dole's pro-life commitments Evangelicals remained unconvinced and uncommitted.

Evangelicals started their political journey in the Republican party as one among the many constituencies of the party formation. As Evangelicals became aware of the shortcomings of the Reagan administrations and the Religious Right reorganized in the early nineties, its efforts to become more influential necessarily collided with the other groups that were already dominating the party, culminating in the strong tensions that characterized much of the decade. In this period, the Religious Right managed to leverage its way through sheer electoral pressure, and to secure in the midst of a probable *big tent* turn the endurance of a strong pro-life, pro-family party leaning, but it had to resort to drastic methods to stem the tide of compromise such as threatening a possible boycott. Meanwhile, changes were undergoing with Republican moderates being repeatedly ousted by social conservatives as Evangelicals became the major Republican voting bloc. With the turn of the century, a convergence of events made a radical change in the Republican approach to Evangelicals possible, as from one side many of those old Republicans who had opposed much of the Religious Right approach in the previous decade had abandoned the party, and from the other the American public became more receptive to moral and faith talks due to the ravaging Lewinsky scandal. George W. Bush embodied this change, as his personal experience made him an ideal candidate for Evangelicals who was sincere in his faith. Bush understood both the possibility of cementing an alliance that had seen better days and the electoral potential that Evangelical Christians were holding, thus carefully reached out to conservative Christians and paid particular attention in making faith rather than agenda the distinctive trait of his political personality, while at the same time delivering some of the results pro-lifers had been waiting for years. Bush political approach did not change much between his two terms, but as he quietly exited the political scene with a low rate of approval among the American public, he also brought his personal style away with him as the next electoral season saw a Republican party largely uncommitted to faith talking. This change in rhetoric and style might have been an attempt by Republicans to put some distance between the party and its previous leader, or it might have simply been due to Republican candidate McCain not being used to or even accustomed to faith talking, as Evangelicals had already noted eight years before. Nevertheless, what matters it's that a largely unliked leader with weak if not hostile ties to the Religious Right managed to capture almost the same share

of the Evangelical vote of his faith driven predecessor, a result that testify the solidity that the Republican-Evangelical alliance reached thanks to changes happening in both of the political allies.

### 3.2 *Evangelicals and the Democratic Party*

As seen in the opening of this election-focused part, Evangelicals have begun their movement away from their traditional Democratic-leaning preference following the tide of the Reagan presidency, and later they consolidated their Republican position to the point in which they became the party's most conspicuous and loyal electoral constituency, providing many times the decisive edge to some important political victories. It has also been shown how in the immediate aftermath of the Reagan-era Evangelicals were counted among those that the medias referred to as Reagan Democrats, expected by political pundits and by the Democratic party itself to return back to their more usual political alliance. In order understand why Evangelicals instead chose not to come back but rather to pursue their newly found path, with all the difficulties that it immediately brought, it's necessary to pay the due attention to the relation between them and the Democratic party in these years. This will be the focus of the following paragraph which will complement the previous one in order to provide a complete overview of the evangelical political experience in the decades considered. As the religious left and its connections with the Democratic party have already been discussed, this paragraph will rather indulge in the relations between conservative Christians and the Democratic party, the contentious points, the possible overtures and the decisive mutual refusals that have come to characterize much of the decade examined and have certainly concurred in shaping the political path of Evangelicals. Indeed, if Evangelicals did not abandon their position as Republican allies even in the midst of the turbulent nineties, it was also due to the kind of agenda and political attitude the Democratic party had adopted, which made definitely impossible for conservative Christians to even consider regaining a place at the Democratic table.

As Reagan stepped out of office, political pundits were wondering about what path conservative Christians would take, and as Republicans increased their efforts to maintain the coalition that had rewarded them with a landslide victory four years prior, Democrats tried to win back those Regan Democrats that had traditionally been their allies. The strategy of the Democratic party appeal to Evangelicals relied on showing that the party was still espousing those religious and traditional values that Evangelicals much cared about, thus in the running up of the 1988 presidential election the party reduced exposure time and influence of those interest groups that could have hindered a possible reconciliation with religious constituencies, such as vocal feminists, gay right activists and strong pro-choicers, going as far to expunge from the platform language the words "abortion" and "gay-rights" adopting instead vague turns of phrase such as "reproductive choice" or "sexual orientation"<sup>201</sup>. Despite these cares, the Democratic party had become identified through the seventies and eighties with progressive policies and groups, championing abortion and gay-rights and supported by

---

<sup>201</sup> *Democrats Gain Momentum*. 38.

feminist organizations as well as the influential Planned Parenthood<sup>202</sup>, thus it could have not been possible to take a sharp social conservative turn or to deny its support to progressive causes without losing much of its political base. This fact largely precluded any successful outcome of the Democratic strategy to appear lenient towards Christians concerns, something that did not go unnoticed to conservative groups and leaders who either called the Dukakis-Bentsen ticket out as being strongly pro-choice, or simply faulted the party with being unwilling to actually draw compromises on the abortion issue. In the end, the Democratic party failed to recapture the Evangelical vote which went overwhelmingly to the Republican party. Still, it should be noted that the Democratic strategy was since the beginning not aimed at reclaiming conservative Evangelicals but rather the more moderate fringes of Christian voters who could have been pushed away from the party by the strong presence and influence of feminists and pro-choicers in the previous platform, and indeed conservative groups were denied the possibility to give oral testimonies during the party convention<sup>203</sup>. In the aftermath of the 1988 presidential election it was clear that the majority of Evangelicals were not Reagan Democrats but rather Republican supporters, intentioned to increase their political influence, thus the Democratic party ceased its attempts to reclaim this lost constituency and instead focused on reinforcing its more progressive caucuses. This became clear during the 1992 presidential election, as almost in a similar fashion to what was happening in the Republican party also the Democratic party witnessed an internal confrontation between pro-lifers and pro-choicers, but while in the Republican camp social conservatives secured a strong anti-abortion party stance, in the Democratic camp it was pro-choicers who emerged victorious from the confrontation and pro-lifers were either muted or had to change their stance on abortion to advance in the party ranks, something that the soon to be presidential candidate Bill Clinton did, as he was confronted by abortion right advocates who questioned his political record since he had supported restriction on the practice during his time as governor of Arkansas<sup>204</sup>. This shift was completed by the time the 1992 platform was presented, as this strongly embraced the pro-choice cause with pledges to uphold *Roe v. Wade* while pro-life Democrats<sup>205</sup> were denied the chance to voice their opposition to the strong stand taken by the party, a decisive turn in a progressive direction that marked much of the coming Democratic political history<sup>206</sup>. Having settled the abortion issue on strong pro-choice grounds did not mean that the Democratic party abandoned any attempt to appeal to religious voters, and indeed religious values and rhetoric were amply used during the 1992 electoral campaign to voice and accompany concerns for a variety of issues different from those traditionally championed by the right, such as the environment, care for the poor and the unfortunates, racial reconciliation. Indeed, the same Democratic ticket Clinton-Gore represented for some an attempt to reach out once again to Christians, as both of them were devout Southern Baptist who frequently cited the Scriptures during their speeches, demonstrating

---

<sup>202</sup> Planned Parenthood is an important non-profit organization that provides reproductive healthcare in the U.S. and worldwide, from sexual education to abortion. <https://www.plannedparenthood.org/>. Accessed July 28, 2020.

<sup>203</sup> Lawton, Kim A. *Religious Groups Push Platform Agenda*, Christianity Today, July 15, 1988, 41-42.

<sup>204</sup> Ead. *Is Pro-life Democrat a Contradiction in terms?*, Christianity Today, March 9, 1992, 54.

<sup>205</sup> At the time, pro-life democrats were 80 out of the 268 presents in Congress. In Ivi.

<sup>206</sup> Lawton, Kim A. *Estranged Bedfellows*, Christianity Today, August 17, 1992, 41.



that Republicans were not holding a monopoly on faith<sup>207</sup>. In the aftermath of election day it was clear that while a small proportion of more moderate Evangelical had voted Democratic attracted by some Democratic policies or by Clinton's frequent use of religious imagery and devout faith, the majority of Evangelicals firmly remained committed to their Republican alliance and had now to mobilize not in support, but in opposition to a presidency they feared would bring some of the most liberal social policies of American history, as news began to circulate that Clinton would have lifted all abortion restriction of the Regan-Bush era and expanded homosexual rights in his first 100 days of presidency<sup>208</sup>.

The Clinton presidency brought a sharp development in the relations between conservative Evangelicals and the Democratic party, which at the time mainly meant between a social conservative religious constituency and an overall liberal president. As seen, following the unsuccessful compromising strategy of 1988 the Democratic party took a strong and unapologetically pro-choice stand coupled with wide support for liberal policies as far as gay-rights are concerned, events that could only strain any possible relation with conservative Evangelicals. Clinton himself, his presidency but also his persona emphasized this difference even more, to the point in which by the end of his second term he came to represent all the Religious Right could possibly stand against. The most puzzling aspects about Clinton in his relation with Evangelicals were not simply his policies and the political values he stood for, but rather that this values were not coming from a secular atheist but from a devout Baptist, who showed remarkable knowledge of the Bible and expressed a sincere Christian faith. In his first term Clinton gave the Religious Right an adversary to galvanize against as he revoked most of the measures to limit abortion set up by the Reagan and Bush administrations<sup>209</sup>, pledged to expand gay-rights and appointed social liberals in key administrative positions, but he also sought to reach out the Evangelical community and met with mainly the more moderate exponents of this religious groups in private breakfasts held in the White House, encounters in which he impressed his Evangelical guests who described him as a deeply religious and spiritual man, with even conservative pastor and former member of the Moral Majority Ed Dobson describing him as "more spiritual than any President we've had in recent years"<sup>210</sup>. Clinton went also as far as enacting some reforms that received some degree of support from Christian conservatives, such as the Religious Freedom Restoration Act of 1993<sup>211</sup> which sought to protect the autonomy of religious organizations and practices from state interference, the Defense of Marriage Act of 1996<sup>212</sup> which codified for federal purposes marriage as the union of a man and a woman, and a comprehensive welfare reform in 1996 that largely reflected the Republican Contract with America but also Clinton previously expressed emphasis on personal responsibility and contained the Charitable Choice option, meaning the opportunity for religious organization to accede to federal funds for social and non-sectarian services, a project

---

<sup>207</sup> Noll, Mark A. *The Politician's Bible*, Christianity Today, October 26, 1992, 16-17.

<sup>208</sup> Lawton, Kim A. *Seeking Common Ground*, 41.

<sup>209</sup> Tumuly, Karen & Cimon, Marlene. *Clinton Revokes Abortion Curbs*, Los Angeles Times, January 23, 1993. <https://www.latimes.com/archives/la-xpm-1993-01-23-mn-1587-story.html>. Accessed on August 10, 2020

<sup>210</sup> Yancey, Phillip. *The Riddle of Bill Clinton's Faith*, 27.

<sup>211</sup> Signed into law on November 16, 1993, as Pub. L. No. 103-141.

<sup>212</sup> Signed into law on September 12, 1996, as Pub. L. No. 104-199.

whose expansion became one of the cornerstones of George W. Bush presidential terms. It should be still noted that especially the latter two reforms were the result of the Republican takeover of Congress, with the Defense of Marriage Act being strongly pushed by conservative Republicans and signed reluctantly by the president, while on the welfare reform Republican had more of a strong influence on an already undergoing process. Despite these actions apparently in line with some of the conservative Christian concerns, the Clinton presidency received harsh criticism from the Religious Right especially for its abortion policies and one particular issue became dominant in the political discourse of the mid-nineties, the ban of the much controversial practice of partial abortion and as a bill to outlaw the procedure passed with support from both Houses of the Congress in 1995 and 1997, both times the legislative procedure ended with the presidential veto with Clinton arguing that the proposed bills did not guarantee the necessary care for the woman's health<sup>213</sup>, a position that enraged moderate pro-choicers and infuriated conservative pro-lifers, who claimed that by vetoing the bill the president was endorsing infanticide, thus providing even more arguments to social conservatives to solidify their Republican alliance<sup>214</sup>. Indeed, as the 1996 national election came closer and Evangelicals had to deal with a Republican presidential candidate they largely disliked, opposition to Clinton became the strong galvanizer behind conservative Christians activism, with polls showing that the majority among them disapproved the president while leaders such as Falwell said about him that "There is nothing about Bill Clinton to respect"<sup>215</sup>. Nevertheless, the incumbent president secured a second term with a wide victory margin carried especially by the good state of the economy, but did not make inroads among conservative Christians who unhappy with the president social policies continued their steady transition towards the Republican party. The major events of the years to come in the relation between Clinton and conservative Christians was undoubtedly the Lewinsky scandal, something that hit Christians not only for the sexual nature of the extra-marital affair but especially for the perjury committed by the president, who lied under oath to the Congress. The unfolding impeachment procedure and the missed apology by Clinton served as the final confirmation for the image many conservative Christians had already painted of him, that of a man whose faith commitment came always in second place behind political opportunism. By the end of his presidency, Bill Clinton had set a difficult precedent<sup>216</sup> for the relation between Evangelicals and Democrats and more than his scandals it was the ambivalence of liberal policies and faith commitments that infuriated and confused conservative Christians, making them increasingly diffident towards future openings and use of religious values from Democratic candidates, actions considered at best insincere and at worst blatantly manipulative. As previously discussed, following the inglorious end of the Clinton presidency the 2000 elections were marked by the strong use of faith-talking not only from Republicans, but also from Democrats eager to shake off the stigma the Lewinsky scandal had brought upon the party. But while Bush's faith commitments and appeals were welcomed with thrilled enthusiasm by Evangelicals, the same remained diffident about faith-talking coming from Democratic

---

<sup>213</sup> Morgan, Timothy C. *SBC targets Clinton, Disney, Jews*, Christianity Today, July 15, 1996, 66.

<sup>214</sup> Cromartie, Michael. *One Lord, One Faith, One Voice?*, 42.

<sup>215</sup> Kennedy, John W. *Candidates Court Family Values Vote*, 78.

<sup>216</sup> Still in 2004 Clinton was used by Evangelicals as the bad example of the politician who uses his religious knowledge and spirituality just to manipulate. In *A Question of Faith*, 28.

candidate Al Gore (born 1948) and even though Evangelical pundits did not claim that Gore's personal faith was insincere, they remained nonetheless wary about how faith beliefs were actually connected to policy proposals and largely understood his faith-rhetoric as being deployed as an electoral strategy. This diffidence emerged once more and in stronger tones during the 2004 national elections, and as the Democratic primary seasons opened and the party tried to reconnect with potential Evangelical voters by showing shared faith-based values or championing a broader agenda of Christian concerns, these efforts encountered the cool reaction of Evangelicals, with Cizik describing Democrats as being "generally in a fog" when relating to Evangelicals, bearers of a spirituality described as "contrived"<sup>217</sup>. Doubts about the sincerity behind Democratic outreaches became even more pronounced when John Kerry secured the party presidential nomination: not only Kerry had declared that he didn't make decision in public life based on religious belief, but most importantly presented Evangelicals with contradicting records on the relation between his faith beliefs and policies, stating that he believed in life beginning at conception but supported nonetheless abortion as a public policy thus receiving the endorsement of important pro-choice groups, or that he opposed gay marriage but would not concede a constitutional amendment defining marriage as an heterosexual union. Such statements led even Evangelical Democrats to wonder about the sincerity of Kerry's faith words, concluding that rather than a devout Catholic he would better fit the profile of the secularist professing an inclusive theology<sup>218</sup>.

The 2004 elections saw Evangelicals more aligned than ever with the Republican party, casting more than three quarters of their votes for the Republican ticket, endorsing a candidate who they perceived to be kin to their beliefs and values against one that instead was described as dubious, appealing to faith values only for electoral gains. Nonetheless, the efforts from the Democratic party to reach out more religious constituencies had yet to end, taking instead a diverse turn as the 2006 mid-term elections approached. This electoral confrontation saw a change of attitude and strategy from the Democratic party that for some extent overturned what had become a steady political position since the time of Bill Clinton, as if previously Democrats with a social conservative leaning were repeatedly muted in favor of those holding more liberal views, now they were receiving endorsements to run in key electoral races. Exploiting a favorable conjunction that saw the country being more and more dissatisfied with mismanagement from the Bush administration and the ongoing war efforts in the Middle East, and the propension among more moderate Evangelicals to move beyond single issues for broader agendas, the Democratic party dramatically changed its strategy and sought to reconnect with religious voters by endorsing in conservative electoral district candidates from the conservative wing of the party. Almost symbolically, this change of attitude was embodied by the endorsement and then victory of Bob Casey Jr. (born 1960) in the Pennsylvania Senate race, as he was not only a conservative Democrat with pro-life leanings but the son of Bob Casey Sr. (1932-2000), the former Democratic governor who was famously denied an intervention in the 1992 party platform due to his pro-life positions. If on a national level the 2006 elections saw little difference in the voting patterns of Evangelicals, on a local level it was clear that the

---

<sup>217</sup> Carnes, Tony. 'Swing Evangelicals', Christianity Today, February 2004, 15.

<sup>218</sup> Stricherz, Mark. *John Kerry's Open Mind*, 30.

Democratic strategy had worked, as conservative Democrats managed to win against conservative Republicans and received also an higher share of the Evangelical vote than their non-conservative party peers, sometime even more than their Republican rivals<sup>219</sup>, proving that by endorsing candidates more open to pro-life positions and with an actual history of commitment to religious values, the Democratic party could still receive a large share of the Evangelical vote. Therefore, following these successes the Democratic party and especially candidate Barack Obama adopted a similar faith appealing strategy for the 2008 national election, trying to reach out more than ever to Evangelicals and not to those on the Religious Left, but also to a series of groups and associations with whom the party had not had any connection in decade, the most notable example being the NAE which received weekly communications from the Obama camp through all the electoral season. Outreach to religious conservatives did not only consist of meetings and communications, but also of policy proposals and pledges addressing issues strongly felt among strong religious voters, such as to maintain and increase the faith-based initiative of Bush, opposed by many liberals in the name of state-church separation, and to provide more financial resources to permit women to carry their pregnancies to term<sup>220</sup>. Despite this outreach, on election day the Democratic party made little inroads among conservative Christians, who remained loyal to the Republican party partly because of the ever present pro-choice bottom-line of the Democratic party, partly because the last minute appointment of Sarah Palin as running mate galvanized conservative leaders who had remained apathetic for much of the electoral race. For how much Obama had been criticized during the campaign as an ultraliberal merely pretending to reach out to conservative Christians, on the wake of his victory an influential Evangelical as Richard Cizik stated that despite strong disagreement on social policies Obama remained the Democrat that better understood evangelicals since the time of Jimmy Carter, a person with a “willing ear” and prone to collaboration<sup>221</sup>, a small but nonetheless significant result of the new Democratic strategy. The overture the Democratic party demonstrated since the 2006 electoral campaign came with its own strong limitations, and while it is undeniable that significant changes were made such as endorsing candidates from the conservative wing of the party rather than moderates whose faith commitments were not convincing enough for an Evangelical audience, on a general level the party did not change its traditional liberal positions and the 2008 party platform maintained a strong pro-choice language and position, calling abortion a “need” and expunging the famous phrase coined by Clinton “abortion should be safe, legal and rare” because pro-choicers believed it was casting abortion in a negative light<sup>222</sup>.

The relations between Evangelicals and the Democratic party did not reach the same of complexity than that with the Republican party, being characterized most of the time either by diffidence or animosity. As seen, attempts from the Democratic party to reach out to Evangelicals cooled down through the nineties as it became more and more clear that this religious constituency was steadily transitioning towards the core of the Republican party. At the center of the inability of the Democratic party to regain its traditional religious allies

---

<sup>219</sup> Hansen, Collin. *The Other Election*, Christianity Today, August 2008, 15.

<sup>220</sup> Kennedy, John W. *Preach and Reach*, 28; Pulliam, Sarah. *Election Honeymoon*, 15.

<sup>221</sup> Pulliam, Sarah. *Election Honeymoon*, 15.

<sup>222</sup> *Can we come to the party?*, 23.

laid a deep clash of values that could have not been resolved in favor of a conservative position, and as Evangelicals adopted an increasingly stronger pro-life pro-family position following the lead of the Religious Right, the Democratic party strengthened its liberal position on the issues, a polarization that happened quite quickly as the differences between the 1988 and 1992 party platform testify. The following eight years of the Clinton presidency only exacerbated any possibility of collaboration between conservative Christians and Democrats, as the ruling party pushed forwards some intense pro-choice legislation ill-welcomed even among moderate Evangelicals. But Clinton's biggest legacy has not been his vetoes on the partial abortion ban neither his sexual scandals, but rather an intense confusion among Evangelical about the actual depth of Democrats faith commitments as they witnessed a devout Baptist with a good knowledge of the Bible and a publicly known spirituality championing policies in complete discordance with what Evangelicals expected to be his religious values, and as the Lewinsky scandal unfolded religious voters became convinced that the religiosity they had witnessed was if not insincere, at least deeply manipulative. Further attempts from the Democratic party to reach out to Evangelicals by appealing to religious values were welcomed with coldness and deep suspicion, especially when these faith commitments where coming from candidates whose personal record revealed more liberal if not secular leanings, and the common feeling among religious voters was that Democratic politicians were simply not able to understand them, showing a faith most frequently described as 'contrived'. At this point, an important change happened, as the party reverted its faith appealing strategy not by trying to promote faith-talking from otherwise secular candidates, but rather by endorsing those politicians from the conservative wing of the party who fit the model appreciated by Evangelicals and could actually bolster an historic commitment to faith-based politics. As the strategy resulted in a success with conservative Democrats outperforming both their peers and their Republican rivals in the share of votes received by Evangelicals, the party maintained this approach also in the 2008 national election but as the confrontation moved from local key races to the national stage, it was clear that this change in attitude was not being accompanied by a change in the core principles behind the party stand on hot-button issues. Nevertheless, despite the shortcomings on election day the outreach towards Evangelicals the party had demonstrated during the electoral campaign contributed in at least alleviating the suspicions a part of the Evangelical world was feeling and could have resulted in potential future collaborations in some areas broader that the pro-life or pro-family causes.

Some consideration should be drawn in order to complement the history of the changes here summarized. First, any outreach the Democratic party attempted from the times of Dukakis until the most recent Obama example have always been aimed at the moderate fringes of the movement, those Evangelicals who might have not been pleased by the rhetoric of the Religious Right or might have valued more a broader agenda of issues over one-issued positions, thus neglecting from the start Religious Right groups. Second, through this decades the Democratic party has always maintained a strong pro-choice position which pledged not only to uphold *Roe v. Wade* but also to fight against possible restriction of the practice, and as the party was receiving strong support from those on the pro-choice side and pro-choice lobbyist it never abandoned or compromised on the issue, an attitude that by default faulted any attempt of collaboration between conservative

Evangelicals and the party mainline in these years of culture wars. Third, the strong support the Clinton administration had showed on abortion rights combined with the distaste Evangelicals were feeling for a president whose ambivalence between faith commitment and political positions was increasingly casting him as a manipulative person in the minds of this religious constituency, largely contributed in pushing Evangelicals towards the Republican party despite the strong in-party tensions that were at the time happening.

### 3.3. *Considerations on Part I. Chapter 3*

This third chapter has focused on the history of Evangelicals as a political constituency, the voting behavior that came to characterize them and the relation with the two main American parties, in order both to delineate a political history of this group and to understand the reasons behind their political alliance with the Republican party, which intensified and solidified in the nineties and two-thousands to the point in which Evangelicals became the most numerous and loyal single voting bloc for the Republicans. The evangelical voting pattern during these times has been analyzed to provide a general picture of their political behavior, from which their steady and decisive transition to the core of the Republican electorate has clearly emerged as the defining factor of their recent political history. However, it has been shown that taking into consideration only the Evangelical voting record it's simply reductive, as the overwhelming majority of votes that Evangelicals consistently casted for the Republican party tends to hide the strong in-party tensions that have characterized the political history of this constituency and the main traits of their alliance with the Republican party. Indeed, for much of the nineties strong in-party tensions arose between the newly arrived Evangelicals and the already present Republican constituencies as far as the party identity and political agenda are concerned, with social conservatives and economic conservatives striving to push the party towards their preferred positions. These tensions revealed severe ongoing clashes within the Republican party, as the different constituencies tried to overcome one another or to strike a balance between their goals. In the end, the fact that these tensions decreased despite having reached possible breaking-points for the Evangelical-Republican alliance, testified the nature and scope of the collaboration between the religious constituency and the party: *big tent* Republicans realized that their efforts were curtailed by the fact that without the support of the Evangelical constituency it would have been impossible for them to win the elections, while Evangelicals realized that despite holding a strong grip on the party and being able to steer its overall agenda, their influence was not absolute and would have had eventually to compromise in order to achieve concrete results, as the Republican party represented their best political option. As the 20<sup>th</sup> century came to an end, the relations between Evangelicals and Republicans were reinvigorated by a combination of events, as the leadership of the group promoting the big tent strategy resigned in the midst of the disappointing 1998 electoral results and a new candidate arose over the others for the 2000 presidential campaign, George W. Bush. Bush and his presidencies played a crucial role in solidifying the Evangelical-Republican alliance, as he embodied the ideal faith-driven politician that much appealed to conservative religious voters and quickly delivered results as far as social policies were concerned, increasing even more his popularity among the Evangelical constituency. Despite the inglorious

end of his presidency, the alliance he helped to cement resisted a sudden challenge that might have precipitated the relations back to one decade before, as the Republican party produced a candidate unliked by Evangelicals such as John McCain: still, the Republican party quickly reassured its most loyal constituency of the pro-life, pro-family leanings of its candidate, and Evangelicals rallied with overwhelming support for a Republican ticket they did not like, a testimony of the completion of an alliance much more solid and reliable than that of the early nineties, a product of decades of tensions and compromises coming from both sides.

This part has also analyzed the relations between Evangelicals and the Democratic party in an attempt to prove that the clash of values between these two groups played a significant role in the consolidation of the Republican-Evangelical alliance. After some early attempts to regain control over its former constituency, the Democratic party abandoned for a long time any strategy to reach out to conservative religious voters and instead focused on its progressive and liberal social positions, maintaining an outreach to that moderate religious electorate ready to compromise on abortion and gay-marriages for the sake of a broader agenda of Christian issues such as care for the poor, minorities and the environment. The strongest moment of polarization between Democrats and Evangelicals was represented by the presidencies of Bill Clinton, whose strong ambivalence between strong liberalism in social position coupled with a conservative Christian religious background and deep spiritual knowledge confused Evangelicals as a riddling contradiction. Moreover, what started as a suspicion that all the religious talking of Clinton was, although personally sincere, used in a manipulative way for political gains, became a reality in the minds of Evangelicals as he repeatedly vetoed the partial abortion ban act despite having been passed by both Houses, and committed perjury by lying under oath to the Congress as the Lewinsky scandal unfolded. Clinton's legacy quickly became associated with his own party, and while faith-driven politicians and especially presidential candidates produced by the Republican party were considered to be sincere in their beliefs and words, their Democratic peer suffered an harsher judgement from Evangelical pundits, being defined as pretending at best, lying at worst. Finally, it has been shown that the Democratic party underwent a serious change of strategy since the 2006 midterm elections by endorsing for local races candidates from the conservative wings of the party with pro-life leanings and credentials, resulting in good results on a local level while still not causing a realignment as far as general voting patterns are concerned. The new strategy adopted by the Democratic party, which paid more attention to faith-talking and faith-values and sought to reach out to more Evangelical leaders than it had done in the past, continued to be used by Obama during his 2008 presidential campaign and produced mixed results: from one side it managed to partially shake off Clinton's difficult legacy, with important Evangelical leaders such as Richard Cizik recognizing the efforts of the party and the propension to dialogue of Obama, from the other side though it did not produce change neither in the bottom-line position of the Democratic party as it remained as committed to its social liberalism as before, and neither in the overall voting pattern of Evangelicals, the overwhelming majority of whom remained staunchly Republican. More than the history of the relations between the Democratic party and the Evangelical constituency in the nineties and two-thousands, which as seen is one marked by strong contrasts and disagreements, this analysis sought to emphasize how distance in values and policies between the majority of Evangelicals and the Democratic party had become so

unbridgeable that no cooperation could have been possible or even thinkable, leaving no other plausible option for the Evangelical constituency rather than an alliance with the Republican party. Therefore, even in the midst of the tensions that characterized much of the relation between Evangelicals and Republicans in the nineties, the presence of another party whose commitment to abortion was as strong as the commitment Evangelical held for pro-life positions played a crucial role in preventing the breaking-up of the Republican-Evangelical alliance, as if inside the party Evangelicals were struggling to impose their agenda, outside of it they would have been isolated and impotent in the face of the political process.



## Part II. Significant Public Policy Issues

It has been the objective of Part I of this dissertation to show the political evolution the Evangelical constituency underwent as it entered the core of American politics, becoming more familiar with the nature and rules of the political and partisan world. The results, as it has been amply discussed, have been from one side the emergence of the Evangelical constituency as the electoral core of the Republican party and therefore an increase of its influence when it came to defining the traits of the party agenda, from the other side an achieved political maturity that transformed a triumphalist and inflexible approach to public policy into a more pragmatic one, made of broader agendas, give-and-take logic and gradualism as a legitimate mean to achieve effective political goals. While previously these transformations have been described in relation with politics and parties, now the focus will shift towards those public policy issues that have been crucial for the decades considered. It's indeed by focusing on specific issues that the scope of the changes Evangelical political activism underwent appears clearer, as it becomes possible to see how larger and more flexible their agenda became without at the same time abandoning those ultimate goals that have given meaning to their political action. Furthermore, it will be addressed how in the pursuit of their goals Evangelicals have developed non-political strategies as well, which sometimes have been carried in order to parallel political efforts, other times were born directly out of frustration and anger towards the limits of politics thus resulting in a clash with the political process.

## 4. Abortion

The issues Evangelicals most heartfelt during these two decades have been largely bioethical ones, and while new concerns such as stem-cell research and cloning arose during this period and became a matter of discussion among religious conservative, abortion continued to top the list of the Religious Right priorities so much so that it became a litmus test not only to judge one's political position but also religious commitment, as demonstrated by the reactions Evangelicals manifested in response to Clinton's abortion policies. The importance of abortion in the history of the Religious Right is not noteworthy just for its ever-presence as top concern, but also because through the attitude and strategies Evangelicals adopted to confront such practice it is possible to observe those changes previously discussed in action, as the most extreme forms of political actions were progressively abandoned in favor of more pragmatic ones and Evangelicals efforts broadened, starting from a strategy aimed at obtaining a constitutional ban to more gradual objectives to curb the practice through the States. Therefore, analyzing the positions the Religious Right assumed when confronting abortion becomes a central step in the broader study of the recent history of this political group, and it's indeed from this bioethical issue that the second part of this dissertation will start. In order to produce an effective historical narration, this chapter will deal firstly with an history of abortion rights starting from the Supreme Court ruling *Roe v. Wade*<sup>223</sup> and its interpretation among Evangelicals, showing how these moved in less than one decade from an initial indifference or even support to staunch opposition. Next, the chapter will forward into discussing the different identities of the pro-life movement, paying particular attention to the Religious Right as all of its groups have since adopted a strong pro-life position, and the strategies adopted by conservative Christians who in parallel to legislative and political means also pursued social and ministerial ones. The aim of this analysis is to show how the anti-abortion front has not been a unique and monolithic movement but rather the sum of different groups which although sharing the same common objective, strongly differed in their preferred means to the point in which the mutual relations between especially the more aggressive and the more pragmatic components either suffered or were entirely cut. In order to conduct this analysis, the chapter will encompass the major events that occurred during the nineties and early two-thousands related to abortion policies, such as those Supreme Court ruling between the late eighties and early nineties that were expected to reverse *Roe* but definitely failed, the events surrounding the ban of the controversial practice of partial-abortion, and the increased attention paid to non-political means such as the Crisis Pregnancy Centers, thus providing historical depth and examples for the changes the Religious Right underwent in this period.

---

<sup>223</sup> On January 22, 1973, the Supreme Court ruled (7-2) that unduly restrictive state regulation on abortion were unconstitutional, since they violated the woman's constitutional right to privacy granted by the fourteenth amendment. The decision gave a woman the right to an abortion during the entirety of the pregnancy and defined different levels of state interest for regulating abortion in the second and third trimesters. See: Conway, Karen S. & Butler, Michael R. *State Abortion Legislation as a Public Good—Before and After Roe v. Wade*, *Economic Inquiry*, Vol. 30, No. 4, 1992, 609-626. <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/abs/10.1111/j.1465-7295.1992.tb01284.x>. Accessed August 28, 2020; Myers, Richard S. *Re-Reading Roe v. Wade*, *Washington and Lee Law Review*, Vol. 71, No.2, 2014, 1025-1046. <https://scholarlycommons.law.wlu.edu/wlulr/vol71/iss2/12>. Accessed August 28, 2020.

#### 4.1 Evangelicals and the Pro-Life Cause

If by the nineties abortion had become central in the agenda of the Religious Right, this has been the result not of the crystallization of a static position but rather the final achievement of a dynamic series of events that brought Evangelicals into defining opposition to abortion as a nonnegotiable trait of their political, social and even religious identity<sup>224</sup>. Far from being an inevitable outcome of Evangelical political history, opposition to abortion represented instead a decisive and for some extent radical turn, as during the seventies Evangelicals went from timidly opposing or even supporting the practice and the related Supreme Court ruling *Roe v. Wade*, to fierce condemnation, describing abortion with the most reprehensible terms ethics and religion could offer and making its ban or at least its curtailing the central theme for different kinds of activism. When the first movements for the liberalization of abortion started to sprout in the fifties and then more decisively through the sixties, Evangelicals initially remained on the sidelines of the debate around reproductive rights, leaving the central stage of opposition to abortion solidly into conservative Catholic hands<sup>225</sup>. The Catholic hierarchy adopted a strong anti-abortion line based on the official teachings of the Church and even as the much controversial discussion around the liceity of birth control started to circulate around Catholic circles in the sixties, opposition to abortion remained a strongly shared and uniform position among the ecclesiastical hierarchy. As pro-abortion organizations started to form and push for a loosening of state legislation on the practice in the sixties, they found support among Protestant and Jewish clergies and physicians, while strong opposing came from the Catholic side, in an early polarization that by the end of the decade would result in the still present divisions between pro-life and pro-choice camps<sup>226</sup>. Indeed, the first organization in the pro-life camp was founded directly by the National Council of Catholic Bishops (NCCB)<sup>227</sup> in 1968 as the National

---

<sup>224</sup> In the beginning of the abortion debate, the division between supporters and opposers of reproductive choice ran between pro-abortion and anti-abortion groups. After the *Roe v. Wade* decision, the anti-abortion label was dropped in favor of the pro-life one, a move pro-abortion groups soon paralleled by adopting the pro-choice label. Thus, the division acquired a new meaning following the desire of the two groups to intensify the values they considered to be at stake in the debate itself. The result has been a strong polarization and a clash of values between those who consider abortion through the lens of life, and those who instead intend the issue as the right of a woman to have full control and autonomy over her reproductive choices. For further information see: Staggenborg, Suzanne. *The Pro-Choice Movement: Organization and Activism in the Abortion Conflict*, Oxford/New York, Oxford University Press, 1994; Critchlow, Donald T. *The Politics of Abortion and Birth Control in Historical Perspective*, University Park, Pennsylvania State University Press, 1996; Fried, Marlene G. *From Abortion to Reproductive Freedom: Transforming a Movement*, Boston, South End Press, 1990; Karrer, Robert N. *The National Right to Life Committee: Its Funding, Its History, and the Emergence of the Pro-Life Movement Prior to Roe v. Wade*, *The Catholic Historical Review*, Vol. 97, No. 3, 2011, 527-557. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/23052569>. Accessed August 28, 2020.

<sup>225</sup> Durham, Martin. *The Christian Right*, 84. For more comprehensive material on the history of abortion in the USA see, Solinger, Rickie. *Pregnancy and Power: A Short History of Reproductive Politics in America*, New York, New York University Press, 2005; Shapiro, Ian. *Abortion and the Supreme Court Decisions 1965-2000*, Indianapolis, Hackett Publishing Company, 2001, for at least the law history immediately preceding *Roe* and about those Supreme Court ruling that will later be discussed see Wilson, Joshua C. *The Street Politics of Abortion: Speech, Violence, and America's Culture Wars*, Stanford, Stanford University Press, 2013, especially for the cultural aspects of the pro-life and pro-choice debate.

<sup>226</sup> R. Marie Griffith. *Moral Combat*, 209-212.

<sup>227</sup> The National Conference of Catholic Bishops is the episcopal conference of the Catholic Church in the USA, founded in 1966 to attend the Church's own affairs in the country. From July 1, 2001, the NCCB merged with its secular arm the

Right to Life Committee (NRLC), which if in the beginning remained under church control, by 1973 it had re-founded itself as an independent body in an attempt to appeal to a broader cross-confessional audience and to be more free in its political tasks as the flagship organization on the pro-life camp. In the early aftermath of *Roe v. Wade*, the first responses and initiatives that would later shape and characterize the whole traits and image of the pro-life camp came from Catholics alone. In 1975, the NCCB formed the National Committee for a Human Life Amendment with the goal of lobbying for the addition of a life amendment to the constitution. The National Committee crafted and distributed a “pastoral plan for pro-life activities”<sup>228</sup> to organize a wide grassroots network of citizens and diocesan groups in order to lobby in each congressional district in favor of pro-life politicians, urging activists to go beyond confessional barriers and collaborate with non-Catholics alike. The early efforts of Catholic activism produced a first political result that although limited proved the potentiality of pro-life activism, as in 1976 Republican Catholic senator Henry Hyde sponsored a legislation aimed at banning federal funding of abortion, an act that despite not resulting in a human-life amendment nonetheless was well received as it separated taxpayer citizens from a practice some of them opposed. As seen, the first movements and initiatives of the pro-life camp were coming from the Catholic Church itself as the NCCB, or from autonomous groups and activists who were themselves conservative Catholics as the NRLC, while on the other hand Evangelicals were not yet involved in the what would have later become one of their biggest social and political battlefield. While collaborations between conservative Catholics and Evangelical leaders were happening during these years, these were still an exception rather than a rule and represented isolated episodes between individuals, not organizations and neither denominations, as discussed in the previous part of this dissertation<sup>229</sup>. There have been in essence two reasons why Evangelicals did not join the pro-life movement since its early days, the first one being the persistence of a strong anti-Catholic bias that made any attempt to seriously collaborate with Catholic groups simply unthinkable, the second one being an overall different stand about the reproductive practice and the relative Supreme Court rulings, initially welcomed and supported by many born-again Christians. Starting from the first reason, Evangelicals manifested a strong anti-Catholic bias as a legacy inherited from their Protestant and Fundamentalist nature, thus assuming a suspicious if not hostile attitude towards any initiative supported and especially promoted by the Catholic Church. When in 1973 the NRLC was re-constituted as an autonomous body, the predominance of Catholics in its membership worried many Evangelicals, who considered it as a backdoor to impose Catholic teachings over the rest of society<sup>230</sup>. Even when Evangelicals finally voiced their opposition to abortion and actively joined the political world on strong social conservative positions in the late seventies, the collaboration with their conservative Catholic peers meant not the sudden end of confessional animosity and many among

---

United States Catholic Conference (USCC) to form the United State Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB). <https://www.usccb.org/about>. Accessed August 28, 2020.

<sup>228</sup> Griffith, Marie R. *Moral Combat*, 226.

<sup>229</sup> See Part 1, chapter 2. *The Religious Right, Origins: From Nixon to Reagan*.

<sup>230</sup> Dowland, Seth. *‘Family Values’ and the Formation of a Christian Right Agenda*. Dowland reports that in the early seventies, ‘about 70% of the members of the National Right to Life Committee claimed membership in the Catholic Church’; Durham, Martin. *The Christian right*, 85.

conservative Protestant leaders framed the doctrine of co-belligerency not as an alliance but rather a temporary collaboration due to extreme circumstances<sup>231</sup>. Next to the strong anti-Catholic sentiment Evangelicals still resented, the second reason behind their initial refusal to join the pro-life cause stemmed from the fact that many were actually in favor of a loosening of the abortion legislations, even welcoming positively *Roe v. Wade* for the emphasis the Supreme Court had put in underlining the individual autonomy in making private decisions. Indeed, the Supreme Court framed abortion not as a public policy but rather as an individual right issue, promoting and defending the autonomy and privacy of the individual choices against state interference. By doing so, the court decision received support even from conservative groups on the ground that it matched in rhetoric and meaning their same feelings about the autonomy of private decisions, groups among which Evangelicals and conservative Protestants can be counted as the experience of the Scope Monkey Trial had made them very wary about the dangers of state intrusions on the private sphere<sup>232</sup>. When liberalization of abortion started to become a more and more frequent topic through the sixties and early seventies, Evangelicals showed an overall support for a loosening of the legislation behind the practice, and even the SBC, which at the time was promoting conservative views on sexuality and later would become a major player on the pro-life camp, positioned itself initially on the pro-choice camp, advocating the liberalization of abortion under certain circumstances among which “the emotional, mental and physical health of the mother” and welcoming *Roe* through some of its more prominent leaders<sup>233</sup>. This said, not all Evangelicals equally agreed on the liceity of the practice and there have been since the beginning some voices of dissent, but that early opposition offered from pundits such as *Christianity Today* or grass-root activists remained largely isolated and ineffective, as religious leaders and large denominations either refused to join the pro-life side because of the strong predominance of the Catholic, or endorsed the practice and the surrounding legislation because of a perceived affinity as far as the defense of individual autonomy from state interference was concerned<sup>234</sup>. In the second half of the seventies the attitude of Evangelicals towards abortion started to change and as conservative Protestants joined the already existing Catholic pro-life organizations, soon new groups were to be founded and led by Evangelicals themselves not in an effort to offer a Protestant counterpart to a Catholic dominated movement, but rather as initiatives born out of a new sensibility and interpretation of abortion and social liberal policies in general, with groups such as Concerned Women for America, Focus on the Family and the Moral Majority being founded one shortly after the other sharing the same preoccupations with the advancement of social liberal legislation and dissolution of the American family. The decisive Evangelical turn towards the pro-life camp did not materialize simply in the assumptions of already existing Catholic positions, but rather expressed a particular and peculiar stand that although made abortion an important and prominent issue, nonetheless it contextualized it within the broader scheme of defense of the traditional American family and Christian sexual morality, alongside opposition to pornography, homosexuality and the broader changes in the

---

<sup>231</sup> Dowland, Seth. “*Family Values*”, 615; Johnson, Emily S. *This is Our Message*, 87.

<sup>232</sup> Dowland, Seth. “*Family Values*”, 611.

<sup>233</sup> Balmer, Randall. *Evangelicalism in America*, 110; Griffith, Marie R. *Moral Combat*, 202-203.

<sup>234</sup> Ead. *Moral Combat*, 202; Dowland. Seth. “*Family Values*”, 611.

familiar structure advocated by feminists. Positioning abortion as part of a broader agenda of social conservative issues became a necessity for the early rise of the Religious Right, as since in the late seventies many conservative Protestants were still conceiving abortion as a Catholic issue, a new approach was necessary in order to go beyond the traditional Protestant resistance to join Catholic causes. Therefore, if from one side these newly founded groups gradually adopted the already existing Catholic rhetoric that framed abortion as a life issue, from the other side a new broader narrative started to emerge portraying abortion and the related *Roe* case as an attack on the traditional and biblical family structure because of the full female autonomy on abortion the Supreme Court had ruled<sup>235</sup>. A first and important differentiation thus emerged among the very same pro-life camp between single-issue organizations focused on opposing abortion in itself, and other groups which instead understood the fight against abortion as part of wider projects for a moral restoration. This division did not represent an insuperable obstacle and neither became a matter of mutual exclusivity, but rather a grey area of overlapping interests that if many times offered opportunities for cooperation and collaboration, at the same time left ample space for these groups to define in autonomy their goals and strategy, thus allowing existing and eventual differences not to undermine the shared position on the pro-life camp. The NRLC for example has historically tackled abortion as a human right issue, concerned first and foremost with the defense of human life and protection of the unborn rather than the defense of a particular kind of sexual morality or family structure, thus it has occasionally cooperated with groups sharing this same core understanding despite their political position or adjunctive ideological traits, as demonstrated by the collaboration with socially liberal groups such as Feminists for Life or the Pro-life Alliance of Gays and Lesbians<sup>236</sup>. Moreover, the NRLC has not necessarily pursued a political path towards conservatism as did the rest of the groups on the Christian Right side, but rather maintained a more single-issue focused approach to the political world, valuating representatives on the sole ground of their position on abortion, so that when the 1996 elections drew closer, the representatives' scorecards promoted by this organizations largely differed from those of its conservative Protestant pro-life allies, with a strong pro-life Democratic congressman such as Tony Hall being evaluated 100/100 by the NRLC but only 23/100 by the Christian Coalition due to his positions on economics and welfare<sup>237</sup>. Evangelicals' attitude towards abortion went from indifference or even support to staunch opposition, and as they join the pro-life cause their organizations started to surpass in numbers and political strength those of their Catholic counterparts<sup>238</sup>. Cementing an entire constituency on such strong and inflexible grounds about an issue previously neglected because of anti-Catholic prejudice, or even supported with strong

---

<sup>235</sup> Dowland, Seth. "Family Values", 616-617.

<sup>236</sup> Feminist for Life is a non-profit organization founded in 1972. It maintains that abortion is not a viable solution for women and that efforts should rather be concentrated into opposing the practice and working to change the context that ultimately led a woman to seek reproductive choices. More information on <https://www.feministsforlife.org/about-us/>. Accessed August 28, 2020. The Pro-Life Alliance of Gays and Lesbians is another non-profit organization founded in 1990. It promotes a composed pro-life and pro-gay view founded on the assumption that "All human life deserves protection and respect simply because it's human life". More information on <https://www.plagal.org/>. Accessed August 28, 2020; See also Durham, Martin. *The Christian Right*, 86-87.

<sup>237</sup> Matheus-Green, Frederica. *The Hungry Congressman*, 46.

<sup>238</sup> Griffith, Marie R. *Moral Combat*, 239.

and decisive statements coming from well-known Evangelical leaders because of the elevation of individual and private autonomy, required the development of a series of reasonings for such a radical change, and arguments in favor of a strong pro-life position. A new rhetoric to address abortion was therefore crafted, with formulae and shared understandings forming a new core of Evangelicals' politics that would persist in the upcoming decades. When in the late seventies Evangelical and conservative Protestant leaders formed the groups of the early Religious Right, they found themselves lacking compelling and structured pro-life argumentations especially as they joined side with Catholic led organizations. Catholic activists and organization could indeed rely on a set of dissertations, concepts and arguments strongly on pro-life positions and although the debate on contraception was still a highly divisive one among the clergy and lay people alike<sup>239</sup>, abortion on demand had instead traditionally been opposed across the theological spectrum. The Catholic rhetoric about abortion developed in continuity with the official teachings of the church, consisting largely on statements and encyclicals produced by previous popes, such as the *Casti Connubi* (1930) by Pius XI, the numerous statements against abortion on demand made by Pius XII<sup>240</sup>, the *Humanae Vitae* (1968) by Paul VI, and then largely invigorated under John Paul II, whose pontificate inaugurated an even more social conservative position on the issue<sup>241</sup>. Not only were the teachings of Rome defining a strong pro-life rhetoric for American Catholics, but these were echoed through the country by the NCCB which, as seen before, rose at the forefront of religious opposition to the expansions of abortion right by creating bureaus, associations and pastoral plans organizing sympathetic activists around now traditional narratives. At the center of these narratives there has been the shared understanding that abortion is first and foremost a human life issue, and therefore opposing abortion is not a fight against the autonomy of the individual or its freedom but rather a defense of the unborn, referred to time after time as being innocent human life. Moreover, since the codification of modern human rights in the aftermath of World War II, the Catholic Church quickly adapted abortion as a human right issue, arguing that since the unborn was endowed with life and personhood from the moment of conception, it also had the right to life and that this right should be defended. A further step in this line of reasoning was to find a compelling historical case to draw a parallel with in order to make abortion resonate even more among the Catholic public, a choice that definitely materialized in comparing abortion to the genocide committed by the Nazis in the concentration camps<sup>242</sup>, a comparison that would prove to be rather resistant as Catholic activists and groups frequently defined the death of unborns as an holocaust<sup>243</sup>. Another

---

<sup>239</sup> The NRLC for example decided not to address the issue at all probably to prevent potential internal divisions.

<sup>240</sup> Pius XII. *Address to the Italian Association of Catholic Midwives*, Rome, October 29, 1951. [https://w2.vatican.va/content/pius-xii/it/speeches/1951/documents/hf\\_p-xii\\_spe\\_19511029\\_ostetriche.html](https://w2.vatican.va/content/pius-xii/it/speeches/1951/documents/hf_p-xii_spe_19511029_ostetriche.html). Accessed August 20, 2020; Pius XII. *Address before the convention 'Family Front'*, Rome, November 27, 1951. [https://w2.vatican.va/content/pius-xii/it/speeches/1951/documents/hf\\_p-xii\\_spe\\_19511127\\_associazioni-famiglie.html](https://w2.vatican.va/content/pius-xii/it/speeches/1951/documents/hf_p-xii_spe_19511127_associazioni-famiglie.html). Accessed August 20, 2020; Griffith, Marie R. *Moral combat*, 210.

<sup>241</sup> Jhon Paul II. *Evangelium Vitae*, Rome, March 25, 1995. [http://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/it/encyclicals/documents/hf\\_jp-ii\\_enc\\_25031995\\_evangelium-vitae.html](http://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/it/encyclicals/documents/hf_jp-ii_enc_25031995_evangelium-vitae.html). Accessed August 20, 2020.

<sup>242</sup> Griffith, *Moral Combat*, 210.

<sup>243</sup> For the Catholic position on bioethics and abortion in particular, see Turina, Isacco. *Vatican Biopolitics*, Social Compass, Vol. 60, No.1, 2013, 134-151. <https://doi.org/10.1177%2F0037768612471776>; For U.S. Catholicism history and position on these issues see Williams, Daniel K. *Defenders of the Unborn: The Pro-Life Movement Before 'Roe v.*

trait that should be counted as a distinctive one of the Catholic groups narrative and general behavior is that while fiercely opposing abortion, they nonetheless maintained a sincere faith in the juridical and political system as the preferred and potentially most effective mean to operate change as far as abortion policies are concerned, with the NRLC operating as the flagship organization of the pro-life camp within the boundaries of law and civil behavior, an important and not negligible characteristic that will in time being at the center of many controversies among the pro-life camp itself. Compared to these well-structured and traditionally founded Catholic positions, Evangelicals found themselves not only without an equally compelling narrative, but heirs of positions that had previously advocated values contrasting with the newly adopted pro-life identity. Beside the voices of support for the abortive practice and the Supreme Court decisions, even the mild opposition some Evangelicals offered was far from being a useful precedent, since it defined abortion as a “tragic moral choice” and while it recognized the difference of opinions about its sinfulness, it nonetheless admitted its necessity and permissibility under some circumstances, reasoning that “the fetus is not reckoned as a soul”<sup>244</sup>. Despite Evangelicals not having to rely as much Catholics on previously established traditions to formulate a theological position on a given topic, they still needed new arguments, language and rhetoric to address from a completely different perspective an increasingly dividing issue. Further complicating the passage to the pro-life field was the fact that any new argumentation had to draw closer to the already dominating Catholic pro-life positions without at the same time merging in them, given the still strong anti-Catholic prejudice. Therefore, Evangelicals performed such a necessary turn by gradually adopting the core principles of the already present pro-life movement, such as the sinfulness and undefendable wrongness of abortion as well as the belief that life begins at conception and merging them with the already existing social conservative sexual and family ideas familiar to the larger movement. Crucial in this regard were the ideas of the already mentioned Schaffer, who as a voice out of the choir had already been condemning abortion as one of the strongest products of the secular humanism that was corroding American moral foundations starting from the family. Indeed, by looking at the core concerns of the major politically active groups of the newly born Religious Right abortion appears as being the most prominent but not sole concern of an agenda revolving around broader definitions of family values<sup>245</sup>. In a fashion similar to the one displayed by Catholics, Evangelicals also strived to find a convincing historical precedent for their fight against abortion and if from some extent they easily acquired the comparison with the Nazi genocide, they would finally find their own parallel in the fight abolitionists waged against slavery, whose historical unrolling offered some advantageous narratives for their contemporary anti-abortion fight: a Supreme Court ruling<sup>246</sup> upholding the constitutionality of a practice deemed immoral and sinful by those who opposed it, social and cultural ostracism for those at the frontlines of the movement, a long and exhausting fight that from a humble and seemingly ill-fated beginning

---

*Wade*”, Oxford/New York, Oxford University Press, 2016; McGreevy, John T. *Catholics and American Freedom*, New York, W. W. Norton, 2003.

<sup>244</sup> Stafford, Tim. *The Abortion Wars*, Christianity Today, October 6, 1989, 20.

<sup>245</sup> Balmer, Randall. *Evangelism in America*, 119; Dowland, Seth. “*Family Values*”, 616-618.

<sup>246</sup> The reference is to the *Dred Scott v. Sandford* (1857) ruling. <https://www.britannica.com/event/Dred-Scott-decision>. Accessed August 21, 2020.



finally ended in a triumphant victory<sup>247</sup>. Parallel to the assumptions of new narratives and reasons to oppose abortion has been the development of an appropriate language that would frame abortion as a life and moral issue, language that became increasingly more uncompromising as from one side Evangelicals rose as the most vocal component of the pro-life movement and from the other they witnessed the failure of translating into decisive political actions much of their pro-life projects. It was under the strongly pro-choice presidency of Bill Clinton that abortion started to be referred to in the gloomiest ethical terms possible, described by many articles and editorials in *Christianity Today* as a murder or even worse as infanticide, to the point in which Evangelicals called into question not only the moral character of those on the pro-choice side but even of the country as a whole<sup>248</sup>. While many of the central concepts and reasons behind opposition to abortion remained almost unchanged from the early days of the Moral Majority, this has not meant that the larger movement positions and narratives crystalized into a single monolithic form, but instead they undergone changes and adjustments born out for example from the necessity to adapt to a more political environment, therefore turning to more pragmatic languages and means, or from the frustration caused by a perceived inefficiency of the legislative process, leading to more radicalized and sometime even violent discourses and actions.

#### *4.2 The Different Faces of the Pro-Life Movement: Identities and Strategies in the Nineties and Early Two-Thousands*

The pro-life movement developed into all but a monolithic entity, and while a broader consensus emerged about the moral nature of the fight against abortion and the compelling arguments to engage in such a struggle, already when it came into defining the boundaries and meanings of the pro-life label important differences started to arise, showing the theological, intellectual and social background of the respective groups who engaged in the fight against abortion and often resulting in different political behaviors and alliances. As seen, the first difference arose when Evangelicals joined the pro-life cause in the late seventies and consisted in a differentiation between already existing Catholic led organizations that had been pursuing and would continue to pursue objectives focused on the defense of life rather than of a particular form of family or sexual morality<sup>249</sup>, and Evangelical led organizations that would instead increasingly frame opposition to abortion as the central but not only concern of their social conservative agendas. Although important, this differentiation should be considered a soft one, since both parts maintained the same position when it came precisely to abortion and interacted one with the other on the political scene, lobbying for pro-life causes from the same side of the political field. Considerably more significant is the difference that has emerged, especially in the nineties, between those Evangelical groups that although sharing the same pro-life label, ultimately chose to

---

<sup>247</sup> Stafford, Tim. *In Reluctant Praise of Extremism*, *Christianity Today*, October 26, 1992, 18-22.

<sup>248</sup> Matthews-Green, Frederica. *Wanted: A New Pro-life Strategy*, *Christianity Today*, January 12, 1998, 27; *Changing Hearts and Laws*, *Christianity Today*, March 5, 2001, 38.

<sup>249</sup> At the time the U.S. Catholic Church was opposing gay marriages and the expansion of gay-rights, championing the model of the traditional heterosexual family. What matters is that gay-rights and abortion were being considered two different and separated fields, and the NRLC has indeed not engaged in any battle not related to abortion specifically.

draw the boundaries of the term and the weight of the issues very differently one from the other, resulting in a decisive differentiation between the Religious Left and the Religious Right, whose core characteristics have already been amply described previously but still require an examination of the salient differences as far as pro-life issues are concerned. As Evangelicals broadened the meaning of the pro-life label by incorporating it in the broader pro-family concept, opposition to abortion became the primary concern behind political and non-political activism. Such was the importance abortion had assumed among the Religious Right that it became a divisive topic for the same alliance with the Republican party, especially following the attempted internal compromise on abortion of the mid-nineties. Abortion had thus assumed the scope of a litmus test, leading to collaborations with non pro-lifers not even being considered as possible. Even when the Religious Right started that long and sometime difficult process of change towards a more pragmatic political stance and as its groups broadened their agendas to encompass also economic and financial concerns, these changes affected not the realm of priorities but rather that of means, and opposition to abortion remained one of the central and ultimate goals towards which conservative Evangelical efforts were directed. As an example, in the running up to the definition of the welfare reform of 1996, the Republicans then in control of both Houses pushed for a redefinition of public aid that would exclude previously granted state benefits to minor unwed mothers, allowing then states themselves to use the saved money to potentiate efforts to reduce unmarried pregnancies or to finance adoption programs but not abortion, a move that while pursuing social and economic conservative concerns simultaneously offered a financial solution to a social issue and was indeed endorsed by the Christian Coalition and Conservative Women for America<sup>250</sup>. On the other side of the pro-life spectrum, groups and leaders of the Religious Left pushed for a broader definition of the pro-life label that would put at the same level issues such as abortion, economic injustice, environment degradation and nuclear disarmament, on the ground that opposition to everything that threatens or destroys life deserves recognition as a matter of pro-life concern. In the midst of this different pro-life agenda, it should be noted that the arguments used to oppose abortion were mostly the same, as it was the overall rhetoric adopted: abortion was equally considered to be a moral issues and its opposition strictly connected with the religious based concepts of sanctity and defense of human life, intended as beginning at conception; abortion was also equally defined as a “moral tragedy”<sup>251</sup> and the practice referred to as “the destruction of millions of unborn babies”<sup>252</sup>. Religious Left leaders would often call out the pro-life agenda of their right-wing counterparts as being inconsistent due to the noteworthy absence of other pro-life issues aside from abortion, or because of the support shown towards representatives who were at the same time receiving large donations from the tobacco or liquor lobbies<sup>253</sup>. The gap between the two wings of Evangelical political activism as far as the nature of the pro-life agenda is concerned would only grow further through the nineties as a result of the already discusses increased political

---

<sup>250</sup> Durham, Martin. *The Christian Right*, 94-95. In the end, after much controversies and negotiations between the different components of the party and between Republicans and democrats, the bill passed retaining “the use of incentive for states to discourage out-of-wedlock births, [...] [provided that] the abortion rate must not rise”. Ibid, 96.

<sup>251</sup> Olsen, Ted. *Where Jim Wallis Stands*, Christianity Today, May, 2008, 53.

<sup>252</sup> Sider, Ron. *Abortion Is Not the Only Issue*, Christianity Today, July 14, 1989, 28.

<sup>253</sup> Ivi; Sider, Ron. *Our Selective Rage*, Christianity Today, August 12, 1996, 14-15.

polarization, when in seeking an alliance with the Democrats, the Left resolved in *de facto* diminishing the weight of abortion within their own pro-life agenda in favor of other issues more suitable for their political position, as better exemplified by the comments a leader such as Jim Wallis made during the 2008 electoral campaign, defining his and his followers pro-life goal as “protecting unborn life [...] without criminalizing abortion”<sup>254</sup>, a medium position that tried to reconcile opposition to abortion with the decisively pro-choice position of the Democratic party. Finally, the strongest difference that emerged within the pro-life camp was perhaps the one between groups that shared faith and optimism towards participation in the political process as a viable and effective mean to achieve radical changes and maintained such position even in spite of juridical and legislative setbacks, therefore never trespassing the boundaries of law, and groups that instead grew so much frustrated and angered with the shortcomings of politics that not only came to the conclusion that the political process was useless as far as the ultimate goal of protecting unborn life was concerned, but that it was their own responsibility to take action and step out of the limits of law, leading to an extreme activism that whilst anchored on non-violent civil disobedience, soon escalated and led to violence being perpetrated by small extremist groups on the fringe of the pro-life camp. All the groups that have been so far discussed fall under the first category, since despite their differences on the intended scope and nature of the pro-life cause as well as on the best strategies and courses of action to achieve their goals, they still engaged in the civic and political discourse, recognizing its limits but also legitimacy. Among the groups that instead fall under the second category, Operation Rescue is without a doubt the most famous and exemplificative one for the strategies it adopted and for the consequences these had on the broader pro-life movement. Founded in 1987 by conservative Christian Randall Terry (born 1959) out of frustration with the political system and on the belief that major changes in society have always been preceded by social upheaval<sup>255</sup>, Operation Rescue sought to advance the pro-life cause through non-violent civil disobedience by organizing events called ‘rescues’ consisting in large manifestations and sit-ins outside of abortion clinics, with the double objective of blocking the access to abortion clinics thus saving in the process the life of a baby, and pushing its activists towards arrest to gain media coverage, a strategy directly inspired by the civil right movement of Martin Luther King Jr. (1929-1968). Such an hazardous and controversial movement harvested since the beginning mixed feelings among the other component of the pro-life camp, and while in the early days of the rescues important figures such as James Dobson, Pat Robertson and Jerry Falwell gave their endorsements<sup>256</sup> without taking part in civil disobedience, other critical voices were soon raised especially by the NRLC, which argued firstly that political and legislative solutions could bring more considerable results than any sit-in, and secondly that media coverage of the extreme rescues would end in more harm than good done to the pro-life movement, since differently from the civil right era medias were not behind the pro-life cause<sup>257</sup>. Despite the mutual animosities between the NRLC and Operation Rescue, the latter continued to grow in numbers and fame through the early

---

<sup>254</sup> Olsen, Ted. *Where Jim Wallis Stands*, 53.

<sup>255</sup> Cryderman, Lyn. *A Movement Divided*, Christianity Today, August 12, 1988, 48.

<sup>256</sup> Frame, Randy. *Showdown in Atlanta*, Christianity Today, September 16, 1988, 44.

<sup>257</sup> Cryderman, Lyn. *A Movement Divided*, 49.

nineties, a rise to prominence that came fast but did not last long as a conjunction of events seriously undermined the potential of the organization. Firstly, testimonies from within the pro-life camp started to sprout about the perceived fallacies of the Operation Rescue approach echoing more and more the concerns expressed by the NRLC, with even a legal organization such as the Rutherford Institute<sup>258</sup> committed to conservative causes but external to the pro-life movement reporting that no significant decrease in the number of abortions had resulted from the rescues<sup>259</sup>; secondly, non-violent extremism inevitably attracted individuals from smaller and much more controversial groups on the most extreme fringe of the pro-life movement eager to cross the line between legality and illegality to its full extent, leading to more controversial initiatives such as distributing ‘wanted’ posters of abortionists or picketing outside of doctor’s houses, or directly to open violence in the form of bombings, arsons and even murder<sup>260</sup>; finally, the escalation of violence coming from pro-life extremists and the murder of Dr. David Gunn pushed Congress into passing in 1994 the Freedom of Access to Clinic Entrances Act (FACE) which made blocking the entrance to abortion clinics a federal act punishable with up to one year in prison and a fine of \$100,000<sup>261</sup>. Although Operation Rescue condemned any and all forms of violence committed by pro-life extremists and required its activists to sign a pledge of nonviolence<sup>262</sup>, the enactment of the FACE Act seriously undermined the ability of the organization to continue with its civil disobedience strategy and it slowly faded away from the main pro-life scene, and in time the changing attitudes of the pro-life movement and the broader Christian right relegated what had been Operation Rescue to a thing of the past, with its protests largely considered as having been a counterproductive and unsuccessful strategy<sup>263</sup>. As Operation Rescue disappeared, smaller and far more radicalized extreme groups founded on the concepts of ‘defensive action’ and ‘justifiable homicide’<sup>264</sup> remained active on the fringes of the pro-life movement – a position they still occupy to this day. The identity of the pro-life movement has therefore been a multifaced one, with groups carrying different intellectual backgrounds and political feelings labeling themselves as pro-life on the ground of their same shared assumption about the moral wrongfulness of abortion. This variety has not stopped to identity or ideological issues but has manifested also in the different strategies the movement has adopted through the years, and as such related to those historical developments

---

<sup>258</sup> Founded in 1982, the Rutherford Institute is a non-profit organization dedicated to the defense of civil liberties and human rights by offering free legal services and assistance to those seeking its help. Although specialized in the defense of religious rights, through the years it has expanded its scope to cover a series of issues concerning rights and freedom of the individual against interference from the government or external forces. More information can be found at <https://www.rutherford.org/about>. Accessed September 1, 2020.

<sup>259</sup> Kennedy, John W. *Pro-Life Movement Struggles for Viability*, Christianity Today, November 8, 1993, 40.

<sup>260</sup> Ivi.

<sup>261</sup> Dr. David Gunn was murdered by pro-life activist Michael Griffin, who shot him outside of the abortion clinic where he used to work. This event marked the first time pro-life extremists resolved to murder as a mean to prevent abortion. Booth, William. *Doctor Killed During Abortion Protests*, Washington Post, March 11, 1993.

<sup>262</sup> Kennedy, John W. *Pro-Life Movement Struggles for Viability*, 40.

<sup>263</sup> *Refocusing the Pro-life agenda*, Christianity Today, March 1, 1999, 29.

<sup>264</sup> Durham, Martin. *The Christian Right*, 97. ‘Defensive action’ and ‘justifiable homicide’ are concepts developed by violent and extreme fringes of the pro-life movement, consisting in the idea that killing an abortionist doctor to prevent further abortion is not only morally but scripturally justified. This position has been universally condemned by the rest of the pro-life movement.

happening both in the then maturing Religious Right, and in the political and legislative context surrounding abortion. Therefore, analyzing such strategies and their evolution through the years provides not only a complete history of the pro-life movement and its cause, but also of the political and nonpolitical engagement of evangelicals and the broader Religious Right.

The major division when it came to pro-life strategies has passed through those pursuing political and legislative goals, and those instead focused on the development of a set of non-political answers to the abortion question. Although this division might seem reminiscent of the contrast between politically engaged organizations and the Operation Rescue, it is instead very different as firstly it referred to means and not principles, and secondly organizations largely sought to pair these two approaches rather than separate them, so that it became common for a politically engaged group to also deploy non-political means in order to foster the pro-life cause either consistently, or because of changing circumstances. By the late seventies and early eighties, politics had appeared as one of the most viable and effective field to contrast the expansion of social liberal agendas in general and abortion right in particular, therefore the majority of groups on the pro-life side engaged in their own particular way in certain forms of direct lobbying or general political support towards representatives and politicians showing concerns towards the unborn. While some Democrats had shown sympathy towards the pro-life cause, it would be among Republicans that these new conservative groups found their strongest allies. As seen before, the movement of a large social conservative constituency such as the Evangelical one under the new Republican banner would eventually lead to important changes both in the party and national agenda, and it's indeed in these early days of newfound political engagement that these events were triggered: as the Republican voting basin was being swelled by social conservatives, the attitude towards abortion of the party itself started to change. If in 1976 the party platform recognized internal disagreements on the abortion issue, by 1980 these were weakened and by 1984 completely disappeared, with the party now calling for a constitutional human life amendment and the elections to the Supreme Court of judges respecting "traditional family values and the sanctity of innocent human life"<sup>265</sup>. Such calls have echoed the core characteristic of the first political strategy adopted by the Religious Right to deal with abortion, consisting in the shared idea that the best course of action would have been to elect a president sympathetic to the pro-life cause who would have in turn appointed social conservative Supreme Court judges in order to overturn *Roe* and passed a human life amendment to make abortion illegal on a federal level. Conservative Christian expectations were incredibly high under the Reagan and Bush (Sr.) presidencies especially as far as the overturning of *Roe* was concerned<sup>266</sup>, and indeed many abortion related cases that had made their way up through the juridical system until the Supreme Court were welcomed as key cases to overturn the 1973 ruling, even when this prospect was made unrealistic by the nature of the case itself: *Webster v. Reproductive Health Services* (1989) was described as having the potential to overturn *Roe* although the very same case concerned

---

<sup>265</sup> Durham, Martin. *The Christian Right*, 89.

<sup>266</sup> On the eve of George H.W. Bush election, *Christianity Today* reported that "[the election] makes it more likely that *Roe v. Wade* will be overturned, or at least substantially curtailed". Barnes, Fred. *Issues for 1989: Abortion*, Christianity Today, January 13, 1989, 47.

only the constitutionality of states placing financial limitations over abortive clinics<sup>267</sup>; *Hodgson v. Minnesota* (1990) paired with the retirement of liberal judge William Brennan (1906-1997) increased expectations once more, despite the case almost stroke down an abortion restriction consisting of parental notice from a minor before an abortion if it were not for the inclusion of a judicial bypass<sup>268</sup>; *Planned Parenthood v. Casey* (1992) was ruled during the election year and thus even more galvanizing for the whole political spectrum, and even as it upheld several state restriction of the practice, it did not challenged the constitutionality of abortion<sup>269</sup>. Just as the long waited decisive Supreme Court ruling failed to arrive so did also the human life amendment, which although promised during the Republican conventions of 1984 and 1988, not only never materialized but it was not even pushed forward by the same Republicans in Congress. The election as president of pro-choice Democratic candidate Bill Clinton prompted a profound change as far as this first political and juridical strategy is concerned: from one side the absence of presidential support had made the whole strategy impossible to pursue; from the other side though the Religious Right did not immediately abandon the prospect of seeing one day *Roe* being overturned and an amendment being signed, but rather while slowly coming to term with the necessity of more pragmatic approaches it resolved in pushing the previous strategy behind viable ones. During the nineties, as the Religious Right was undergoing significant changes towards a more pragmatic political position consisting in an agenda made of more numerous but interconnected issues and in a more prone to compromise and gradualism decision-making style, strategies to promote the pro-life cause on a political level largely felt this larger trend. The Republican attempt backed by Religious Right organizations to promote a welfare legislation encompassing specific economic and financial restriction on abortion is one of the best examples of this renewed political strategy, which revolved around finding non-social or ethical solutions in order to oppose the practice. Another important change of these years has been conducting opposition against specific and already controversial abortive practices rather than against abortion *in se*, something that is best demonstrated by the long and difficult campaign to ban ‘partial-birth abortion’. The practice medically referred to as ‘intact dilation and extraction’ is a form of late termination of pregnancy performed around the second or third trimester and consists of a complex operation in which first the fetus is partially extracted except for the head, then a surgical incision is made at the base of the skull in order to remove the brain through a suction catheter, leading to the collapse of the skull and thus an easier final delivery. The gruesomeness of the practice, the fact that it was available for purely elective rather than strongly compelling reasons, and the wide disagreements within the American Medical Association about the necessity of it had concurred into making it the central target of pro-life concerns in the years of the Clinton presidency<sup>270</sup>. Moreover, another compelling factor that made partial-birth abortion a favorable target for pro-life strategists

---

<sup>267</sup> Lawton, Kim A. *Could This Be the Year?*, Christianity Today, April 7, 1989, 36; Muck, Terry C. *What If We Win?*, Christianity Today, April 21, 1989, 13.

<sup>268</sup> *Chipping Away at Roe v. Wade*, Christianity Today, August 20, 1990, 37. The judicial bypass consisted in the possible exemption for a minor from notifying her parents before an abortion if she had instead notified and received approval from a judge appointed for that court circumscription.

<sup>269</sup> *Opposing Views Argued in Court, on the Streets*, Christianity Today, May 18, 1992, 48.

<sup>270</sup> Ferranti, Jennifer. *‘D and X’ Abortion Ban Faces Presidential Veto*, Christianity Today, December 11, 1995, 74.

was that due to the stated reasons the ban received wide support from across the political spectrum, to the point in which it was supported by two thirds of the House and a majority in the Senate, a result impossible to achieve had the pro-life movement continued to target abortion *in se*. Despite wide political support, the bill was vetoed twice by President Clinton in 1995 and 1997 on the base that it did not offer enough protection for the life of the mother consistent with *Roe*. By the time of the second presidential veto, the issue had already trespassed the federal level and singular states had started to promote their own laws on the procedure, either curtailing or banning it as a whole, which inevitably led to a flurry of local battles between state legislations and courts around the constitutionality of the bans themselves, an event that helped the pro-life cause in capturing once again part of the public opinion in a period otherwise marked by other difficulties<sup>271</sup>. The practice remained the central issue concerning abortion during the 2000 elections, with president-hopeful George W. Bush promising its ban in case of victory, a result that materialized in 2003 with the signature of the Partial-Birth Abortion Ban Act, then upheld by the Supreme Court ruling *Gonzales v. Carhart* in 2007<sup>272</sup>. Beside partial-birth abortion another specific issue captured the attention of pro-life pundits, that being the passage of a ‘born alive’ bill that would have protected the life of children surviving an attempted abortion procedure or delivered alive through a procedure known as ‘induced-labor abortion’ consisting in the delivery of a severely premature fetus to cause its natural death outside of the womb<sup>273</sup>. The bill encountered a less controversial development than the contemporary partial-birth abortion one, failing to pass once in the ending senatorial season of 2000 only to be once again submitted the following year and definitely signed on 2002 as the Born-Alive Infant Protection Act<sup>274</sup>. Although the initiative did not receive a lot of attention at the time due to its unfortunate timing, as public opinion was concerned with partial-birth abortion and the bill itself was presented at the highest of the electoral year, it fits nonetheless as an example of that major change in strategies the pro-life movement was undergoing, once again eager to target specific and more debatable issues rather than pursuing ambitious and maybe unachievable goals. Therefore, even if the presidency of Bill Clinton represented a difficult period for the pro-life movement due to the strong presidential commitment to pro-choice positions, it came nonetheless as a transformative moment as far as political strategies are concerned, as social conservative groups did not retreat from the scene but instead focused their attentions into finding new strategies more viable under the changed circumstances. Moreover, these changes came as deeper than simply temporary adaptations, since once the Clinton presidency ended and a pro-life Republican entered again in the White House, pro-life groups chose to pursue this gradualism rather than revert to their previous strategies. Indeed, as Bush won the 2000 elections and a new Republican majority seated in Congress, the once traditional pledges made by the president and favorably welcomed by conservative Christians about a reversal of *Roe* were considerably absent, as the president stated that it was too early to discuss this possibility and pro-life groups duly accepted such position, pushing instead for other significative decisions on abortion at the time

---

<sup>271</sup> Moore, Art. *Partial-Birth Bans Make Little Headway in States*, Christianity Today, April 5, 1999, 18.

<sup>272</sup> Zylstra, Sarah E. *One Small Step for Life*, Christianity Today, June 2007, 17.

<sup>273</sup> Blunt, Sheryl H. *Lives Measured in Minutes*, Christianity Today, November 13, 2000, 91.

<sup>274</sup> The Born-Alive Infants Protection Act was signed into law by President George W. Bush on August 5, 2002, as Pub. L. 107-207.

pending in Congress<sup>275</sup>. Talks and hopes about a definitive reversal of *Roe v. Wade* did not completely disappear but were significantly transformed, as in the early 2000s conservative Christians came to publicly state a preference for gradualism instead of triumphalism in politics, with the new key phrase to describe this profoundly different approach being “undermining without overruling”<sup>276</sup>, a concept that while maintaining a deeply rooted opposition to abortion and pursued its abolishment as final goal, nonetheless moved future political efforts towards achievable and especially winnable objectives. Participation in the political and legislative process through pressure and lobbying in general has been a distinctive trait of the post-*Roe* pro-life movement as well as of the broader Religious Right from the late seventies. Through the years, considerable organizational and financial resources were spent in order to pursue those political strategies just discussed, leading to confrontations that often made it to the headlines and captured public opinion such as Supreme Court rulings or the passage of pieces of legislations on controversial issues. Next to these more visible actions Evangelical groups also engaged conspicuously outside of the political realm, promoting a wide array of initiatives supporting the pro-life cause spanning from education to actually providing services that could offer an alternative to abortion. Far from representing an exclusive alternative to political engagement, the pursuit of non-political strategies and initiatives in general came as a further commitment to the pro-life cause which often paired the political path organizations were advancing. A good example of the complementarian nature of such strategies is the educational efforts of Focus on the Family and the Family Research Council. Although the primary purposes of these organizations were and still are educational in nature and have consisted in the production and distribution of literature, radio programs and ministries as well as counselling and therapy services characterized by a strong pro-life position<sup>277</sup>, their commitment have notoriously exceeded such purposes and deeply affected the political process thanks to the power and large constituencies each one wielded, until the creation in the early two-thousands of “Action” affiliates in order to engage more freely in direct lobbying<sup>278</sup>. Another important aspect of the non-political pro-life strategy has concerned the creation and support of Crisis Pregnancy Centers (CPCs), a peculiar initiative meant to directly oppose abortion clinics on their own field as service providers. CPCs represents a highly decentralized and local-focused reality, and while there are organizations that try to build an affiliation between the centers<sup>279</sup>,

---

<sup>275</sup> *Changing Hearts and Laws*, 38.

<sup>276</sup> Olsen, Ted. *The Art of Abortion Politics*, Christianity Today, March 2006, 73.

<sup>277</sup> Zoba, Wendy M. *Daring to Disciple America*, Christianity Today, March 1, 1999, 31-38. Further information about the educative and non-political pro-life projects produced and sponsored by the organization are easily to be found on the organization website <https://www.focusonthefamily.com/pro-life/>. Accessed September 17, 2020.

<sup>278</sup> Nonprofit organizations registered under the 501(c)(3) status are precluded from actual direct lobbying or from making political endorsements. Thus, big organizations intending to have more impact on the political process often resolve to create “Action” affiliates, such as Focus on the Family Action or Family Research Council Action. These are non-profit organizations as well but registered as 501(c)(4) status, and as such can devolve a larger part of their budget to electoral and political purposes. “Action” is simply a customary label given to indicate the nature of the organization and to distinguish between affiliate and principal, since often they are homonyms. For further information see Sullivan, Sean. *What is a 501(c)(4), anyway?*, The Washington Post, May 13, 2013. <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/the-fix/wp/2013/05/13/what-is-a-501c4-anyway/>. Accessed September 11, 2020.

<sup>279</sup> Stafford, Tim. *Inside Crisis Pregnancy Centers*, Christianity Today, August 17, 1992. 20.



each one of them is at the end a product of local circumstances and of its own activists, therefore while it's possible to generalize some of the main traits of these initiatives substantial differences might still persist between centers. At their core, CPCs are locally based non-profit organizations staffed by volunteers who, after having participated in a short formational course, offer counseling to often desperate pregnant women seeking an abortion, with the final and explicit goal of persuading the woman to carry the pregnancy to term. Beside from this core characteristic and the shared goal of dissuading women from seeking an abortion, offered services differ from one center to another, and while almost all centers offer a free self-administered pregnancy test, some might go further and provide free infant clothes or small house furniture in order to support struggling women during the first years of their child infancy, while some might instead focus on improving their counselling services sometime even expanding them to post-abortion women seeking help to cope with their grief. Finally, some CPCs have gone further and adopted in their services the use of strong imagery made of pictures of aborted fetuses and unborn corpses, a practice for which they came under criticism especially from pro-choice activists<sup>280</sup>. CPCs also differ when it comes to their policies regarding the scope of their participation in the broader pro-life movement, especially as far as Operation Rescue is concerned. While some centers have taken part directly or through private initiatives of their volunteers to the rescues, others have considered the group a problematic presence jeopardizing any effort to attract emotionally sensible women seeking counselling and have gone so far to prohibit any affiliation between their volunteers and the rescue initiatives<sup>281</sup>. With the rest of the pro-life movement relations have been instead more productive, as best demonstrated by the sonogram initiative pursued since the early two-thousands by CPCs in collaboration with other major pro-life actors such as Focus on the Family or the SBC: the initiative has since then consisted in these two major organizations allocating funds for or directly financing CPCs in order to purchase ultrasounds machines for their centers, as performing a sonogram on a pregnant woman made further counselling much more effective, furthermore demonstrating the complementarian nature of political and non-political strategies<sup>282</sup>. What's more interesting about CPCs and the role they've played as a non-political mean of the broad pro-life movement is that while they've been a presence on the American scene since the late sixties, the attention they received would increase in the late nineties and early two-thousands. Indeed after the increasingly more controversial trajectory taken by Operation Rescue and other groups through the decade, appeals from inside the pro-life movement began to multiply and many called for the adoption of a different overall approach marked not by intense confrontation against abortionists but rather by a display of more lenient and supportive tones towards abortion seeking women, and CPCs offered both a good example and a corroborated model for the viability and efficiency such changes would have brought<sup>283</sup>. But the public image

---

<sup>280</sup> Ibid. 21.

<sup>281</sup> Ibid. 20.

<sup>282</sup> Stricherz, Mark. *Saved by sonogram*, Christianity Today, March 2003, 21; Further information on the sonogram initiatives financed by the Southern Baptist Convention can be found at <https://psalm139project.org/>, while information about those financed by Focus on the Family can be found at <https://www.focusonthefamily.com/pro-life/option-ultrasound-program-2/>. Accessed August 18, 2020.

<sup>283</sup> Matthews-Green, Frederica. *Wanted: A New Pro-life Strategy*, 27; *Refocusing the Pro-life Agenda*, Christianity Today, March 1, 1999, 29.

of the pro-life movement was not the only reason behind the increased attention paid to CPCs and further explanations can be given by looking at the broader political context of the era. As the pro-life movement found itself on a political unfavorable position under the Clinton administration, with the president himself posing an unsurmountable obstacle for any anti-abortion legislation even when backed by large bipartisan support, it became easier for pro-life groups to focus on the pursuit of non-political strategies, and among these CPCs represented an already functioning alternative with the advantage of being more appealing to the general public rather than more confrontational forms of activism.

#### *4.3 Considerations on Part II. Chapter 4*

The analysis of the Evangelical attitude towards abortion, and of the broader identity and strategies that have characterized the pro-life movement in particular during the nineties and early two-thousands, fit the overall objective of this dissertation of describing the political evolution the Religious Right underwent during the decades considered, in order to demonstrate that Christian conservative organizations adapted to the external political circumstances they were exposed to by becoming more pragmatic as far as both objectives and means are concerned. Having been the primary concern on the social conservative agendas in the period considered, abortion has provided a more than adequate practical example to further describe the scope of the changes the Religious Right was undergoing and the historical context that influenced the taken directions. First of all, it has been shown how the Evangelical attitude towards abortion drastically changed in the seventies from initial indifference or even support of the practice and the related Supreme Court ruling, to staunch opposition. This profound change necessarily required Evangelicals to adopt a new rhetoric and narrative on which to found their opposition to abortion, something they did by adopting the already existing Catholic anti-abortion arguments but contextualizing them alongside a broader social conservative agenda, which paired abortion with a series of other sexual issues such as gay-rights and feminism aimed at portraying the dangers the American families were facing from an increasingly morally corrupted and secularized society, a gloomy scenario intellectuals such as Schaeffer helped to paint. The discussion has then moved towards the identities of the pro-life movement, showing how rather than a monolithic entity it represented a conglomerate of different groups which although sharing the same assumptions about the wrongfulness of abortion, showed nonetheless consistent differences in identity when it came to defining the scopes and nature of the pro-life label. In this regard, the Religious Right pro-life conception emerged as a strictly social conservative one which privileged opposition to abortion as its not unique but by far primary concern, a difference that becomes more sensible when confronted with the position the contemporary Religious Left was displaying, considering instead the pro-life agenda to be comprised of a series of concerns spanning from abortion to environmental care all equally important. Moreover, it has been described how the Religious Right maintained its commitment and overall optimism towards the political and legislative process, not an obvious outcome since at the time other conservative Christians were joining the ranks of organizations that eschewed politics and engaged in controversial non-political actions, thus demonstrating their frustration and disillusionment towards political

participation as a whole. Finally, the chapter has moved towards the perhaps most interesting and relevant part, that being the discussion of the political and non-political strategies groups committed to the pro-life cause have pursued, as it's indeed in these practical actions that the evolution of the whole Religious Right appears more evident. From when it emerged in the late seventies and all through the eighties, the Religious Right showed a triumphalist political style dominated by ambitious goals and grand strategies. As far as abortion is concerned, the main goal was to make it illegal once again and the strategy to pursue consisted in the election of a pro-life president, the appointment of conservative Supreme Court judges for the subsequent reversal of *Roe*, and finally the passage of a constitutional human life amendment. Conservative Christians pursued this strategy despite the growing unlikelihood of its success and remained convinced until the election of Bill Clinton, which marked a *de facto* end to any realistic possibility. While the 1992 elections came as a serious blow to conservative Evangelical political prospects, it nonetheless forced the whole Religious Right to come to terms with the fact that the strategy they had been pursuing for more than a decade not only was now impossible, but had in fact been vain from the very beginning. Such realization pushed conservative groups to gradually change their political behaviors not by abandoning their goals, but by pursuing more suitable and realistic strategies to achieve their ends, a fact that is clear when taking into consideration the political means adopted to oppose abortion under the Clinton presidency. From one side the Religious Right expanded the nature of sought solutions by looking towards economic and financial answers for a social and bioethical problem, thus finding other discourses that could have appealed also to its more socially moderate but economically conservative Republican allies. From the other side, rather than opposing abortion *in se* pro-life groups championed a wider series of battles against specific abortive issues and procedures, which due to their own controversial nature would have better found a supportive majority in the public opinion. Instead of a human life amendment or a complete and sudden reversal of *Roe*, the Religious Right chose to pursue a political path marked by gradualism, one aimed at the implementations of higher and wider restrictions to abortion which would have in time eventually undermined the practice itself. This change in the political attitude of the Religious Right proved to be a deep one, as following the election in 2000 of pro-life Republican George W. Bush conservative Christians did not revert their strategies but rather reinforced their gradual approach. The Clinton presidency and the difficulties it posed for pro-life political projects also pushed conservative Christians into revising their own non-political strategies, and as controversies and a tragic escalation into violence had marked the end of Operation Rescue and similar forms of activism, attention was paid to more compassionate models that could not also have worked as a viable alternative to oppose abortion given the difficult legislative environment, but also as means to appeal to the general public and rehabilitate the image of the pro-life movement after anti-abortionist violence, leading to renewed attention being given to Crisis Pregnancy Centers. Political and non-political strategies have been available means the pro-life movement has adopted to foster its anti-abortion cause, and rather than being mutually exclusive paths, these have formed two complementary sides of the recent history of pro-life activism. Moreover, political and non-political means have equally followed the larger evolution both the pro-life movement and the Religious Right were undergoing during the decades examined, and reflected in practical actions their deep and substantial changes. Indeed, it might be possible for

some extents to define some parallels between the increased attention paid to CPCs and the pursuit of the Partial-Birth Abortion Ban as events stemming from common roots, as both of them were pursued from the Religious Right to enhance the public perception of the pro-life cause after antiabortionists violence, both were initiatives that might have found a broader consensus among moderated due to the counselling style and the inherently controversiality respectively, and both were answers to a larger political crisis. These events confirm once more the evolution of the Religious Right towards becoming a more pragmatic political force capable of differentiate its agenda as well as the nature of its strategies in order to enhance its possibilities of success, and the fact that such evolution took place in the nineties and was reinforced in the early two thousands, transforming Christian conservative groups into very different organization from what they had been in the first decade of their political history.

## 5. Homosexuality and Gay-Rights

Gay-rights have been a predominant part of the social, cultural and political recent history of the United States. In the last decades, the gay community strongly engaged on the political and non-political arenas to seek validation for their sexual identity, as well as to push for changes in the American legal and cultural tissue pursuing what have been described as ‘gay-rights’, which at their core consist in legally enshrined non-discrimination on the base of sexual preferences, and in the cultural and social acceptance of homosexuality. From the other side of the ideological spectrum, even before conservative Evangelicals entered the political scene, Christian organizations and famous preachers were carrying local or nationwide campaigns to oppose any prospect of expansion not only of gay-rights but especially of the social acceptance of homosexuality, which was considered a sin at best and a dangerous perversion at worst. It thus came natural for the Religious Right to make opposition to gay-rights one of its top concerns, a position it not only maintained but decisively increased in the decades considered, since it’s during the nineties and early two-thousands that gay-right issues would start to become more relevant on the local and national political scene. Therefore, for the importance gay-rights have assumed in the Religious Right social agenda as well as the broader consideration Evangelicals had of homosexuality, these topics fit the overall goals of this dissertation playing a decisive role for the understanding of conservative Christians recent political history. Similar to the previous one on abortion, this chapter will focus on the analysis of gay-rights as an issue of primary Christian concern. The chapter will deal first with the reasons behind this staunch opposition as well as the broader perception and ideas Evangelicals had about homosexuality. Next, the chapter will move forward to analyze the general strategies Evangelicals have developed both on the political and non-political field to contrast the advancement of the gay-liberation movement in contemporary times. As far as politics are concerned, particular attention will be paid to the debate around same-sex marriage, as it emerged right in the early nineties and dominated the gay-rights debate for all the period considered and even further until 2015<sup>284</sup>. Regarding the non-political field, focus will be placed on the ‘ex-gay ministries’, which as the name suggests aimed at curing homosexuality and represented the most extensive ministerial effort Evangelical church-based organizations promoted. Finally, the chapter will also include a comparison between the political attitude and behavior conservative Christians displayed towards abortion and gay-rights, in order to find similarities and differences that might be relevant to the final ends of this dissertation.

---

<sup>284</sup> In 2015 the Supreme Court ruled in *Obergefell v. Hodges* that same-sex couples had the fundamental right to marry on the same conditions of heterosexual couples, and based this decision of the Due Process Clause and Equal Protection Clause of the Fourteenth Amendment, which at their core maintain that all citizens are subjected to the same laws. This landmark decision paved the way for same-sex marriage but did not bring the end of the debate about gay-rights, as conservative groups still maintain the immorality of homosexuality. Further information on the case can be found at <https://www.britannica.com/event/Obergefell-v-Hodges>. Accessed September 2, 2020.

## 5.1 *An Evangelical View on Homosexuality*

The history of the modern gay-rights movement in the U.S. officially started in the summer of 1969 with the Stone Wall riots in New York, when a confrontation between the local gay-community and the police escalated into violence and prompted homosexuals activists all over the country to coalesce into organizations advocating for those civil-rights that will in time be referred to as gay-rights, opening a wide debate among the American public opinion that soon drew the attention of conservative Christians as well<sup>285</sup>. Homosexuality had already been a matter of discussion among Christian denominations since at least the early decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, with conservative Protestant denominations, Fundamentalists and later on Evangelicals, all condemning the practice as naturally and morally wrong and finding compelling scriptural justifications for their arguments<sup>286</sup>. What had significantly changed since the Stone Wall riots was that the discussion around homosexuality was no more solely characterized by arguments about its morality or naturality, but rather had moved towards the realm of civil-rights for homosexual people, thus homosexuality became a matter of public-policies and as such it will be addressed and considered by both supporters and opposers of the gay-liberation movement. Before indulging in the broader public-policy debate around homosexual rights and in the different initiatives undertaken by Evangelicals and the Religious Right, it's important to understand how homosexuality was understood within Christianity and what was homosexuality according to conservative Protestants in particular, who were the homosexuals and what Evangelicals though could have been the consequences of the expansions of gay-rights.

In western societies, the ideas of same-sex attraction as a sexual orientation different from heterosexuality and of homosexuals as an identifiable group began to solidify only in the beginning of the twentieth century. At this time, Christian churches were universally in agreement about the inherently wrongfulness of homosexual relations because they defied the naturally God-ordained nature of sexuality, and because the Bible itself explicitly condemned them. It would not be until the sixties that different positions would emerge within Christianity. By that time, three important changes had happened in western Christianity in general that had allowed the sprouting of new and possibly positive interpretations of same-sex commitment. A new theology of marriage had emerged emphasizing mutual commitment and emotional intimacy as being as important as procreation. Ministers taking part in pastoral care and counselling were being trained in psychology other than theology, developing an understating of homosexuality that reflected the medical model of the time of homosexuality as an illness rather than purely a sin. Finally and especially in the Anglophone

---

<sup>285</sup> For further information on gay-rights social and legal history see Poindexter, Cynthia. *Sociopolitical Antecedents to Stonewall: Analysis of the Origins of the Gay Rights Movement in the United States*, Social work, Vol. 42, No. 6, 1997, 607-615. <https://academic.oup.com/sw/article-abstract/42/6/607/1847126?redirectedFrom=fulltext>. Accessed September 2, 2020; Pierceson, Jason. *Courts Liberalism and Rights: Gay Law And Politics In The United States and Canada*, Philadelphia, Temple University Press, 2005.

<sup>286</sup> For further information on the history of Christianity and Homosexuality see Balch, David L. *Homosexuality, Science and the "plain sense" of Scripture*, Grand Rapids, Eerdmans, 2000; Preston Sprinkle, ed. *Two Views on Homosexuality, the Bible, and the Church*, Grand Rapids, Zondervan, 2016; Brown, Terry, ed. *Other Voices, Other Worlds: The Global Church Speaks Out on Homosexuality*, London, Darton Longman and Todd, 2006.

world, the broader discussion about the relation between law and morality moved to debate whether or not it would have been possible for churches to support the removal of laws restricting the rights of homosexuals without at the same time condoning the morality of the practice. What had been until that point a shared agreement within Christianity about the sinfulness of homosexuality soon left space to a variety of different positions, as Christian churches developed their own answers to the ongoing debate. Mainline Protestant churches proved to be the more open to accept same-sex relations when these were characterized by mutual commitment and emotional intimacy<sup>287</sup>. Although in the beginning mainline Protestant denominations remained committed to exclusively heterosexual marriage, singular congregations led by more progressive ministers started to promote the acceptance of strongly committed homosexual relationships. Finally, by the turn of the century homosexual relations were not only fully accepted within Christian denominations, particularly in the U.S., such as the Episcopalian Church, the United Church of Christ and the Presbyterian Church, but homosexuals themselves were being ordained ministers on the same grounds of their heterosexual counterparts. The Catholic Church took another direction and developed a theological understanding of sexual attraction that divided between orientation and action. The official teachings affirmed that while individuals cannot choose their sexual orientation, they are in full control over their actions and should refrain from indulging in sexual behaviors not considered morally acceptable. The Catholic Church strongly refuses to recognize the moral liceity of any form of same-sex relation and considers active homosexuals as sinners. At the same time, it does not condemn homosexuality *in se* but leaves homosexuals with one option to live their lives in compliance with Catholic moral teachings, meaning a life of chastity. Surprisingly, from the beginnings of the modern gay-rights movement until the mid-eighties the debate surrounding the morality of homosexual relations was still open in U.S. Catholicism, with groups such as Dignity<sup>288</sup> promoting more pro-gay views while supported by a part of the U.S. hierarchy. Most notably, in “Sexuality: God’s Gift” Brooklyn Bishop Francis Mugavero advocated for a more welcoming approach towards homosexuals and their rights, calling them “subjects to misunderstanding”<sup>289</sup>. The debate around homosexuality ended abruptly when in 1986 the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith published the “Letter to the Bishops of the Catholic Church on the Pastoral Care of Homosexual Persons”<sup>290</sup>, in which it addressed homosexuality as an “objective disorder”. The

---

<sup>287</sup> On the history of mainline Protestant churches and homosexuality, see Olson, Laura R. & Cadge, Wendy. *Talking About Homosexuality: The Views of Mainline Protestant Clergy*, Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion, Vol. 41, No. 1, 153-167. <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/abs/10.1111/1468-5906.00107>. Accessed September 20, 2020; Cadge, Wendy, Day, Heather, Wildeman, Christopher. *Bridging the Denomination-Congregation Divide: Evangelical Lutheran Church in America Congregations Respond to Homosexuality*, Review of Religious Research, Vol. 48, No. 3, 2007, 245-259. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/20447442>. Accessed September 20, 2020; White, Heather R. *Reforming Sodom: Protestants and the Rise of Gay Rights*, Chapel Hill, University of North Carolina Press, 2015.

<sup>288</sup> Further information on the Organization can be found at <https://www.dignityusa.org/history>. Accessed September 20, 2020.

<sup>289</sup> Mugavero, Francis. *Sexuality-God's Gift*. Brooklyn, Chancery, Pastoral Letter of the Bishop of Brooklyn, February 1976.

<sup>290</sup> Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith. *Letter to the Bishops of the Catholic Church on the Pastoral Care for Homosexual Persons*, Rome, October 1, 1986. <https://www.ewtn.com/catholicism/library/letter-to-the-bishops-of-the-catholic-church-on-the-pastoral-care-of-homosexual-persons-2081>. Accessed September 20, 2020.

official position of the church has been further reinforced during the long pontificate of John Paul II and to this day still condemns of same-sex relations as sinful<sup>291</sup>.

Fundamentalists and Evangelicals proved to be the more conservative Christian groups as far as homosexuality is concerned. Homosexuality has been consistently condemned as a sin subverting God-ordained sexuality, with argumentations strongly anchored on the literal interpretation of the Bible<sup>292</sup>. This left no space for any different exegesis of the Scriptures nor for any theological discussion on the issue that could have provided more conciliatory reasonings. Furthermore, when looking at the theological openings on the understanding of homosexuality that were happening within mainline denominations, Evangelicals openly addressed all these discussion as being based on “gross misinterpretations” or straightforward disregard for the Scripture<sup>293</sup>. Evangelical leaders did not have to find elaborate theological argumentations to sustain their opposition to homosexuality because the very same was being based on a literal interpretation of the Bible universally shared between congregations, which in turn meant that the issue quickly became predominantly – if not uniquely – a political and social one. This is even more evident when the rhetoric used by Religious Right leaders is taken into consideration. When in 1981 Falwell publicly spoke against homosexuality it referred to it as an “Homosexual Revolution” and based his arguments on Biblical passages in which homosexuality was addressed as a symptom of national degradation. Moreover, homosexuals themselves were presented not in their individuality but rather as a group “on the march”, as “militant gays”<sup>294</sup>. This rhetoric remained dominant in the imagery of the Religious Right as one decade later James Dobson would signal social acceptance of homosexuality as being part of a larger “Civil War” for American values<sup>295</sup>.

It’s important to underline that the understanding Evangelicals developed about homosexuality and for their consequently opposition to gay-rights has been since the beginning strongly anchored on religious and scriptural grounds. Indeed, not only the SBC had stated during the 1976 national convention that homosexuality is a sin<sup>296</sup>, but Evangelicals maintained through the decades an interpretation of the Bible in

---

<sup>291</sup> On the history of the Catholic church and homosexuality, see Westerfelhaus, Robert. *A Significant Shift: A Pentadic Analysis of the Two Rhetorics of the Post-Vatican II Roman Catholic Church Regarding Homosexuality*, International Journal of Sexuality and Gender Studies, 1998, Vol. 3, 269-294. <https://link.springer.com/article/10.1023/A:1023243500332>. Accessed September 20, 2020; McNeill, John J. *The Church and the Homosexual*, Boston, Beacon Press, 2015.

<sup>292</sup> Stanton, John L. *The Loving Opposition*, Christianity Today, July 19, 1993, 20; *Homosexuality and the Bible*, Christianity Today, November 5, 1990, 57.

<sup>293</sup> Stanton, John L. *The Loving Opposition*, 20.

<sup>294</sup> Falwell, Jerry. *Letter from Jerry Falwell on keeping Old Time Gospel on Air*, August 13, 1981. <https://texashistory.unt.edu/ark:/67531/metadc177440/>. Accessed September 20, 2020; Richburg, Keith B. *Falwell and the Moral Majority Declare War on City’s ‘Perverted Act’*, The Washington Post, September 10, 1981. <https://www.washingtonpost.com/archive/local/1981/09/10/falwell-and-moral-majority-declare-war-on-citys-perverted-act/75537070-76ba-459f-ba2d-606edb9cdde8/>. Accessed September 20, 2020.

<sup>295</sup> Dallas, Joe. *Born Gay?*, Christianity Today, June 22, 1992, 23.

<sup>296</sup> The complete resolution reads “The messengers to the Southern Baptist Convention meeting in Norfolk, Virginia, affirm our commitment to the biblical truth regarding the practice of homosexuality and sin”. [http://religiousinstitute.org/denom\\_statements/resolution-on-homosexuality-1976/](http://religiousinstitute.org/denom_statements/resolution-on-homosexuality-1976/). Accessed September 15, 2020.



which homosexuality was condemned as a behavior in clear defiance to God's teachings on sexuality<sup>297</sup>. Important consequences have derived from this biblical based arguments and religiously characterized approach. The first consequence has been that homosexuality was considered to be a sexual behavior that by falling outside of what Evangelicals considered to be rightful, meaning exclusively marital sexual intercourse, was easily compared to other forms of biblically condemned sexual deviances such as promiscuity, adultery, rape and even pedophilia<sup>298</sup>, something that would emerge in the profiles Religious Right leaders would draw during their campaigns to describe homosexuals. The second important consequence has been that since homosexuality was considered to be a morally wrong action and a sin, Evangelicals were open to the idea of a path of redemption for homosexuals, best exemplified in the ex-gay ministries that since the seventies had been promoted. Assuming that homosexuality was a sin further influenced the behavior of Evangelicals when relating to homosexuals, as if from one side they criticized and fiercely opposed gay-right activists and those promoting cultural and legal acceptance of homosexuality, from the other there have also been appeals to soften the tones of the controversial debate and show compassion and love for those striving to overcome their sexual orientations, calling for a general rediscovery of the 'hate the sin, love the sinner' concept, an effort that came with all its strong limits. The third and final consequence has been that having Evangelicals based their position and understanding of homosexuality largely on scriptural grounds, the whole debate around gay-rights crossed political and cultural lines and came to represent at least for them a sort of test for their faith and commitment to the Bible as a source of undeniable truth. Therefore, accepting any position on homosexuality different from what they had deduced from their biblical interpretations, even more when this meant accepting gay-rights and their cultural validation, would have meant for Evangelicals to go against the core of their faith and religious identity, since it would have required them to either twist the Bible or even worse to ignore what they thought to be clear and unequivocal mandates. But homosexuality and by extensions the debate around gay-rights represented for Evangelicals something else than a biblical sin, and indeed they quickly understood it as a product and at the same time cause of the moral decay the American society was undergoing due to the changes in the social, sexual and cultural arena advanced since the sixties by progressive groups. While the Bible provided Evangelicals with a moral framework ordained by God of acceptable sexual behaviors, it did not offer an answer to the question of why some individuals feel attracted to people of their own same gender. The same medical community was not able to provide at the time an univocal answer, and still to this day a variety

---

Briggs, Kenneth A. *Baptists, In Shift, Ask Members to Seek Antiabortion 'Climate'*, The New York Times, June 18, 1976. <https://www.nytimes.com/1976/06/18/archives/baptists-in-shift-ask-members-to-seek-antiabortion-climate.html>.

Accessed September 15, 2020.

<sup>297</sup> There are plenty of statements on the sinful nature of homosexuality within *Christianity Today*, for the most relevant see Frame, Randy. *The Evangelical Closet*, Christianity Today, November 5, 1990, 56; Dallas, Joe. *Born Gay?*, 23; Stanton, Jones L. *The Loving Opposition*, 21; *The Post Closet Era*, Christianity Today, November 13, 1995, 51.

<sup>298</sup> LeBlanc, Doug. *The Year of the Homosexual Vote*, Christianity Today, October 26, 1992, 66. In Oregon, the Oregon Citizen Alliance (OCA), a local Christian conservative organization, rallied to promote Measure 9, a state amendment to define by law "homosexuality, pedophilia, sadism and masochism [...] [as] abnormal, wrong, unnatural". The proposition was defeated but it clearly shows how conservative Christians associated homosexuality with a series of other sexual behaviors or crimes.

of opinions dominates the issue between those who maintain that homosexuality is an inborn trait of the individual, those who consider it to be a predisposition that can mature into a more or less defined sexual preference and those who instead insist that is the result of external factors<sup>299</sup>. In the midst of these opinions, Evangelicals developed their own answers about the nature and origins of homosexuality. They strongly opposed the idea of homosexuality as a lifestyle or as choice, arguing instead that same-sex attraction was a “condition homosexuals find themselves in without consciously choosing it”<sup>300</sup>. At the same time, when looking for the cause of homosexuality they mainly refused the arguments brought forward by some in the medical community about the genetic nature of same-sex attraction, an explanation that since its first appearance in the early nineties had received strong criticism from the scientific community itself, conceding at best that genetics might result in a predisposition or inclination towards homosexuality but not in the behavior itself<sup>301</sup>. The explanation Evangelicals provided about the nature of homosexuality was instead based on the idea that attraction to one’s own gender was caused by an early childhood trauma, not necessarily a violent one, the individual had experienced in his familiar environment. This childhood trauma was connected with either an history of abuse, or most commonly with the disequilibrium of traditional gender roles in the familiar structure and a deficient relationship with often the same-sex parent, which would cause a child to be confused about his own gender and sexual behavior, a position Evangelicals would reinforce through the testimonies of those undergoing homosexual healings<sup>302</sup>. This explanation falls under the larger category of the ‘environmental causes’ of homosexuality, which contends that same-sex attraction is a result of the broader context the individual finds himself in or of external forces acting on him, an advantageous understanding of homosexuality that allowed churches and ex-gay ministries to focus on the personal childhood and private family history of the homosexual individual seeking help to identify the original external factor and operate a process of healing. At the same time, the environmental explanation also allowed the Religious Right to develop instead a broader look that went beyond the person and unsurprisingly identified those external forces in the advancement of secularization and the degradation of American moral values, creating a discourse that sometime appeared as a vicious circle in which homosexuality was presented as both a symptom and a cause of the moral decadence of society. Religious Right leaders were universally in agreement that the social causes of homosexuality were to be found in the redefinition of traditional gender and familiar roles groups were

---

<sup>299</sup> Sheldon, Jane & Pfeffer, Carla & Jayaratne, Toby & Feldbaum, Merle & Petty, Elizabeth. *Beliefs About the Etiology of Homosexuality and About the Ramifications of Discovering Its Possible Genetic Origin*, Journal of homosexuality, Vol. 52, No. 3-4, 2007, 111-150. [https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1300/J082v52n03\\_06](https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1300/J082v52n03_06). Accessed September 11, 2020.; Kinney, Robert. *Homosexuality and Scientific Evidence: On Suspect Anecdotes, Antiquated Data, and Broad Generalizations*, The Linacre Quarterly, Vol. 83, No. 2, 2016, 364-390. <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1179/2050854915Y.0000000002a>. Accessed September 11, 2020.; Mills, Melinda. *How do genes affect same-sex behavior?*, Science, Vol. 365, No. 6456, 2019, 869-870. <https://science.sciencemag.org/content/365/6456/869>. Accessed September 11, 2020.

<sup>300</sup> *The Post Closet Era*, 60.

<sup>301</sup> *Born Gay?*, 22-23.

<sup>302</sup> For the testimonies provided by ex-gay born-again Christians, see Stafford, Tim. *Coming Out*, Christianity Today, August 18, 1989, 16-21; Stanton, Jones L. *The Loving Opposition*, 23; Stafford, Tim. *An Older, Wiser, Ex-Gay Movement*, Christianity Today, October 2007, 51.

promoting, which in their opinion were leaving children without proper relatable role models thus causing them sexual confusion<sup>303</sup>. But homosexuality was not presented simply as a by-product of the feminist or progressive agenda, but rather homosexuals were seen as playing an active role in the advancement of secularization against the traditional Christian values of the American family. All the most prominent Religious Right leaders addressed homosexuals and gay-right activists as complete moral opposite of the values-driven Christian American, motivated by the desire of nullify the traditional values of the American family for the sake of their own sexual perversion<sup>304</sup> or going as far as stating that the fight for homosexuality was part of “Satan’s diabolical attack upon the family”<sup>305</sup>. In their appeals, Religious Right leaders soon juxtaposed homosexuals with feminists, a hendiadys that historically dates back to the days of opposition to the Equal Rights Amendment<sup>306</sup> in the late seventies, which conservative Christians argued would have soon promoted homosexual marriage, but that became prominent after the 1977 National Women’s Conference in Houston, where feminists ratified their alliance with gay-right activists, an event later described as the turning point in the personal history of many conservative leaders such as Beverly LaHaye<sup>307</sup> and Phyllis Schlafly. From that point forward, Religious Right leaders would consistently referred to homosexuals and feminists as a duet with increasingly harsh and aggressive tones that culminated in what had been probably the most controversial accusation ever made against them, as on the aftermath of 9/11 Falwell infamously declared that through the efforts of secularizing America they “helped this [the terrorist attack] happen”<sup>308</sup>, a statement he would stepped back on after harsh criticism from the rest of the Evangelical community and even from president Bush himself. As it has appeared from the previous paragraph, homosexuality has been consistently considered by Evangelicals first of all as a sin, and a such unapologetically condemned through a series of arguments based on strong biblical and religious grounds. Moreover, believing homosexuality to be the result of external forces that have acted on the individual, Evangelicals have also understood same-sex orientation to be a product of the broader changes on gender relations progressive groups were advocating since the late sixties, even accusing homosexuals to be at the frontline of a perceived attack on the traditional Christian and American family. From these shared assumptions, two different approaches to homosexuality developed and coexisted,

---

<sup>303</sup> Durham, Martin. *The Christian Right*, 53-54; Griffith, R. Marie, *Moral Combat*, 292, 294-295.

<sup>304</sup> This position was assumed by Tim LaHaye, as reported in Ead. *Moral Combat*, 292.

<sup>305</sup> Falwell, Jerry. *Listen, America!*, New York, Bantam, 1980, 157-159.

<sup>306</sup> The Equal Rights Amendment (ERA) was an amendment proposal aimed at granting equal legal rights for all American citizens, whose most recent legislative history unfolded between 1971 and 1982. The Amendment did not reach the necessary number of state ratifications needed to become effective. Opposition to the ERA was led by conservative Christians, prominently by anti-feminist and conservative Catholic Phyllis Schlafly. For further information, see Geng, Chunling. *The Great Influence of ‘Stop-Era’ and Its Tactics on the Un-Ratification of the ERA*, Canadian Social Science, July 1, 2012, 8, 15-20; Rymph, Catherine M. *Republican Women: Feminism and Conservatism from Suffrage through the Rise of the New Right*, Chapel Hill, University of North Carolina Press, 2006; Marley, David J. *Phyllis Schlafly’s Battle against the ERA and Women in the Military*, Minerva, Quaterly Report on Women and the Military, 2000, 18, 17.

<sup>307</sup> Johnson, Emily S. *This Is Our Message*, 90; Durham, Martin. *The Christian Right*, 43.

<sup>308</sup> *Jerry Falwell and Pat Robertson Blame 9/11 on Organizations Like People for the American Way*, YouTube video, 1:20, from an episode of the *700 Club* televised by the Fox Family Channel [now Freeform] on September 13, 2001. Posted by “PFAWdotorg” on April 2, 2010. [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kMkBgA9\\_oQ4](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kMkBgA9_oQ4). Accessed September 10, 2020.

one more influenced by religious doctrine and focused on the personal experience of the individual in order to attempt an healing and correct the sexual orientation towards more biblical lenient models, while the other dominated by a more ideological stand and adopted on the public policy scene to voice a political position on social issues. Similarities and differences can also be observed in the image Evangelicals developed about homosexuals, as it was directly related to the reasons behind opposition to homosexuality. Generally, homosexuals were all considered to be bearers of a wrongful position, but while some saw them as sinners, other considered them as a threat. Starting from the first model, homosexuals were seeing primary as sinners by those Evangelicals who were closer to ex-gay ministries or were personally involved in these initiatives, often being themselves ex-gay born-again Christians now seeking to provide help. The image of the homosexual drawn by these Evangelicals was all except a threatening one, often depicting gay people as suffering individuals too often left lonely by their families and peers, an emphatic image accompanied by appeals to the broader Evangelical movement to become more welcoming towards struggling homosexuals and to change the tones of the debate from gay-bashing to anti-gay activism, intended indeed as a compassionate effort of healing<sup>309</sup>. By all accounts, the image of homosexuals and the relative approach to them developed by this segment of born-again Christians can be described with the already mentioned concept of hate the sin, love the sinner, and as such proved to be rather resistant since it had been maintained through the years, even during some of the most heated moments of the gay-rights debate of the nineties and early two-thousands<sup>310</sup>. This said, this image came with its limits which were strictly related with the very same nature of the anti-gay ministries. Undeniably, the strong appeal to empathy and comprehension stemmed from the personal experience of some Evangelicals who had struggled with their sexual orientation and the threat they felt of being abandoned by the family and community they were living in, as it often emerges from the description itself they personally provided, thus prompting these ex-gay Christians to approach their struggling peers from a different position than the rest of their co-believers<sup>311</sup>. But it's also true that a compassionate rhetoric and therefore approach was necessary for the appeal of the movement towards people struggling with what they considered to be a religious and moral dilemma, and indeed similarly to CPCs ex-gay ministries often blamed the harsh and violent tones of the more politically engaged Religious Right as turning homosexuals away from ex-gay programs towards instead the gay-rights movement<sup>312</sup>. This consideration is not meant to diminish the sincerity behind the feelings and motivations of these Evangelical activists, but comes nonetheless as a necessary clarification when acknowledging that these ministries had nonetheless an anti-gay goal and were by no means a place of tolerance. Ex-gay ministries indeed still considered

---

<sup>309</sup> Stafford, Tim. *Coming Out*, 17; Neff, David. *The New Ex-Gay Agenda*, Christianity Today, March 9, 1992, 21.

<sup>310</sup> As an example, the commitment made by president Bill Clinton to remove the Act banning homosexuals from the military, and the juridical debate about state recognized same-sex marriage caused in those years by the court case *Baehr v. Miike* debated in the state of Hawaii.

<sup>311</sup> Among the examples of ex-gay Christians reporting this fear of ostracism, see the experience of Colin Cook by himself narrated in *I Found Freedom*, Christianity Today, August 18, 1989, 22-24; Ralph Blair, founder of Evangelicals Concerned, stated that he knew many homosexual pastors who were keeping their sexuality secret because “[they] realize that to disclose this would ruin their career”. In Frame, Randy. *The Evangelical Closet*, 56.

<sup>312</sup> Id. *The Evangelical Closet*, 57.

homosexuality to be wrong in itself, a sinful behavior for which a Christian had to seek atonement and healing, and with these assumptions they confronted homosexuals showing compassion and understanding only for those who wanted to undergo a path of repentance. Arguments such as acceptance of homosexuality and gay-rights were not even considered among these circles, as the goal of these ministries was explicitly anti-gay and did not admit by principle any other position not compliant with the biblical interpretation of same-sex relations they followed. It necessarily comes that all those gay people who instead promoted cultural and legal acceptance for their sexual orientation were simply not approached by ex-gay ministries, who maintained the wrongfulness of that position but choose not to fight it in confrontational terms most probably to not undermine their efforts.

Very different was instead the image of homosexuals depicted by the Religious Right and by other activists who chose to directly confront on the public scene the expansion of gay-rights. The idea they developed of homosexuality as part of a larger attack on the traditional American family and its values carried on by a cohort of secularists forces was directly transferred on the image of the homosexual they held. No trace of empathy or attempted understanding can be noticed on the rhetoric crafted by Religious Right leaders, who counted homosexuals, especially the most outspoken gay-rights activists among them, as being at the forefront of the secular attack on the family. One trait in particular emerged since the first anti-gay initiatives of the late seventies, that being the threat homosexuals posed to children. Contrary to the nowadays stereotypical image of the gay man as highly sensible and overly feminized, conservative Christians imagined homosexuals as masculine individuals with an uncontrollable sexual libido which compelled them not only to engage in promiscuity, but to target children. This image was also being reinforced by the early idea that “since homosexuals cannot reproduce, they must recruit”<sup>313</sup>, popularized since the early days of Evangelical opposition to homosexuality by activists such as Anita Bryant (born 1940) or leaders as Tim LaHaye, who maintained that every homosexual was potentially an “evangelist of homosexuality, capable of perverting many young people to his sinful way of life”<sup>314</sup>. Crucial for the development of the image of homosexuals as child predators have been from one side the fact that being homosexuality already considered a deviant sexual

---

<sup>313</sup> For her personal biography and the personal views of the activist, see Bryant, Anita. *The Anita Bryant Story: The Survival of Our Nation's Families and the Threat of Militant Homosexuality*, Old Tappan, Fleming H. Revell, 1977; For a more historical account, see Johnson, Emily S. *This Is Our Message*. Born in 1940 in Oklahoma, Anita Bryant rose to prominence on the national scene as a pop singer in the sixties. Her artistic career saw a transition from pop, love centered songs, to a more ‘God and Country’ genre, a shift that paralleled her spiritual growth as a born-again Christian. Bryant befriended important Evangelical pastors and even joined Billy Graham on his crusades. Similarly to the broader changes the Evangelical community was undergoing the mid-seventies, Bryant’s life took a decisive turn towards political involvement in the mid-decade when she organized the PAC campaign to primarily oppose the employment of homosexual teachers in public schools, accused of being a threat for the psychological and physical health of the children. Although successful in Dade County, the efforts to expand the PAC campaign on a wider national level largely stalled. In the early eighties Bryant lost her primary sponsor following a successful boycott organized by the gay community against the brand of beverages she was the spokeswoman for. Her financial situation was further aggravated by the divorce from her husband and manager, which left her without a stable foothold on the music industry. Furthermore, the complicate divorce she endured alienated her from the very same Evangelical leadership she had associated with. Alone and in a dire financial crisis, Bryant retired to private life.

<sup>314</sup> LaHaye, Tim & LaHaye, Beverly. *The Act of Marriage*, Grand Rapids, Zondervan, 1976, 279.

behavior on biblical grounds it became easier for Evangelicals to simply compare it to other repulsive practices, from the other the wide publicization the comparison received during one of the earliest anti-gay campaigns, the Protect American Children (PAC) initiative of Anita Bryant, whose name is indicative of the strong image of homosexuals as a threat to children. PAC was initiated in 1976 in response to a local legislative initiative Miami-Dade County had passed in order to amend its anti-discrimination code to include protection against discrimination on the base of sexual preference. Bryant, a singer with a national fame and a devout Christian, led the efforts of the local conservative forces to oppose the amendment and focused its efforts on defending school children from being taught by gay teachers, who according to the activists would have either molested or perverted their students into becoming gay. The initiative became famous through the country and soon Bryant received support from Falwell himself and the SBC, all sharing her concerns and child-focused rhetoric<sup>315</sup>. Bryant's legacy survived her ill-fated activist career<sup>316</sup>, and the fight against homosexual teachers and the teaching of homosexuality in general continued through the years motivated by the same arguments Bryant had advanced, propelled by future organizations such as Focus on the Family or the Family Research Council<sup>317</sup>. Beyond this particular but evocative trait, homosexuals were considered a threat because they were not seen as being part of a mistreated group but rather members of a small but highly influential elite which alongside feminists and secular medias were promoting corrupting behaviors among the American society<sup>318</sup>. Therefore, differently from the image of homosexuals ex-gay ministries had developed, the one painted by the Religious Right was much more unequivocal and straightforward. All the Religious Right did was simply transferring the assumptions about the menacing aspects of homosexuality for the American family from the sexual behavior to those engaging in it. Homosexuals became ideological enemies, as they were considered to play an active role in the cohort of secular forces advancing what was considered a corruptive and anti-Christian agenda, and even as some appeals were made to reduce the gay-bashing rhetoric and overall tones of the debate, no compromise ever came from the Religious Right pundits about the inherently wrongfulness and threatening nature of homosexuality<sup>319</sup>.

In order to definitively understand what homosexuality and the gay-rights debate meant for Evangelicals and the Religious Right, it's necessary to deal with what they thought could have been the consequences of an eventual legislative and cultural acceptance of homosexuality. Considering the general idea Evangelicals maintained about same-sex relationship and the image they developed of homosexuals, it

---

<sup>315</sup> Johnson, Emily S. *This Is Our Message*, 38; Griffith, R. Marie. *Moral Combat*, 290.

<sup>316</sup> Gay-rights activists, galvanized by Bryant campaign and the notoriety gay-rights gained due to the controversies around them, organized counter protests and even sabotaged the beverage brand Bryant sponsored, Florida Orange Juice. Gay-rights activists efforts were very effective, as from one side PAC started to lose referendums around the country, from the other Bryant career suffered enormously from the boycott. On top of that, Bryant divorced her husband and agent in the early eighties, a decision that left her in dire financial straits and alienated her from the rest of the religious right leadership. For further information, see Johnson, Emily S. *This Is Our Message*, 63-66.

<sup>317</sup> Durham, Martin. *The Christian Right*, 53.

<sup>318</sup> Griffith, R. Marie. *Moral Combat*, 289; Durham, Martin. *The Christian Right*, 51;

<sup>319</sup> *Religious Right Rallies for Gay-Rights Battle*, Christianity Today, July 22, 1991, 39; Webster, Alexander F.C. *Homosexuals In Uniform?*, Christianity Today, February 8, 1993, 23;

comes not as a surprise that any prospect of expansion of gay-rights was accompanied by a deep and intimate fear for the future of American families and society. Nonetheless, the scopes of this generally shared fear took many forms, with expected consequences stratifying into different layers of gravity, from total apocalypse to more defined economic concerns. This has not meant that each preacher, group or association developed their own expectations and maintained these through the years, but rather that from a common background that always referred to the breakdown of American society, different narratives were developed and mutually exchanged or adopted depending on particular contingencies. For example, the need to defeat a local legislative initiative granting special rights to homosexuals might have resulted in a narrative that channeled fear through economic concerns, arguing that granting anti-discrimination laws to homosexuals would have depleted other of their liberties. The most loud narratives about what the acceptance of homosexuality would have meant described literally apocalyptic consequences for the future of America society, with preaches such as Robertson, Falwell and Tim LaHaye arguing that an advancement of gay-rights would have brought the ire of God upon the nation, since the commandments of the Bible would have been forsaken in favor of a secular agenda<sup>320</sup>. Aside from these apocalyptic arguments, which sometime incurred in condemnation or at least strong disagreement coming from the Religious Right itself or from the broader Evangelical community, a more accepted assumption solidified around the idea that homosexuality would have corroded American morality and thus led to the dissolution of the familiar tissue, and by extension of the societal one. Already present in the early days of opposition to gay-rights, this argument became increasingly more dominant when same-sex marriage started to appear as a prominent issue on the public policy debate during the nineties. The extent of the threat posed by the acceptance of homosexuality Evangelicals perceived was further reinforced by the idea that gay-rights represented only the initial push for a cascade of further social initiatives perceived to be affine. Evangelicals reasoned that allowing anti-discrimination laws as far sexual orientation is concerned would have led at first to children being taught in school to be homosexuals, as well as religious expression of individuals and organizations opposing homosexuality would have been curtailed or harassed by the government<sup>321</sup>, and then in time to the government condoning other forms of sexual behaviors such as “bigamy, polygamy, incest and adultery”<sup>322</sup>. The same domino narrative affected also confrontation within the church bodies around the possible ‘blessing’ of homosexuality, as Evangelicals consistently maintained that supporting homoerotic relationships from the pulpit would have led to “other signs of departure from the faith”, including of course the acceptance of abortion<sup>323</sup>. These diffused narratives about the social effects of homosexuality are very similar to the more apocalyptic ones pronounced by Religious Right leaders from political as well as church pulpits. If it were not for the tones of the statements that eschewed images of biblical punishments in favor of man-made social corruption, by simply comparing the expected outcomes acceptance of homosexuality would have resulted in it would be difficult to distinguish the discourse made by a zealous

---

<sup>320</sup> Durham, Martin. *The Christian Right*, 54; Griffith, R. Marie. *Moral Combat*, 290-292.

<sup>321</sup> Frame, Randy. *Seeking a Right to the Rite*, Christianity Today, March 4, 1996, 64.

<sup>322</sup> Kennedy, John W. *The marriage battle begins*, Christianity Today, September 2003, 33. The quoted words belong to Sen. Rick Santorum (born 1958) (R-Pa).

<sup>323</sup> Humphrey, Edith M. *What God Hat Not Joined*, Christianity Today, September 2004, 41.

leader in front of a political caucus or a congregation from arguments brought forward by non-politically involved figures or even intellectuals. This to say that opposition to homosexuality and the arguments around it were more than rallying calls for political or electoral purposes, being instead deeply ingrained in the view Evangelicals held about their surrounding world and society. Aside from these more far reaching ideas about what gay-rights would have resulted in for the future of America, some pragmatic and non-religious based claims were made especially to confront legislative initiatives on a local level, a change of attitude most probably caused by the need of having to appeal to people with different cultural and ideological backgrounds as well as by the peculiarities the local dimension brought with itself. An early example was Christian opposition to the attempt in late 1989 by the San Francisco City Council to pass a resolution that would have allowed gay couples and non-married heterosexual couples to form domestic partnerships recognized by the city. The resolution also left the door open to a possible expansion of healthcare benefits for partners of city workers who register under this form. Instead of framing the whole battle against the proposition as a matter of family defense and morality, local conservative Christian organizations campaigned especially on the grounds that the proposition would have placed a financial burden on the whole city population due to the high costs of the healthcare benefits it might have included, an argument made even stronger by the high number of AIDS cases in the city and its gay community since treatment was notoriously expensive. In a surprise turn of events, conservative Christian efforts to gather support by targeting business owners and taxpayer citizens rather than zealous defenders of families were successful, as the proposition was turned down through a referendum on November 7, 1989<sup>324</sup>. Considering the context in which this event happened, as San Francisco was largely regarded as the most welcoming city for homosexuals with a big and thriving gay-community, it becomes clear that the reasons behind such a different and more composed approach are to be found in the particular electoral composition of the city itself, which would have made impossible the success of a campaign on different grounds. Another famous example is the already mentioned campaign led by the Colorado for Family Values (CFV), in which the conservative group, backed by other important Religious Right organizations such as Focus on the Family, opposed a clause that would have included homosexuals under the list of protected class status, on the same level of other disadvantaged minorities<sup>325</sup>. Interestingly, instead of campaigning on moral grounds and arguing that such a legislation would have resulted in social or moral corruption, CFV choose to base its arguments on the fact that homosexuals did not match the definition given in the civil rights era of disadvantaged minority, since gay people averagely did not suffer economically, do not have a distinct physical characteristic distinguishing them as a group and actually held political influence, as legislation championed by gay lobbies was actually finding success on local and states level<sup>326</sup>. Allowing gay people to have special protections, CFV argued, would have been not only wrong but detrimental to the liberties of everybody else, as homosexuals were not simply disadvantaged but actually influential as a group.

---

<sup>324</sup> Digitale, Robert. *San Francisco Set to Define 'Family'*, Christianity Today, October 20, 1989, 46; *Plans for Gay Rights and Giants Lose*, The New York Time, November 9, 1989. <https://www.nytimes.com/1989/11/09/us/the-1989-elections-san-francisco-plans-for-gay-rights-and-giants-lose.html>. Accessed September 5, 2020.

<sup>325</sup> Durham, Martin. *The Christian Right*, 56.

<sup>326</sup> Ivi.



CFV efforts concretized in an Amendment 2 of Colorado, which prohibited laws granting extra protection on the base of sex orientation and was passed through a state referendum on November 1992 only to be deemed unconstitutional by the Supreme Court four years later<sup>327</sup>. Despite having been in the end a vain effort, the CFV campaign proves once more that it was possible for conservative Evangelicals and even for some groups of the Religious Right to articulate different narratives avoiding *in toto* biblical and religious arguments, even if in the end those who sustained these campaigns were nonetheless conscious of and exposed to those narratives of social and moral threat previously discussed.

## 5.2 *Gay-Rights on the Public Policy Debate*

The Evangelical view on homosexuality appears since the beginning as an uncompromising one, powered by strong and sometime even violent narratives about the nature of same-sex attraction, the identity of homosexuals and the possible consequences of an expansion of gay-rights. Conservative Evangelicals in general, being them leaders or activists of the Religious Right, or being them ministers and fellows of a congregation, all were exposed to the same core narratives and concepts and all developed their arguments starting from the biblical bases they were more familiar with. It has been shown indeed how even those Evangelicals that might have appeared as the more compassionate and moderate ones still maintained the same base concepts about the sinful and threatening nature of same-sex attraction, showing compassion only towards those ready to undergo a ‘healing’ treatment. The same is also valid for those approaches and solutions that might have appeared as being more pragmatic or emptied by religious arguments, as this was the result not of an evolving idea about homosexuality but of convenience and effectiveness. This part of the chapter will indeed further complement the previous one by providing an insight on those approaches Evangelicals have adopted to oppose gay-rights on the political scene. As the debate moved from the individual and his sexuality to public policy, conservative Christians directly transported to their political activism that strong and uncompromising view on homosexuality that has formed their theoretical background. Notably, some public policy issues received more attention than others and for the period considered gay marriage dominated the homosexuality debate from the local level all the way up to the White House. Before discussing the political aspects of opposition to gay-rights, it’s useful to remind that politics did not constitute the only field in which Evangelicals operated to promote their views about sexuality and much of their efforts were concentrated on non-political efforts such as ex-gay ministries. These were promoted either as non-political initiatives by politically involved groups such as Focus on the Family<sup>328</sup>, or were organized by local groups often in affiliation with a church and associated with each other under umbrella organizations such as Exodus International, launched in 1976. Moreover, ex-gay ministries were not an uniquely Evangelical experience but

---

<sup>327</sup> Rabey, Steve. *Courts Strikes Down Homosexual Rights Ban*, Christianity Today, June 17, 1996, 70.

<sup>328</sup> From 1998 Focus on the Family had promoted its own ex-gay ministry named Love Won Out, later sold in 2009 to Exodus International. <https://web.archive.org/web/20090816165408/http://www.bpnews.net/bpnews.asp?id=31084>. Accessed September 5, 2020.

rather a common sight on the conservative religious landscape of the United States: the Catholic Church launched its own ex-gay organization, Courage<sup>329</sup> in 1980, while conservative Jewish created their own initiative Jewish Offering New Alternatives for Healing (JONAH)<sup>330</sup> in 1999. Ex-gay ministries operated all by sharing the same basic assumption about the nature of homosexuality, arguing that it was not an inborn trait of the individual but rather a sinful behavior therefore curable through a process of healing, later structured into a psychological process known as ‘conversion therapy’. While the absence of a singular model of healing therapy does not allow a comprehensive generalization of the phenomenon, the experience of Exodus International, the largest ex-gay organization of the nineties and two-thousands, represents a close enough case to generally understand what these therapies consisted in and how they were welcomed by conservative and liberals alike. The core of ex-gay ministries was represented by individual or group counselling in which a staff member of the organization talked with homosexuals striving to overcome their feelings and together they tried to understand how these feelings started in the first place. Once they had understood the origins of homosexual feelings, which as demonstrated previously was always sought in an early childhood trauma and familiar disbalance, the counselor would help in the healing process offering personal as well as spiritual guidance, sometime even developing a step-by-step approach not so different from that used to overcome other addictions<sup>331</sup>. While it comes not as a surprise that ex-gay ministries were harshly criticized by gay-rights activists and social liberals in general, it’s worth noting that they were not completely understood and neither supported by all conservative Christians alike, as many remained uncertain about the effectiveness of one’s healing thus leading to ostracism against ex-homosexuals<sup>332</sup>. Through the decades, Exodus paid increasingly more attention in presenting the change to heterosexuality as a gradual one, and if in the beginning an endpoint to the ex-gay path was seen and pursued<sup>333</sup>, slowly the organization started to maintain that change required a “lifetime of discipleship”<sup>334</sup> and that sometime it could not be enough as it was possible for a person to struggle with his homosexual feelings for the rest of his life, a change that followed the general trend happening in society towards social acceptance of homosexuality as well as developments in the scientific and psychological debate<sup>335</sup>. Indeed, in 2007 Exodus boasted the effectiveness of its therapies through a study that had proved

---

<sup>329</sup> More information at: <https://couragerc.org/>. Accessed September 5, 2020.

<sup>330</sup> More information at: <https://web.archive.org/web/20150319201524/http://jonahweb.org/sections.php?secId=11>. Accessed September 5, 2020.

<sup>331</sup> A notable example is offered by Courage International, which developed a program titled “The Twelve Steps of Courage” on the model of the more famous Twelve Step Program of the Alcoholics Anonymous. More Information at <https://couragerc.org/resource/twelve-steps/>. Accessed September 20, 2020.

<sup>332</sup> Neff, David. *The New Ex-Gay Agenda*, 21; Davies, Bob. *Ex-Gay Sheds The Mocking Quote Marks*, Christianity Today, January 7, 2002, 55; Stafford, Tim. *An Older, Wiser Ex-Gay Movement*, Christianity Today, October 2007, 51.

<sup>333</sup> Stafford, Tim. *Coming Out*, 21.

<sup>334</sup> Id. *An Older, Wiser Ex-Gay Movement*, 50.

<sup>335</sup> A comprehensive figure of trends about cultural acceptance of homosexuality in American society can be found at <https://news.gallup.com/poll/1651/gay-lesbian-rights.aspx>. Accessed September 5, 2020. For the scientific debate, the American Psychiatric Association Stated that it “[...] does not believe that same-sex orientation should or needs to be changed, and efforts to do so represent a significant risk of harm by subjecting individuals to forms of treatment which have not been scientifically validated and by undermining self-esteem when sexual orientation fails to change”. In Scasta, David & Bialer, Philip, & the American Psychiatric Association. *Position statement on issues related to homosexuality*.

that around 38% of struggling homosexuals were cured to heterosexuality and 29% more showed improvement towards a convincing change only five years later it completely retracted from this position and its then president Alan Chambers (born 1972) denounced the complete failure of conversion therapy, leading to the disbandment of Exodus in 2013<sup>336</sup>. As studies about the ineffectiveness of conversion therapy multiplied and states began to either discourage or directly ban the practice<sup>337</sup>, in the 2010s ex-gay ministries' efforts were severely curtailed and many of them disappeared<sup>338</sup>. The history of ex-gay ministries demonstrates how deeply rooted was opposition to homosexuality in the Evangelical community, since not only ex-gay organizations that made an anti-gay goal the core of their activism engaged only with homosexuals ready to recognize the wrongfulness of their sexuality, but their ex-gay members were still being subjected to ostracism and stigmatized by the rest of their churches. Changing cultural trends and legal landscapes concurred to put an end to an initiative that since the beginning had to find legitimacy among the very same subculture where it had emerged, proving that anything that was not staunch opposition to homosexuality was not enough to be wholly accepted. Far more sustained by the Evangelical community have been instead the efforts to oppose on the political stage gay-rights and the acceptance of homosexuality. These have manifested in initiatives undertaken by conservative Christian organizations on a series of different political levels, from strictly local

---

<sup>336</sup> Stafford, Tim. *The Best Research Yet*, Christianity Today, October 2007, 54. The research titled *Ex-Gays?: A Continuing Study of Religiously Mediated Sexual Orientation Change in Exodus Participants* has been conducted in 2007 by then professor of psychology and provost at Wheaton College Stanton Jones, , and by Regent University professor Mark Yarhouse. It should be noted that both Wheaton College and Regent University are private university of Evangelical foundation, the latter in particular has been founded by Pat Robertson.

<sup>337</sup> In the United States the practice has been called into question and while some States and Counties have passed local bans especially for conversion therapy for minors, on a federal level no ban has been issued despite concerns being expressed at the highest political level for example by president Barack Obama. *Obama Calls for end to 'gay conversion therapy'*, BBC News, April 9, 2015. <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-us-canada-32227353>. Accessed September 5, 2020; The European Parliament critiqued the therapy and urged Member States to pass bans. As today, September 8, 2020, conversion therapy has been banned by Malta, Germany (for minors and adults forced or fraud into it) and Albany (not EU member). Duffy, Nick. *European Parliament condemns gay cure therapy and tells EU member states to ban it*. Pink News, March 1, 2018. <https://www.pinknews.co.uk/2018/03/01/european-parliament-condemns-gay-cure-therapy-and-tells-eu-member-states-to-ban-it/>. Accessed September 8, 2020.

<sup>338</sup> Exodus International was disbanded in 2013; in 2015 a court found JONAH guilty of consumer fraud by claiming that through conversion therapy it could revert sexual preferences. Following the case JONAH was forced to pay an indemnity of \$3.5millions and to shut down all activities, websites and servers. In the aftermath of the case, the executive broad of JONAH tried to re-incorporate the assets of the organization into a new one named Jewish Institute for Global Awareness (JIFGA), only to be once more brought to trial and receive the same judgement. Livio, Susane K. *Group claiming to turn gay men straight committed consumer fraud, N.J. jury says*, NJ.com, January 17, 2019. [https://www.nj.com/politics/2015/06/gay\\_conversion\\_therapy\\_fraud\\_trial\\_verdict.html](https://www.nj.com/politics/2015/06/gay_conversion_therapy_fraud_trial_verdict.html). Accessed September 5, 2020; Courage remains active to this day since it does not pursue conversion therapy but rather abstinence for homosexual people. Indeed, the Catholic approach to homosexuality has been rather different than the Evangelical one. In Catholic theology, the understanding of homosexuality soon differentiated between 'homosexual orientation', considered not always freely chosen, and 'homosexual activity', which being an action was the result of a choice and thus prohibited. Therefore, rather than changing one person's sexual orientation, Catholic efforts were aimed towards a life in compliance with the official teachings of the church on sexuality. Since same-sex marriage was opposed, chastity remained the only accepted alternative for homosexuals. Courage was based on this understanding of homosexuality, and because of this it faced resistance both from conservative Catholics who did not believe any such organizations should be directing towards supporting openly gay and lesbian Catholics and from liberals who wanted a rethinking of the church position on sexual matters.

to nationwide. Conservative Christians have created small associations or organizations in order to contrast public policy initiatives that would have had consequences on a strictly local level, such as a city or county decisions to implement non-discrimination policies or often school board initiatives to implement a gay-accepting educational curriculum. In this case, local associations have either conducted their campaigns autonomously, as with the aforementioned San Francisco initiative, or have received support from bigger organizations of the Religious Right, which intervened in order to enhance the political clout of the group and to offer logistic support. Religious Right organizations picked their battles according to the affinity between the issue discussed and the goal of the organization, so for example Focus on the Family privileged school related issues and promoted in this circuit its literature on sexuality while Concerned Women for America offered support for legislative issues<sup>339</sup>, all part of the effort to strengthen and mobilize a grassroots base across the nation. These initiatives encountered different outcomes and depending on local circumstances as well as the strategies adopted some succeeded where others failed, with a major distinction being the ability to forge a narrative that went beyond moral arguments to touch economic and civil-right concerns. Exemplar is the case of the Oregon Citizen Alliance and CFV, contemporary local organizations both opposing in 1992 an expansion of gay-right legislation in their respective States: while the former adopted a morally based strategy and lost the national referendum, the latter chose to eschew as much as possible moral arguments in favor of a more legalistic approach that, by using the very same standards developed by the courts in the civil right era, could demonstrated how homosexuals were not a disadvantage minority thus denying further civil-rights being granted on the base of sexual preference, a strategy that secured the referendum victory<sup>340</sup>. Moreover, while some initiatives remained highly local, such as those in San Francisco and Oregon, other crossed state boundaries and reached the national scene. Colorado Amendment 2 represents once more a compelling example for a local initiative becoming national. CFV had indeed received since the beginning of its campaign support from Focus on the Family and Promise Keepers<sup>341</sup>, and this only increased after the victory at the polls, allowing for the organization of conferences and seminars in other states in which conservative Christians were engaging similar battles<sup>342</sup>. Furthermore, CFV had set an example soon to be followed also at higher political levels, as when in 1994 congressman Gerry Studd (1937-2006) proposed the passage of the Employment Non-Discrimination Act, which would have federally prohibited discrimination on the base of sexual orientation, conservative Christians opposing the proposition largely followed the argumentations CFV had brought

---

<sup>339</sup> *Religious Right Rallies for Gay-Rights Battles*, 38; Rabey, Steve. *Court Strikes Down Homosexual Rights Ban*, Christianity Today, June 17, 1996, 70.

<sup>340</sup> Durham, Martin. *The Christian Right*. 56-57.

<sup>341</sup> Rabey, Steve. *Court Strikes Down Homosexual Rights Ban*. 68; Promise Keepers is an evangelical organization for men founded in 1990. It champions the evangelical ideal of male behavior, opposing homosexuality and promoting marriage fidelity and commitment. It also promotes the traditional Christian family model, based on husband-led household. Further information at: <https://promisekeepers.org/promise-keepers/about-us-2/>. On Promise Keepers, see Everton, Sean F. *The Promise Keepers: Religious Revival or Third Wave of the Religious Right?*, Review of Religious Research, Vol. 43, No. 1, 2001, 51-69. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/3512243>. Accessed September 15, 2020.

<sup>342</sup> Durham, Martin. *The Christian Right*, 58.

forward two years before, stating that as a class homosexuals do not constitute a disadvantage minority<sup>343</sup>. CFV crossed state boundaries also for its juridical history, as the amendment approved through national referendum was struck down first by the Denver District court, then by the Colorado supreme court and finally by the Supreme Court in 1996, which in *Romer v. Evans*<sup>344</sup> deemed the amendment unconstitutional since it specifically identified a particular set of people and denied them “even the protection of general laws and policies that prohibits arbitrary discrimination”<sup>345</sup>. The Supreme Court ruling put a definitive end not only to Amendment 2 but also to the model of opposition inaugurated by CFV since it invalidated the very central arguments brought forward by the Colorado based organization, thus pushing the Religious Right away from pursuing in the future more pragmatic approaches to the gay-right issue. Such has been the case for example with the most prioritized gay-related issue of the nineties and early two-thousands, that of gay marriage. Marriage was not considered a priority in the beginnings of the gay-liberation movement, and the homosexual community itself was divided on how to consider the institution between those who would have liked to establish a lifelong relationship and those instead who advocated for sexual freedom, sometime even claiming that marriage was a conservative if not oppressive creation<sup>346</sup>. By the late eighties the situation had changed, and the gay community started to seek same-sex marriage or at least civil unions or domestic partnership with marriage-like benefits. Many reasons might have been behind this change, which can be interpreted as an important step forward towards further social acceptance of homosexuality as well as a new pursuit based on much more concrete economic and legal concerns. The AIDS epidemic that ravaged through the eighties American society and the gay community in particular had exposed gay people to the fact that long-term partners lacked any influence on health-related decisions as well as on any possible inheritance, pension or benefit in general coming from the loss of a loved one. Indeed, the first efforts towards partnerships with recognized benefits did not materialized in claims over the marriage institution but rather towards unions that could provide some marriage like benefits, a move motivated by the facts that marriage was still a deeply religious institution not recognized by any traditional Christian denomination until the early two-thousands, and that the priority for gay people was to have access to the benefits rather than to the formula of marriage. Such has been the case for instance at the center of the aforementioned San Francisco initiative, where domestic partnership with healthcare benefits were sought by homosexuals while marriage was not even mentioned, as the law proposal was even intended for unmarried heterosexual couples. This said, it’s not possible to underestimate the fact that marriage represented an important social and cultural institution with strong religious and civic traits, thus defining the very same identity of a nation. Having access to same-sex marriage would have meant for homosexuals to advance social acceptance of homosexuality further than ever before. Legally protected civil unions with marriage-like benefits would have facilitated the future access to such an important institution better than more uncompromising campaigns. By the early nineties same sex-marriage

---

<sup>343</sup> *Christians Decry Rights Bill*, Christianity Today, September 12, 1994, 60.

<sup>344</sup> For information about the ruling can be found at: <https://www.britannica.com/event/Romer-v-Evans>. Accessed September 6, 2020.

<sup>345</sup> Rabey, Steve. *Court Strikes Down Homosexual Rights Bill*, 70.

<sup>346</sup> Griffith, Marie R. *Moral Combat*, 287.

emerged as a topic in the gay community and soon appeals to its liberalization were made, while individual congregations within umbrella denominations started to celebrate independently marriages or marriage-like ceremonies although without legal values<sup>347</sup>. The event that brought same-sex marriage on the forefront of the American public and political scene happened in 1993, when the Supreme Court of Hawaii in *Baehr v. Miike*<sup>348</sup> ruled that a barrier to marriage for homosexuals was unconstitutional since it violated the anti-discriminatory clause enshrined in the constitutional equal protection clause, starting a long juridical process that if successful would have allowed the state to effectively emanate marriage licenses to homosexual couples with all the benefits connected to them. The Hawaiian case represented a turning point for both sustainers and opposers of gay-rights because of the principle behind the ‘Full Faith and Credit Clause’ of the U.S. Constitution<sup>349</sup>, which requires states to recognize each other’s “public acts, records and juridical proceedings”, thus meaning that an homosexual couple married in Hawaii could have had the right to have its marriage recognized in any other state regardless of local marriage law. At the same time though, marriage represented a particular case as states were free to regulate the institution as long as these regulations were constitutional, a prescription made ambiguous by the absence at that time of a federal ruling or amendment particularly addressing same-sex relations. Therefore, homosexual activists from one side and social conservatives from the other sought from the beginning some legislative or juridical bases to sustain their respective positions, and while the former pushed their claims through the equal protection clause of the fourth Amendment, the latter found themselves in difficulty as their strongest legal claim was based on the upholding by states of anti-sodomy laws, which since the 1960s were being increasingly repealed<sup>350</sup>. Nonetheless, a conjunction of events gave conservative Christians the opportunity to gain the upper hand on the marriage debate and promote a federal law which would have given states the opportunity to legislate on the status of marriage: Congress was being dominated by a strong Republican majority since the 1994 takeover, while the Presidency was suffering from the personal misconduct of Clinton, who was under trial for sexual harassment against Paula Jones (born 1966)<sup>351</sup>. Under pressure, president Clinton, who previously had advocated an expansion of gay-rights, signed on September 21, 1996 the Defense of Marriage Act (DOMA), which defined ‘marriage’ for federal purposes as the “legal union between one man and one woman as husband and wife”<sup>352</sup> and allowed states to refuse to recognize same-sex marriages sanctioned by other states. Although the Family Research Council, the leading organization behind the coalition that had pushed DOMA, welcomed the Act as a “good first step in forestalling new homosexual right advances”<sup>353</sup>, no subsequent step forward would have been made. DOMA surely had

---

<sup>347</sup> Frame, Randy. *Seeking a Right to the Rite*, 65.

<sup>348</sup> Further information on the case can be found at: <https://www.lambdalegal.org/in-court/cases/baehr-v-miike>. Accessed September 6, 2020.

<sup>349</sup> Information on the Clause can be found at: <https://constitutioncenter.org/interactive-constitution/interpretation/article-iv/clauses/44>. Accessed September 6, 2020.

<sup>350</sup> Frame, Randy. *Seeking a Right to the Rite*, 66.

<sup>351</sup> Griffith, R. Marie. *Moral Combat*, 295.

<sup>352</sup> Further information on the text and consequences of DOMA can be found at: <https://www.govtrack.us/congress/bills/104/hr3396/summary>. Accessed September 6, 2020.

<sup>353</sup> Lawton, Kim A. *Clinton Signs Law Backing Heterosexual Marriage*, Christianity Today, October 28, 1996, 80.

defined marriage for federal purposes as a heterosexual union, thus preventing gay couples to have access to the institution and to obtain those benefits coming with marriage certificates, but it had also further fragmented same-sex marriage into a variety of other issues. This fragmentation was due to the facts that from one side DOMA entirely avoided civil-unions and non-federal benefits such as those offered by corporations to their employees, from the other it left states autonomous to decide whether or not passing and enforcing DOMA laws. As a result, the gay marriage issue moved from federal to state level and a flurry of referenda and propositions were submitted by social conservatives in order to compel states into defining marriage as the union of a man and a woman, leading to some states passing and enforcing DOMA laws and others adopting a more ambivalent behavior by either not tackling the issue or granting marriage-like benefits through civil unions. As examples, in California Proposition 22 was passed with strong conservative Christian support in a state referendum, defining marriage as the union of a man and a woman allowing the state the right to not recognize same-sex marriage certificates emitted by other states<sup>354</sup>. At the same time though, the Vermont House approved a plan to grant same-sex couples civil-unions benefits, showing how complex the situation was becoming through the nation<sup>355</sup>. In the early two-thousands important juridical developments reheated the same-sex marriage debate, as on June 6, 2003 the Supreme Court's *Lawrence and Garner v. Texas* decision struck down sodomy laws as unconstitutional, while some months later the Massachusetts Supreme Court ruled in *Goodridge v. Massachusetts Department of Public Health* that gay people should have the right to marry and requested the state legislature to craft adequate legislative measures, without however granting marriage licenses to the homosexual plaintiffs<sup>356</sup>. The combination of these judgments, which respectively removed or curtailed what Christian conservatives had believed to be strong barriers against same-sex marriage, compelled gay-rights opposers to look for new solutions and one soon emerged on top of the others. The passage of a Marriage Amendment, conservative Christians maintained, would have secured that on a federal level marriage could be recognized only as a heterosexual union, and would have differed from DOMA for not leaving any choice for states to legislate or interpret marriage differently. Moreover, conservative Christian thought to be highly possible to obtain the amendment, since to become part of the constitution an amendment has to be ratified by three-fourths of the states meaning thirty-eight, and in 2003 thirty-seven states had already passed DOMA legislation<sup>357</sup>. Instead, the issue became immediately controversial among the very same Christian right, as different interpretations of the scopes of the amendment soon arose between those who simply wanted to forbid homosexual from 'marrying' but were not in principle against civil unions and the related rights, and those who instead wanted the amendment to contrast any form of domestic-partnership

---

<sup>354</sup> Kellner, Mark A. *Marriage Savers*, Christianity Today, April 3, 2000, 15. Further information on the ballot can be found at [https://ballotpedia.org/California\\_Proposition\\_22\\_Limit\\_on\\_Marriages\\_\(2000\)](https://ballotpedia.org/California_Proposition_22_Limit_on_Marriages_(2000)). Accessed September 6, 2020.

<sup>355</sup> Nicholas, Dan. *Vermont House Approves Civil Unions*, Christianity Today, April 24, 2000, 23.

<sup>356</sup> Kennedy, John W. *The Marriage Battle Begins*, 32; *Massachusetts court backs gay marriage*. Christianity Today, January 2004, 21; More information on *Lawrence and Garner v. Texas* can be found at: <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Lawrence-v-Texas>. Accessed September 7, 2020; More information on *Goodridge v. Massachusetts Department of Public Health* can be found at <https://www.lambdalegal.org/in-court/cases/goodridge-v-department-of-public-health>. Accessed September 7, 2020.

<sup>357</sup> Kennedy, John W. *The Marriage Battle Begins*, 33.

between people of the same sex<sup>358</sup>. Notably, the very same conservative organization Alliance for Marriage (AFM) drafting the amendment in collaboration with the Republican party came under criticism from other actors of the Religious Right such as Concerned Women for America for being too compromising on the issue, because it was not preventing state legislatures from approving same-sex civil unions and was not addressing homosexual marriage as a moral issue, criticism to which AFM founder Matt Daniels rebutted by pointing out the failure the Human Life Amendment had been due to its staunch moralism and lack of pragmatism<sup>359</sup>. Nevertheless, the amendment failed in Congress in 2004<sup>360</sup> and then again in 2006<sup>361</sup>, marking the last time the proposal would ever make it into the House, as Democrats would take over again both Congress and government in the following elections and public opinion would continue to swing towards social acceptance of homosexuality.

The federal level was not the only political level receiving attention, and indeed the Religious Right had been focused on state level endeavors to promote local marriage amendments or statutes since at least the times of DOMA, efforts that increased following the 2003 rulings. The strategy Religious Right organizations adopted was the same they had been pursuing since the nineties, meaning that bigger organizations, especially the Family Research Council and Concerned Women for America, engaged state battles both by directly rallying their supporters and by sponsoring already existing local organizations with the objective to gather enough support to present and then pass national amendments banning same-sex marriages, as well as providing briefings and legal support for important court cases about same-sex unions<sup>362</sup>. Behind the success the Religious Right was achieving on a local level, as in 2006 same-sex marriage was banned in 39 states either by amendment or statute<sup>363</sup>, it was possible to find the same disagreements that were animating the contemporary discussion about the Marriage Amendments, particularly as far as civil unions were concerned. Indeed, bigger organization such as Family Research Council and Concerned Women for America proved time after time to be the defenders of the more irreducible position which would have not allowed same-sex civil unions, while smaller and local actors were fine with settling with compromise on the issue<sup>364</sup>. Disagreements were more than a simple matter of discussion and sometime transferred directly into political clashes between the Religious Right itself. An example of this took place in 2006 when James Dobson endorsed a Republican bill in Colorado that would have granted some benefits to homosexual couples without recognizing them as civil-unions, an effort undertaken to contrast a rival Democratic bill pushing instead for same-sex civil unions. In response to Dobson decision the local chapter of the Christian Coalition not only expressed disagreement,

---

<sup>358</sup> Carnes, Tony. *Amending Marriage*, Christianity Today, April 2004, 92.

<sup>359</sup> Blunt, Sheryl H. *The Man Behind the Marriage Amendment*, Christianity Today, September 2004, 48-49.

<sup>360</sup> Kennedy, John W. *Senate Showdown*, Christianity Today, September 2004, 23.

<sup>361</sup> Zylstra, Sarah E. *Marriage Matters*, Christianity Today, August 2006, 18.

<sup>362</sup> Carnes, Tony. *Amending Marriage*, 90-92; Stricherz, Mark. *Kansas Voters Rejects Gay Rights*, Christianity Today, June 2005, 24; Trammel, Madison. *Thinking Straight*, Christianity Today, September 2006, 22.

<sup>363</sup> *Ivi*.

<sup>364</sup> Carnes, Tony. *Amending Marriage*, 92.



but directly pressured the Republican state senator to drop the bill entirely, an incident that put an end to the legislative initiative<sup>365</sup>.

While strategic differences over how to oppose homosexuality already arose in the mid-nineties, when the Contract with America backed by the Christian Coalition was criticized by Religious Right leaders for the absence of statements on homosexuality<sup>366</sup>, the different circumstances were what make this early two-thousand clash significant for a discourse on the political nature of the Religious Right and their opposition to homosexual-rights. The criticism towards the *Contract* was indeed the product of a period in which the Religious Right was still contending its place on the conservative wing of the Republican party with its economic conservative allies, a position of weakness for some extent that required coming to terms with non-social conservatives without sacrificing central priorities. In the mid-two-thousands instead, criticism towards any compromising solution to the same-sex issue was coming from a position of strength, as Christian conservatives were already forming the core of the Republican electorate and could afford to push political decision towards principles rather than pragmatism, especially in states where their presence was strong. Other important factors concurred in the decision made by the Religious Right to persevere with an uncompromising position on gay-rights issues despite the already well-developed pragmatic turn of the movement, which as seen had manifested in relation with the abortion debate. First of all, the idea that gay-rights and same-sex marriage would have brought the dissolution of American moral and social tissue remained central in the discourses of many Religious Right activists and leaders, and indeed showed itself in the critiques made against AFM for not presenting the Marriage Amendment as a moral issue<sup>367</sup>. As such, the very same idea the broader segment of the Religious Right developed about gay-rights presented a serious and finally insurmountable obstacle for a more pragmatic based approach. Second, the Religious Right might also have been incentivized to maintain such irreducible position by the victories it had been achieving since the passage of DOMA, as well as by the failure of a pragmatic approach such as that of CFV. By maintaining a hardline position, the Religious Right had after all scored many victories in referenda, state legislations and court battles to legally define marriage as a heterosexual union and to prevent homosexual couples from acceding to its benefits. On top of that their greatest ally, President Bush, had announced in 2004 that he would had approved a marriage amendment<sup>368</sup>. There seemed to be therefore little to none motives to change the approach to gay-rights, since until that point it had proved to actually be successful. But one thing the Religious Right had not taken into consideration was how fast social acceptance of homosexuality was growing in the American population. Indeed, while the Religious Right had achieved substantial victories since the approval of DOMA, important changes were already undergoing at the time of the battle for the federal Marriage Amendment, as even a minority among social conservatives were considering excluding same-sex couples from civil-union benefits

---

<sup>365</sup> Stricherz, Mark. *No Compromise*, Christianity Today, May 2006, 19.

<sup>366</sup> Curtis, Carolyn. *Putting Out A Contract*, 54.

<sup>367</sup> Robert Knight, president of the Concerned Women for America-affiliated Culture and Family Institute remarked: "Some people think it's more pragmatic to throw away the moral card [...] That is a losing strategy". In Blunt, Sheryl H. *The Man Behind the Marriage Amendment*, 49.

<sup>368</sup> Carnes, Tony. *Wooing the Faithful*, 35.

being not only counterproductive but sometime even wrong. These changes will further and definitely mature under the Obama presidency, when a series of judicial rulings started to question and undermine the constitutionality of DOMA<sup>369</sup>, culminating in the 2015 *Obergefell v. Hodges* Supreme Court decision that ruled in favor of the constitutionality of same-sex marriage according to the Due Process Clause and Equal Process Clause of the Fourth Amendment.

### 5.3 *A Comparison between Gay-Rights and Abortion within Evangelical Strategies*

Comparing the fights against gay-rights and abortion provides some useful insights on the broader political history of the Religious Right itself. Despite having been top concerns of social conservatives, and despite the connection the Religious Right crafted between abortion and gay-rights as part of the pro-family agenda, next to many similarities it's possible to find important differences. Starting from the similarities, both abortion and gay-rights were considered to be a product of the increasing secularization of America and the advancement of social liberalism, championed by progressive groups on the left side of the political spectrum. This link was further reinforced by the decisively leftward turn of the feminist movement following the 1977 Houston conference, when the National Women's Conference promoted a National Plan of Action encompassing support for gay-rights<sup>370</sup>. From this moment forward, what might have been separated fights against the dissolution of the traditional male led household, the advancement of gay-rights and later abortion, were instead being portrayed by the Religious Right as different parts of the same effort to preserve the moral and traditional integrity of America<sup>371</sup>. This idea remained at the center of the Religious Right rhetoric and imagery for the following decades, and still in the early two-thousands when leaders had to point to their 'enemies' they put feminists, abortionsists and homosexuals all one the same side, arguing that one of those positions would inevitably led to the others. In the minds of conservative Christians, being them ministers or activists, leaders or sympathizers, promoting the pro-family agenda meant equally opposing all those issues that were threatening the social and moral tissue of America, to the point in which middle positions were rarely adopted and when so, harshly criticized<sup>372</sup>. Aside from ideological similarities between opposition to abortion and gay-rights as part of the same pro-family agenda, many important differences can be found in the approach conservative Christians adopted to confront the two issues. Since the early days of the Moral Majority until the election of President Clinton, the Religious Right had pursued an irreducible approach to abortion, seeking

---

<sup>369</sup> A Comprehensive summary of all the court cases that influenced gay-rights can be found in Geinder, Chris. *The Court Cases That Changed L.G.B.T.Q. Rights*, New York Times, June 19, 2019. <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/06/19/us/legal-history-lgbtq-rights-timeline.html>. Accessed September 7, 2020.

<sup>370</sup> Dowland, Seth. "Family Values" and the Formation of a Christian Right Agenda, 624; *What's Next For U.S. Women?*, Times, December 5, 1977. <http://content.time.com/time/subscriber/article/0,33009,915755-6,00.html>. Accessed September 20, 2020.

<sup>371</sup> Dowland, Seth. "Family Values", 624.

<sup>372</sup> When President George W. Bush invited gay-rights activists to celebrate the signature of the Hate Crime Bill, conservative Christians described the president's decision as "puzzling and alarming". Cryderman, Lyn. *Am-Bushed?*, 16.

the reversal of *Roe v. Wade* and the passage of a Human Life Amendment to federally ban the practice. These objectives remained absolutely unresolved and despite some bans having been passed by the Reagan and Bush administrations, these were very little if compared with the goal conservative Christians were pursuing. The nineties represented a period of internal reflection for the Religious Right, which with some difficulties brought important changes in the approach to the abortive issue. By the end of the decade, the pro-life strategy had evolved from pursuing big but unrealistic goals to seeking achievable solution and winnable battles, without conceding ground on the principles behind opposition to abortion. Alongside this political change, non-political solutions received increasingly more attention and they came to constitute an alternative model for engagement that could attract moderates and shed a positive light on the pro-life cause itself. When looking at the homosexual right debate, conservative Christian positions seemed not to have evolved much since the days of the PAC campaign. The same arguments brought forward against homosexuality in the late seventies were being maintained in the early two-thousands by congregations as well as political organizations, and if like abortion no ground was conceded on principles, opposition to homosexuality differed by remaining irreducible even on the practical-level. While abortion was being opposed through the passage of gradual restrictions in an attempt to “undermining without overruling”, big Religious Right organizations were not only pushing for state amendments that would have excluded homosexuals from marrying or receiving any possible marriage-like benefit from other kinds of partnership, but were also actively opposing all those leaders and conservative organizations that would have settled for a compromise. It seems therefore strange that two so different attitudes coexisted as strategic preferences of the same organizations or political coalition. But there might be some historical reasons behind such a strident comparison. First of all, despite having become ideologically affine gay-rights and abortion had two different legal histories. When Evangelicals came to oppose abortion, the practice was already established and legally consolidated, so when ruling after ruling it became increasingly clear that abortion would have remained an American reality, the Religious Right concentrated its efforts to at least restrict and curtail the practice. Gay-rights presented instead the opposite scenario, a non yet legal issue that the Religious Right contrasted in order to prevent any possible legal or legislative advance. In this case, conservative Christians had not to curtail any Supreme Court ruling nor to ideally settle for a compromise since they were operating from a position of legislative strength, and indeed DOMA can be seen as an attempt to maintain this strength in the midst of potentially undermining juridical changes, since it reaffirmed the exclusive nature of heterosexual marriage for federal purposes. Secondly, while irreducibility had proved to be detrimental for the opposition to abortion, the same cannot be fully said for homosexual rights. Campaign to promote marriage amendments had proved to be successful while more pragmatic approaches such as that inaugurated by CFV or the pursuit of a Marriage Amendment drafted by AFM had instead failed either because of adverse Supreme Court rulings, or because of the inability to muster the necessary congressional support. Surely, aggressive campaigns such as that in Oregon resulted in failure and some states began to pass legislation allowing some sort of partnership with marriage-like amendment to gay couples, but these were more the result of local balances rather than national trends, as by the mid two-thousands the Religious Right had backed the passage of amendments or laws opposing homosexual marriage in more than three quarters of

the states. Therefore, there might have been little incentives for conservative Christians to change something that was already working almost as intended, especially considering the threatening image they had of homosexuality in general. Third, same-sex marriage as an issue might have provided less opportunities for compromise than abortion. As seen, the first steps the Religious Right made towards pragmatism and gradualism relied on the pursuit of particular practices that were among pro-choicers themselves object of disagreements, for practical reasons but especially due to moral qualms. Moreover, a pragmatic approach to abortion might have found more appeal in the American public, since in the nineties and early two-thousands the majority of Americans though that abortion should have been legal only under certain circumstances, such as in case of rape, incest or threat to the health of the mother<sup>373</sup>. Homosexual rights and gay marriage in particular did not present the same opportunities. Those opposing same-sex marriage saw little difference between a real marriage and civil-union, since it would have brought all or most of the same benefits of marriage but most importantly would have meant an acceptance of homosexuality, something on which the Religious Right would have never compromised. Thus, it was not possible to distinguish a set of disagreeable practices to focus on, since compromising on one would have meant accepting the whole liceity of homosexual relations. On top of that, while the American public was favorable in regard as equal individual rights for gay people, the majority of Americans still opposed same-sex marriage and would continue to do so until at least the mid-tenths<sup>374</sup>, giving even more reasons to the Religious Right to maintain its rigidity. Finally, the significant differences between opposition to abortion and homosexuality do not invalidate the general idea that the Religious Right moved towards pragmatism in the nineties and early two-thousands, but rather were possible right because of this change. Opposition to homosexuality remained irreducible and on a principle level due to the circumstances being very different from those around abortion, but also because in the early two-thousands the Religious Right could afford to push its agenda more decisively than in the nineties. This came as a result of conservative Christians becoming the core constituency of the Republican party which enhanced the influence of social conservative themselves over the party positions and agendas. Furthermore, the establishment and reinforcement from the nineties of a strong grass-root base was what allowed the Religious Right to engage in nationwide confrontations. Lobbying politicians, organizing activists and mobilizing voters was all made possible by the works of decentralized chapters of the major Religious Right organizations, which in collaboration with local forces were able to influence state politics more than from a central office in Washington D.C.

---

<sup>373</sup> A comprehensive study of the Americans' opinion on abortion can be found at <https://news.gallup.com/poll/1576/abortion.aspx>. Accessed September 18, 2020.

<sup>374</sup> For the polling data, I refer once more to <https://news.gallup.com/poll/1651/gay-lesbian-rights.aspx>. Accessed September 18, 2020.

#### *5.4 Considerations on Part II. Chapter 5*

Gay-rights represented one of the central area of interests for the Religious Right and largely contributed in defining its recent political history. It has been the objective of this chapter to illustrate the reasons behind such a stanch opposition and the development of political and non-political strategies adopted to sustain a social conservative project. Furthermore, the chapter has also presented a comparison between the attitude of the Religious Right in relation with abortion and gay-rights, a choice motivated by the prominence both these issues assumed in the Religious Right agenda and by the significant differences detectable, always with the objective to show the political evolution conservative Evangelicals underwent in the nineties and early two-thousands.

Starting from the reasons that motivated Evangelical opposition to homosexuality, it has been shown how the very same idea they maintained of same-sex relation compelled them into assuming a condemning behavior towards gay people. Homosexuality was being oppose first and foremost for religious reasons, with the arguments brought forward being based on scriptural grounds that left no interpretation if not refusal. This influenced the perception Evangelicals developed both of gay people and of the homosexuality debate in general, because if homosexuals were always considered people and as such entitled to citizen rights, at the same time their status could not be accepted and if not changed, at least it should have been strongly opposed. Homosexuality became almost a test of faith, a matter of whether or not one Christian was being faithful to the Bible and its inerrancy, which made any attempt to come to a compromise increasingly more difficult if not seriously impossible. Beside religious motives, opposition to homosexuality followed the larger debate around the preservation of the American moral and social tissue from an encroaching secularization. Homosexuality was another strong attack on the American family, Religious Right leaders argued, and as such it had to be opposed as a matter of national survival. Therefore, scriptural mandates and a genuine fear for the perceived threat homosexuality posed to American families were the reasons that motivated conservative Christian opposition to gay-rights and later gay marriage. It has been shown how opposition to gay-rights manifested itself in the non-political and political fronts alike, with clearly identifiable characteristics and through initiatives largely characterized by the organizational traits the Religious Right had assumed since the end of the Reagan era. In the world outside of politics, the proliferation of ex-gay ministries represented the most serious effort undertaken by religious conservatives in order to promote and anti-gay message, anchored on the idea that homosexuality was a redeemable sin and a curable behavior. Despite enjoying enough success to increase scope and number of these ministries, the ex-gay movement had to defend its legitimacy both among the very same subculture where it was born, as well as in a society increasingly more open towards acceptance of homosexuality. By the early tenths, ex-gay movements practicing conversion therapy had entered into a phase of profound crisis, and while scientific evidence combined with cultural trends increasingly denounced conversion therapy as a dangerous and futile procedure, the final straw for these ministries came when the president of the major ex-gay organization Exodus personally declared the failure of conversion therapy, leading to the disbandment of the organization. Different and far more sustained have been

instead conservative Christian efforts on the proper political scene. Opposition to gay-rights has been a part of Evangelical political activism since at least the times of the PAC campaign, which combined with the contemporary works of preachers such as the LaHayes and soon joined by the Moral Majority of Falwell set much of the tone for any political project regarding homosexuals. Despite this early presence, it would be in the nineties that homosexuality would become a prominent issue since it was in this period that the gay-liberation movement started to pursue its most important recent battle: liberalization of same-sex marriage. On the marriage front Evangelical opposition had been as sustained as ever and for decades conservative Christians actually held the edge of the debate, pressuring president Clinton to pass the DOMA thus ensuring further protection for marriage on a federal base and then pursuing with success the passage of state amendments and statutes closing the door to any possible opening towards same-sex couples. It has been by observing the battle over same-sex marriage that much of the analysis present in this chapter has concentrated, since the undeniable irreducibility showed by Evangelicals both in their motivations and strategies appeared strangely contradictory when confronted with the evolution the Religious Right was undergoing since the nineties. Indeed, the approach Evangelicals had manifested in their fight against homosexuality has been very different from the contemporary one in regard of abortion, but these differences have been clarified and further contextualized in the period considered. Irreducibility on homosexuality came not as a step back from the gradual evolution to pragmatism but rather as a continuation of the previous Evangelical positions on the issue, a response to a context that largely different from the one of abortion, and as an approach made possible by the position of strength and influence the Religious Right had assumed by the early two-thousands in relation with the Republican party. Furthermore, the very same statewide decentralized strategy the Religious Right adopted to promote local amendments and statues was a direct result of the clout conservative Christian organization had reached on a local level, all merit of the grassroots built from the early nineties.

## 6. New Bioethical Issues: Embryo Research and Stem-Cells

Abortion and gay-rights have been central concerns for the Religious Right in the nineties and early two-thousands, with the battle against these issues being interpreted by conservative Christians not simply as a social or political matter, but rather as part of the larger effort to oppose the encroaching secularization that was threatening the American social and moral tissue. For this purpose, Evangelicals could rely on pre-established theological arguments found either in their own recent religious history, for example as far as homosexuality is concerned, or in the older tradition of their new Catholic allies, as it happened with the adoption of pro-life positions. Therefore, much of the activity of the Religious Right can be interpreted as an effort to translate theologically based arguments into a well-structured political project, ideologically anchored on social conservative bases and politically close to the Republican party. There has been although a particular set of issues for whom conservative Christians did not possess specific pre-established theological positions or knowledge. These issues have been the new bioethical challenges emerged following important scientific breakthroughs on the field of cellular research in the late eighties and through the nineties: human embryo research and the potential medical use of stem-cells<sup>375</sup>. These two issues eventually converged around the possibility of using embryonal stem-cells. The new bioethical challenges of the nineties represent the last central topic to be discussed in the second part of this dissertation, deserving attention because the lack of a precise pre-established theological position required Evangelicals to formulate their answers on either completely new grounds, or to find compelling parallels with other similar topics. This chapter will focus on the historical development of cellular research in the U.S. and the positions assumed by Evangelicals, with an analysis of their arguments and interpretation of these scientific developments; moreover, some considerations will be advanced over the dynamics behind the development of the Evangelical position on the issue as well as on the effective importance these new bioethics have played in the broader Religious Right agenda; Euthanasia and end-of-life issues in general will also be discussed as new bioethical issues of the nineties.

---

<sup>375</sup> 'Bioethics' has been chosen as a term because Evangelicals themselves have adopted this terminology in their language and rhetoric when relating to the issues this chapter discusses, as it has emerged at least through the pages of *Christianity Today*. However, while embryonic research has been considered by conservative Christians as a bioethical issue, the same category has not been always applied to abortion and almost never to gay-rights. Abortion has been considered a bioethical issue as far as the value of the sanctity of human life is concerned, a thesis largely adopted from the already established Catholic pro-life position. Gay-rights have been considered instead sexual issues, most of the time contextualized within the broader pro-family field. Abortion and gay-rights have therefore been treated most of the time in their specificity, while when intended as part of a broader issue, these have been contextualized as social rather than bioethical issues.

## 6.1 Human Embryo, Stem-Cells and Cloning. What are They?

Given the scientific complexity of the issue, it is useful to draw a brief description of cellular research and of the topics the bioethical discussion will further focus on. An embryo is the early stage of development of a multicellular organism<sup>376</sup>. The development of a human embryo is referred to as human embryogenesis and it lasts from the moment of fertilization up until the beginning of the ninth week of pregnancy, when the embryo has developed the basic organic and tissue structures and starts to be referred to as a fetus<sup>377</sup>. This development process is divided into phases differentiated by the nature of the chemical processes the embryo is undergoing. As far as this chapter is concerned, the only distinction between phases significant enough to be addressed is the one between germinal stage and gastrulation, which is placed at around the fourteenth to seventeenth day after fertilization has occurred and is marked by the appearance of the primitive streak. This is because it is at this moment that many scientists have placed the line between permissible and non-permissible experimentation, arguing that the emergence of the primitive streak signifies the creation of a unique human being<sup>378</sup>. During the period of human embryogenesis, the embryo undergoes a process of gene expression, cell division and cellular differentiation that starting from a single-cell zygote, formed by the combined male and female gametes, results in the formation of a fetus with distinct biological human characteristics<sup>379</sup>. At the base

---

<sup>376</sup> J.K. Findlay, M.L. Gear, P.J. Illingworth, S.M. Junk, G. Kay, A.H. Mackerras, A. Pope, H.S. Rothenfluh, L. Wilton. *Human embryo: a biological definition*, Human Reproduction, Vol. 22, No. 4, 2007, 905-911. <https://academic.oup.com/humrep/article/22/4/905/695880>. Accessed September 11, 2020.

<sup>377</sup> It should be noted that the distinction between embryo and fetus as two separate stages of human development is a scientific one and is nowadays universally accepted among scientists for research and medical purposes. The same cannot be said about religious groups, especially those who had assumed a strong pro-life position. Evangelicals and conservative Catholics might use the terms embryo and fetus in their language to address specific issues that require a precise language, such as the issue of embryonic research, but they do not consider them to be two different stages as far as their relations with human life is concerned. Indeed, firmly believing in life starting at conception, for these conservative Christians embryo and fetus are endowed with the same values of life and personhood as a living human being, thus the distinction between the two becomes sort of irrelevant if not for the chronological stage of human development. Generally, the preferred term conservative Christians have used when addressing pre-natal issues has been ‘the unborn’, which refers to all the stages of human development from conception to birth and is endowed with the same statuses of personhood and sanctity of life as a living human being. For further information, see Evans, John H. & Hudson, Kathy. *Religion and Reproductive Genetic: Beyond Views of Embryonic Life*, Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion, Vol. 46, No.4, 2007, 565-581. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/4622009>. Accessed September 20, 2020;

<sup>378</sup> The President’s Council on Bioethics. *Human Cloning and Human Dignity: An Ethical Inquiry*. Washington D.C., July 2002. <https://bioethicsarchive.georgetown.edu/pcbe/reports/cloningreport/research.html>. Accessed September 11, 2020. The President Council on Bioethics was composed by a group of individuals personally appointed by President Bush to guide the administration on bioethics. It was created by Bush in 2001 as a successor of the National Bioethics Advisory Commission established by President Clinton in 1996. The Council remained active until 2009, when President Obama disbanded it in order to create the Presidential Commission for the Study of Bioethical Issue, whose tasks were more about practical guidance on policy making rather than on moral discussions. For the competences and goals of the PCBE, see: <https://www.federalregister.gov/documents/2001/11/30/01-29948/creation-of-the-presidents-council-on-bioethics>. Accessed September 11, 2020.

<sup>379</sup> For general information on embryonic development and stem-cell research see Mummery C., A. Van Den Stolpe, B. Roelen, H. Clevers, ed. *Stem Cells: Scientific Facts and Fiction*. Amsterdam, Academic Press, 2014



of this process there are the embryonic stem-cells which appears at the early stage of embryonic development before the implantation of the embryo on the uterine walls. Embryonic stem-cells are particular cells with two core characteristics: they are pluripotent, meaning that they can differentiate and specialize into all the 220 cell types of the human body, and they are self-renewing under certain circumstances, meaning that they can replicate indefinitely as undifferentiated cells. For their characteristics, stem-cells have been long studied in mammals since the early eighties, but only in 1998 would a scientific breakthrough happen and open the way to human derived embryonic stem-cells, which scientist argued would have benefitted mankind for their application both in research and medicine. With the ability of replicating any possible tissue of the human being, scientist argued stem-cells could be used for creating specialized tissue to be studied for its functioning, to be experimented with drugs and medicines without the involvement of a patient, or to cure degenerative diseases such as blood-related illnesses or Parkinson through transplantation<sup>380</sup>. Although promising, embryonic stem-cells have been at the center of a strong bioethical debate because the only possible way to obtain them is to destroy a human embryo, which some ethicists consider to be already endowed with personhood. Moreover, researchers have developed a process known as therapeutic cloning<sup>381</sup>, which consists in the substitution of the nucleus of a female gamete with the nucleus of a somatic cell of a patient undergoing a stem-cell therapy. The result is the formation of a man-made embryo that, after stimulation, starts to develop until the appearances of a considerable amount of stem cells. At this moment, the embryo is destroyed in order to acquire the stem-cells, and since these carry the same genetic information as the donor and soon to be recipient, the risk of immunological rejection following transplantation is drastically alleviated. Although the embryo created is not a natural one, meaning not the result of the combination of a male and female gamete, the practice has been criticized by bioethicists for its potential use as reproductive cloning, aimed at the creation of a cloned being. Therapeutic cloning differs from reproductive cloning only for the destruction of the embryo to harvest stem-cells, but the principle behind it's the very same that had led to the creation of the famous sheep Dolly<sup>382</sup>. Much of the bioethical debate that arose from the use of the embryonic stem-cells was not centered around stem-cells themselves but rather on the source used to acquire them. Indeed, stem-cells can be acquired from a variety of biological sources without necessarily compromising an embryo, since it's

---

<sup>380</sup> For specific information on stem-cells and their medical application see *Regenerative Medicine*. Department of Health and Human Services, August 2006. [https://stemcells.nih.gov/info/Regenerative\\_Medicine.htm](https://stemcells.nih.gov/info/Regenerative_Medicine.htm). Accessed September 11, 2020; King, N.M., Perrin, J. *Ethical issues in stem cell research and therapy*, Stem Cell Res, Vol. 5, No. 85, 2014. <https://stemcellres.biomedcentral.com/articles/10.1186/scrt474>. Accessed September 11, 2020.

<sup>381</sup> For information on cloning and the related bioethical debate see Koury, Charlotte. *Therapeutic cloning: Promises and issues*, McGill journal of medicine, MJM: an international forum for the advancement of medical sciences by students. 2007, Vol. 10, No.2, 2007 112-20.

[https://www.researchgate.net/publication/51399873\\_Therapeutic\\_cloning\\_Promises\\_and\\_issues](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/51399873_Therapeutic_cloning_Promises_and_issues).

Accessed September 11, 2020; Patel, Kant. *Crafting a Cloning Policy: From Dolly to Stem Cell*, The Social Science Journal, Vol. 40, No. 2, 2019, 350–352. <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1016/S0362-3319%2803%2900019-3>. Accessed September 11, 2020; Roetz, Heiner. *Cross-Cultural Issues in Bioethics: The Example of Human Cloning*, Amsterdam, Rodopi, 2006; Perl, Lila. *Cloning*, New York, Marshall Cavendish Benchmark, 2006.

<sup>382</sup>Wade, Nicholas. *The Clone Named Dolly*, The New York Times, October 14, 2013. <https://www.nytimes.com/2013/10/14/booming/the-clone-named-dolly.html>. Accessed September 11, 2020.

possible to harvest stem-cells from umbilical cords as well as from adult bodies, in which case they are referred to as adult stem-cells. These cells have the same characteristics of the embryonic ones and as their use is not considered controversial, there have been significant pushes by pro-life groups to consider their exclusive use for stem-cell research and treatment<sup>383</sup>.

In U.S. Christianity, the debate around embryonic stem-cells has developed alongside similar lines to those of the abortion debate. Christian denominations that had come to define life as beginning at conception and to make its defense a paramount part of their religious commitment have strongly opposed embryonic researches, insisting instead on the pursuit of adult stem-cells research or other scientific practices not requiring harm or destruction of living human embryos. On this side it is possible to find the Catholic hierarchy, whose official position remained deeply anchored on uncompromising pro-life position<sup>384</sup>, and Evangelicals in general, as both the NAE and the SBC issued statements voicing their opposition to embryonic research but maintaining support for alternative treatments<sup>385</sup>. Promoting instead embryonic stem-cells research have been mainline Protestant denominations, which when balancing the value of embryos and the relieve of suffering have chosen to prioritize the latter. Even in this case, their position has not been always of total endorsement of the practice and some denominations have expressed their support for embryonic research only for embryos that would be destroyed anyway for other reasons, and their opposition to the creation of embryos for the sole purpose of having them destroyed to advance cellular research. This has been the case of the Episcopalian Church and the United Methodist Church<sup>386</sup>. Finally, some churches refused to take a position on the issue, such as the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America and the Mormons<sup>387</sup>.

---

<sup>383</sup> It should be noted that different voices have been raised in favor of adult stem-cells over embryonic ones. Beside pro-life groups such as the NRLC and the different Religious Right organizations, secular institutions and genetic scientists have raised the adult stem-cell options as a preferential research field to invest in. Moral qualms aside, the division between sustainers of embryonic stem-cells and adult stem-cells is also related to the scientific novelty of the issue, which led researches to sustain sometime contrasting conclusions. Information on the researchers sustaining the adult stem-cells option can be found at O'Leary, Denyse. *Embryo Research Contested*, Christianity Today, May 24, 1999, 26; *The Biotech Temptation*, Christianity Today, July 12, 1999, 27; Blunt, Sheryl H. *Embryos Split Prolifers*. Christianity Today, September 3, 2001, 25.

<sup>384</sup> The Catholic Church position on stem-cell research has been based on the official teachings expressed in: Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith. *Instruction for Respect of Human Life in its Origins and on the Dignity of Procreation. Replies to Certain Questions of the Day*, Rome, February 22, 1987. [https://www.vatican.va/roman\\_curia/congregations/cfaith/documents/rc\\_con\\_cfaith\\_doc\\_19870222\\_respect-for-human-life\\_en.html](https://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/documents/rc_con_cfaith_doc_19870222_respect-for-human-life_en.html). Accessed September 25, 2020; John Paul II. *Evangelium Vitae*, Rome, March 25, 1995. [https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf\\_jp-ii\\_enc\\_25031995\\_evangelium-vitae.html](https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_jp-ii_enc_25031995_evangelium-vitae.html). Accessed September 25, 2020.

<sup>385</sup> The NAE position can be retrieved from <https://www.nae.net/bioethics-and-stem-cell-research/>. Accessed September 25, 2020; The SBC position can be retrieved from <https://www.sbc.net/resource-library/resolutions/on-stem-cell-research/>. Accessed September 25, 2020.

<sup>386</sup> For the Episcopalian Church see <https://episcopalchurch.org/library/document/issue-stem-cell-research>. Accessed September 25, 2020; For the United Methodist Church see <http://ee.umc.org/what-we-believe/ethics-of-embryonic-stem-cell-research>. Accessed September 25, 2020.

<sup>387</sup> Information on the position of U.S. Christian denominations have been retrieved from *Religious' Groups Official Positions on Stem Cell Research*, Pew Research Center, July 17, 2008. <https://www.pewforum.org/2008/07/17/religious-groups-official-positions-on-stem-cell-research/>. Accessed September 25, 2020. For further information on the issue of stem-cells research within Christianity, see Guinn, David E. *Handbook of Bioethic and Religion*, Oxford Scholarship

## 6.2 Embryonal Research and Stem-Cells as Bioethical Issues for the Religious Right

Some considerations are necessary in order to introduce the debate and provide an initial framework around which the broader analysis of the bioethical discussion will be developed. The scientific contributions on cellular research represented a difficult and divisive topic for Evangelicals as well as for bioethicists in general<sup>388</sup>. At the center of this complexity stands the fact that both those supporting and opposing scientific advances were motivated by the same values, meaning the defense of life and care for the other. Moreover, there was a shared agreement on the noble nature of the medical research, since both those supporting and opposing scientific advancements on the field maintained the same end of providing cure for the weak and infirm. These are fundamental differences within the abortion debate. In here the two sides of the discussion came to frame their positions emphasizing two different set of values with two connected ends, being these respectively the defense of life and the full autonomy of the private individual, thus resulting in the polarization between being pro-life and pro-choice. Complicating the embryonic research debate even further has been the fact that it represented such a novelty not only for bioethicists or religious groups, but also for the broader American legislative and juridical framework, resulting sometime in evident grey areas where the boundaries of legit and illegit research where blur at best. These just discussed key characteristics emerged almost in every discussion on the bioethical as well as political field.

Starting from the beginning of human cell experimentation, one of the earliest forms of regenerative medicine consisted in a procedure known as fetal cell transplant, which consisted in acquiring specific tissues from an aborted fetus and transplanting these on a patient. This treatment allowed diabetic patients to receive fetal pancreatic cells to better produce insulin, or Parkinson patient to receive fetal brain tissue to regenerate part of their damaged nervous system<sup>389</sup>. The use of tissue obtained by dissecting aborted fetuses and the healing potentialities of the therapy soon posed a critical moral dilemma for bioethicists and Evangelicals as well, as the connection with the practice of abortion was more than evident. In favor of the practice it was possible to find some pro-life doctors and ethicists who maintained first that use of fetal tissue and abortion were two different issues, arguing that fetal tissue transplant was more relatable to organ transplantation rather than with abortion since the underlining question was whether to give a purpose to an already present cadaver or to simply dispose of it, and second that for its healing potentialities the therapy itself was pro-life<sup>390</sup>. On the

---

Online, September 2006. <https://oxford.universitypressscholarship.com/view/10.1093/0195178734.001.0001/acprof-9780195178739>. Accessed September 25, 2020; Weiberg-Salzmann, Mirjam and Willems, Ulrich. *Religion and Biopolitics*, Berlin, Springer, 2020.

<sup>388</sup> For further information on the bioethical debate around embryonic research, stem-cells and cloning see: Waters, Brent and Cole-Turner, Roland. *God and the Embryo: Religious Voices on Stem Cells and Cloning*, Washington D.C., Georgetown University Press, 2003; Cohen, Cynthia B. *Renewing the Suff of Life: Stem Cells, Ethics and Public Policy*, Oxford/New York, Oxford University Press, 2007; Monroe, Kristen R., Miller, Ronald B., Tobis, Jerome S. *Fundamentals of the Stem Cell Debate: The Scientific, Religious, Ethical and Political Issues*, Berkeley, University of Carolina Press, 2008.

<sup>389</sup> This practice was discussed in Simons, Andrew. *Brave New Harvest*, Christianity Today, November 19, 1990, 24-26;

<sup>390</sup> Ivi; Lawton, Kim. A., *Curing or Killing?*, Christianity Today, May 18, 1992, 40-42.

other side, those opposing the practice maintained how impossible it was to separate the issue from abortion since the fetuses themselves were obtained from interrupted pregnancies. Moreover, prominent pro-life groups such as the NRLC and the SBC feared that such a practice would have incentivized women to abort since it would have alleviated possible moral qualms, and they even feared a future in which women might seek payments to provide fetuses by conceiving and aborting<sup>391</sup>. The establishment of a direct link between the advancement of cellular research and abortion will be a constant feature of the bioethical debates soon to come, especially about embryonic research and stem-cells. From one hand this allowed conservative Christians to relate a completely new and morally complex topic to an already known discussions, from the other it provided a well-establish moral framework to face the issue and assume a defined position. A medium position also emerged among those opposing fetal tissue transplant, who by considering the overall healing potential of the therapy came to evaluate it as ethical when the tissues were acquired from non-elective abortions performed to save the mother's life and miscarriages<sup>392</sup>. Beside ethical positions, the practice itself prompted some interesting legal reasoning around the very same status of cadaver experimentation. In the US, scientists can proceed to cadaver experimentation only after having received consent from the person prior to his death or from the deceased's family<sup>393</sup>. In the case of aborted fetuses, some Christian ethicists called into question whether or not a mother could express consent, given the fact that through elective abortion she had renounced her parental identity over the child<sup>394</sup>. From the ethical field the issue moved to the political one, and in 1988 president Reagan with the National Institutes of Health<sup>395</sup> (NIH) posed a ban on the use of federal funds for fetal tissue research, thus halting experimentation in federally funded clinics and laboratories but at the same time allowing privately funded universities to continue nonetheless their researches, inaugurating a procedure that would represent itself during the broader embryonic cell debate of the nineties<sup>396</sup>. Reagan's ban was maintained by Bush and resisted several reversal attempts by Congress, with an important pro-life organization such as the NRLC intensely lobbying in favor of the maintenance of the ban<sup>397</sup>. Although by the early nineties fetal transplantation would be increasingly abandoned in favor of embryonic research, the debate that arose

---

<sup>391</sup> Ibid, 41.

<sup>392</sup> Simons, Andrew. *Brave New Harvest*, 26.

<sup>393</sup> The legal right for an individual to choose for body donation is regulated in the U.S. by the Uniform Anatomical Gift Act (UAGA). The UAGA was first approved by Congress in 1968 following the first successful heart transplant performed the year prior. It has been since then revised two more times in 1987 and 2006 in order to facilitate and uniform the procedure of organ donation, and to punish more harshly those who allow for organs to be harvested from the corpse of an individual who had not express his willingness to become a donor, or who engage in organ trafficking. For more information, see Wilding Knope, Denay L. *Over My Dead Body: How the Albrecht Decisions Complicate The Constitutional Dilemma of Due Process & the Dead*, University of Toledo Law Review, Vol. 41, 2009, 169-211. <https://heinonline.org/HOL/P?h=hein.journals/utol41&i=171>. Accessed September 20, 2020; Stroud, Ellen. *Law and the Dead Body: Is a Corpse a Person or a Thing?*, Annual Review of Law and Social Science, Vol. 14, 2018, 115-125. <https://www.annualreviews.org/doi/10.1146/annurev-lawsocsci-110316-113500>. Accessed September 20, 2020.

<sup>394</sup> Simons, Andrew. *Brave New Harvest*, 27.

<sup>395</sup> The National Institutes of Health it's the primary agency of the United State Government responsible for biomedical and public health research. For information, see <https://www.nih.gov/about-nih>. Accessed September 20, 2020.

<sup>396</sup> Simons, Andrew. *Brave New Harvest*, 25.

<sup>397</sup> Lawton, Kim A. *Curing or Killing?*, 41.

around it already presented much of the characteristic of future bioethical discussions, such as the absence of a strongly polarized debate due to its moral complexity, the interdisciplinarity of a subject touching ethics, science and law, and the overall undecided political answers that although placing prohibition or bans, at the same time voluntarily or involuntarily left some possible legislative bypasses for researches to be conducted by private institutions.

Embryonic research and then embryonic stem-cells research dominated the bioethical debate of the nineties and early two-thousands so much so that arguments in favor and against spanned from ethics to economics, with both sides presenting future scenario respectively full of promises or prone to dystopian realities. At the same time, the debate showed once again the difficulty of finding clear-cut positions on the issue, since its moral complexity and overall novelty simply did not allow the emergence of a defined polarization<sup>398</sup>. The debate around the use of human embryos for research as well as medical purposes concerned those embryos that were being conceived artificially in laboratories and that had never been implanted on a woman for procreation. Moreover, the NIH placed in its guidelines the fourteenth day after fertilization as the last time-limit for allowed research, as it is at this time that under natural conditions the embryo would implant on the uterine walls and show signs of the primitive streak, starting the process of cellular differentiation and specialization and thus exhausting the valuable stem-cells embryos were being studied for<sup>399</sup>. These pre-implantation ex-utero embryos were supplied by the numerous American medical clinics providing In Vitro Fertilization<sup>400</sup> (IVF) for couples who encountered difficulties in conceiving naturally. Indeed, being IVF a complex therapy sometime requiring more than one attempt to effectively carry a pregnancy to term, clinics usually suggest couples to produce more than one embryo and then proceed to store the unused ones by freezing them, a process known as cryopreservation. Given the fact that after a pregnancy has been carried to term a couple most of the time does not pursue further treatments, fertility clinics entered in possession of a considerable number of stored embryos and designated part of these to research purposes<sup>401</sup>. On the political scene, the debate about embryonic stem-cells revolved around whether or not research should have received federal funding, rather than the legality or morality of the research itself. In 1995, Congress successfully opposed an attempt by the Clinton administration to allocate funds for embryonic stem-cells research, which resulted not in medical institutes abandoning their researches but rather continuing thanks to private funds and spontaneous donations of embryos by couples they had stored them in IVF facilities<sup>402</sup>. Specifically, Congress banned any possible allocation of federal funds for researches that harm or destroy human embryos. This subtle phrasing allowed the Clinton administration to successfully push in 2000

---

<sup>398</sup> For the social and cultural trends around the debate of stem-cells and embryonic research, see Vestal, Christine. *Stem Cell Research at the Crossroads of Religion and Politics*, Pew Research Center. <https://www.pewforum.org/2008/07/17/stem-cell-research-at-the-crossroads-of-religion-and-politics/>. Accessed September 11, 2020.

<sup>399</sup> Giles, Thomas S. *Test Tube Wars*, Christianity Today, January 1, 1995, 38.

<sup>400</sup> For information on IVF see <https://medlineplus.gov/ency/article/007279.htm>. Accessed September 11, 2020.

<sup>401</sup> Smietana, Bob. *400k and Counting*, Christianity Today, July 2003, 18; *Souls on Ice*, Christianity Today, July 2003, 28.

<sup>402</sup> O'Leary, Denyse. *Embryo Research Contested*, 26.

for the provision of federal funds for embryonic researches on embryo in surplus in fertility clinics, providing that the process of destruction of the embryo was being carried out by a third party not receiving federal funds<sup>403</sup>. In 2001, President Bush announced that funds would be allocated on already existing researches and for the use of already harvested surplus embryos, but not for new researches and neither to harvest new embryos<sup>404</sup>. Bush decision came as an attempt to strike a compromise between those advocating for and those opposing embryonic stem cell research, resulting in the former disapproving the decision and the latter showing mixed feelings about it since it nonetheless allowed the funding of already existing researches<sup>405</sup>. It should be noted that the legislative and political debates never touched the issue of non-federally funded researches, which continued in the years thanks to private funds.

In the midst of these political developments, Religious Right organizations such as the NRLC, Focus on the Family, the Family Research Council and Concerned Women for America joined forces to oppose embryonic stem-cells research, or at least its federal funding. Differently from the debate that was happening at the highest political levels, for conservative Christians it was paramount to oppose and completely ban embryonic stem-cell research, a position that they consistently defended as being coherent with their pro-life commitment. Anchoring their arguments on the belief of life starting at conception, for conservative Christians harvesting and destroying human embryos was an act of murder perpetrated against a person. In arguing in favor of this pro-life position, conservative Christians largely relied on the same language and concepts they had develop for their fight against abortion: embryos were being referred to as “innocent human life” and not as “an ordinary group of cells”, from which it logically derived that using and destroying human embryos for the purpose of harvesting stem-cells was being compared to the “destruction of human life”<sup>406</sup>. Conservative Christian opposition to embryonic stem-cell research was by no means exhausted in the comparison between embryo usage and murder, but expanded further touching different aspects of the debate. Much of the argumentations followed the ‘slippery slope’ reasoning, meaning an argument in which a course of action is rejected because, with little or no evidence, one insists that it will lead to a chain reaction resulting in an undesirable end or ends. By applying this line of reasoning to ethics, Evangelicals argued that allowing and promoting through federal funding embryonic research would have led initially to eugenic experimentation<sup>407</sup>, then to the complete devaluation of the life of the weak and infirm, henceforth to their biological removal<sup>408</sup>. But ethics was not the only field to which the slippery slope argument was applied to, and interestingly the second more prominent part of the debate focused on the intertwined impact of embryonic research on economics, market and society. By largely building up on the arguments advanced by economic and social

---

<sup>403</sup> Ead. *Tissue of Lies?*, Christianity Today, October 23, 2000, 18; Blunt, Sheryl H. *Embryos Split Prolifers*, 25.

<sup>404</sup> *Ibid*, 23.

<sup>405</sup> Ivi; *It's Not About Stem Cells*, Christianity Today, October 2004, 27. Here the Bush initiative it's referred to as an “ethically unsatisfying move”.

<sup>406</sup> Such examples are respectively from *The Biotech Temptation*, 26; Smietana, Bob. *When Does Personhood Begin?*, Christianity Today, July 2004, 26; Giles, Thomas S. *Test Tube Wars*, 38.

<sup>407</sup> *Id.* *Test Tube Wars*, 40.

<sup>408</sup> Tada, Joni E. *The Threat of Biotech*, Christianity Today, March 2003, 62.

theorist Jeremy Rifkin (born 1943) in “The Biotech Century”<sup>409</sup>, conservative Christians feared that the liberalization of the research would have paved the way for new eugenic industries to wipe out unwanted genes and to establish a “biotech slave market” for human tissue<sup>410</sup>. The fear of a possible marketization for human tissues, embryos and even genes remained consistently present in the Evangelical imagery for all the early two-thousands. Indeed, many of them believed that proposers of embryonic research were not being motivated by altruism as much as by the possibility of creating a new and thriving market in order to benefit economically from the creation and commercialization of human embryos<sup>411</sup>. Economic and market concerns expanded the discussion even further to social questions. Opposers of embryonic research feared these would have impacted distributive justice even more, since a division would have emerged between those who could afford genetic therapies and those who couldn’t, worsening the already complicated issue of rightful allocation of health-care treatments and eventually leading to social stigmatization for those who could not afford genetic treatment<sup>412</sup>. Beside this strong opposition, conservative Christians also developed and submitted their own answers for the embryonic and stem-cells debates, trying to find a balance in the moral dilemma regenerative medicine was posing. While being almost universally opposed to the use of embryos, Evangelicals supported research and use of stem-cells as long as these were being acquired through ethical means, meaning without destroying an embryo as in the case of the aforementioned adult and umbilical cord stem-cells<sup>413</sup>. For all the duration of the stem-cell debate, Evangelicals consistently stated their support for federal funding of adult stem-cell research and use, and consistently criticized the efforts of those advocating for embryonic stem-cells as being motivated by economic and market forces rather than altruism, arguing that embryonic research was being favored by scientists because of the possibility for breakthrough researches to attract significant amounts of funds<sup>414</sup>. Moreover, conservative Christians also tried to find an alternative for those human embryos in surplus left in cryopreservation in fertility clinic. In this case, the most famous solution largely mirrored a practice already advanced as an alternative for abortion, that of adoption. Through programs such

---

<sup>409</sup> Rifkin, Jeremy. *The Biotech Century: Harnessing the Gene and Remaking the World*, New York, Jeremy P. Tarcher/Putnam, 1998.

<sup>410</sup> O’Leary, Denyse. *Embryo Research Contested*, 27

<sup>411</sup> Blunt, Sheryl H. *Embryos Split Prolifers*, 24; *The Biotech Temptation*, 27; Gushee, David P. *A Matter of Life and Death*, Christianity Today, October 1, 2001, 36. The idea of a commercialization of embryos and marketization of the same value of human life largely relates to the broader dystopian vision of the future developed within the evangelical subculture. The most famous example of this vision has been the novel series “Left Behind” by Tim LaHaye & Lerry B. Jenkins, in which the protagonists, members of a new-convert organization of born-again Christians must face the Antichrist itself in the time of Tribulation, which in Christian eschatology represents a time of harsh judgement being inflicted on humanity before the second coming of Christ. Generally, the dystopian representations elaborated by Evangelical writers and preachers have been influenced by the doctrine of Dispensationalism and a firm belief in the End of Times as described in the Bible, particularly in Revelation. For more information, see Shuck, Glenn W. *Marks of the Beast: The Left Behind Novels and the Struggle for Evangelical Identity*, New York, New York University Press, 2005; Frykholm, Amy J. *Rapture Culture: Left Behind in Evangelical America*, Oxford/New York, Oxford University Press, 2004.

<sup>412</sup> Gushee, David P. *A Matter of Life and Death*, 40.

<sup>413</sup> *It’s Not About Stem-Cells*, 27; O’Leary, Denyse. *Embryo Research Contested*, 26.

<sup>414</sup> Tada, Joni E. *The Threat of Biotech*, 61.

as the Snowflakes embryo adoption program<sup>415</sup>, Evangelical activists and ethicists working together with IVF clinics hoped to convince couples to donate leftover embryos to infertile couples, an initiative also supported by the Christian Medical Association and by the federal government, since in 2001 President Bush signed a bill allocating almost a million dollar of funds in support of embryo adoption<sup>416</sup>.

A second bioethical debate sparked by the scientific advances in the field of genetic and cellular research has been that of cloning. There is a direct connection between cloning and embryonic research, since it's through a process known as therapeutic cloning that man-made embryos are created for research and medical purposes. Beside for the fact that these man-made embryos should have been destroyed in order to harvest the embryonic stem-cells, therapeutic cloning received strong criticism from a broad spectrum of scientists, bioethicists and activists in general for its potential use as reproductive cloning, thus intended to be used to create a genetic copy of an individual. Criticism against cloning followed slightly different lines from those adopted to oppose embryonic research, and the issue itself has never been incorporated in its entirety within the pro-life argumentations. Indeed, while therapeutic cloning was being criticized for its connection with embryonic research and thus intended as coherent with pro-life causes<sup>417</sup>, the issue itself exceeded the questions about life and directly touched the statuses of individuality and personhood. Cloning started to be addressed as a public and bioethical issue after the appointment by President Bush of Jewish conservative bioethicist Leon Krass (born 1939) as chairman of the President's Council on Bioethics (PCBE). Krass arguments provided much of the guidelines for opposition to reproductive cloning, which he argued was not only a very dangerous procedure with high failure rate, but also a threat for human identity as a whole since it would have erased the line between reproduction and manufacture<sup>418</sup>. Interestingly, reproductive cloning also sparked fear for a new form of completely liberalized reproductive process that would have further compromised the structure of the traditional family, freeing humans from any biological bound and obligation and even allowing homosexuals to have children<sup>419</sup>. While these arguments appeared with strength in the early two-thousands, when cloning research was at its beginnings and there was no clear knowledge of its potential, already by the mid of the decade the threats represented by reproductive cloning were being largely re-contextualized and as legislation was being produced on the issue, the debate slowly disappeared. Already in 2004, from one side the PCBE issued a report that called for a ban of reproductive cloning or any other mean of conception different from the union of human gametes, from the other singular states passed local legislation

---

<sup>415</sup> The Snowflake is an embryo adoption program run by the non-profit organization Nightlight Christian Adoption. More information at the official website: <https://nightlight.org/snowflakes-embryo-adoption-donation/embryo-adoption/>. Accessed September 15, 2020.

<sup>416</sup> Smietana, Bob. *400k and Counting*, 18.

<sup>417</sup> Hertz, Todd. *New Coalition Rallies Against Human Cloning*, Christianity Today, January 7, 2002, 17; Stricherz, Mark. *A Law that Shouldn't be Cloned*, Christianity Today, March 2004, 19. Here opponents of therapeutic cloning defined as "meaningless" the distinction between therapeutic and reproductive purposes.

<sup>418</sup> Gushee, David P. *A Matter of Life and Death*, 39; Cameron, Nigel E. de S., *Defender of Dignity*, Christianity Today, June 10, 2002, 45. Leon Krass ideas on human cloning have been articulated by the bioethicist himself in Krass, Leon R. & Wilson, James Q. *The Ethics of Human Cloning*, Washington D.C., AEI Press, 1998.

<sup>419</sup> Gushee, David P. *A Matter of Life and Death*, 39



making it illegal to research on reproductive cloning<sup>420</sup>. While no federal ban was ever issued on reproductive cloning, in 2005 the United States adhered to a non-binding agreement sanctioned by the United Nations against the practice<sup>421</sup>. Finally, contributing on the partial disappearance of the issue from public debate was the strong disagreement among the scientific community itself about the actual feasibility and potential of the practice, since it became increasingly clear that the creation of a complete human clone would have required more scientific and technological knowledge<sup>422</sup>.

### 6.3 End-of-Life Issues

Another set of issues considered to be bioethical by religious groups have been the ‘end-of-life’ issues such as physician-assisted suicide and euthanasia<sup>423</sup>. The category of the end-of-life issues is a broad one and in the decades considered it spanned from practices in which the medic directly intervenes on patient’s request in ending the patient’s life, to greyer areas of indirect involvement such as the removal of feeding tubes or respiratory devices. End-of-life issues had already been a matter of discussion during the first decades of the twentieth century, but only towards the nineties they became a public policy issue as advocacy groups successfully lobbied for the passage of end-of-life legislations in some of the States. The first state to legalize medical-aid in dying has been Oregon, where Measure 16 or the Death with Dignity Act<sup>424</sup> was approved through a state referendum by a slim majority of 51% on November 8, 1994. A crucial moment for the end-of-life debate has been the Supreme Court ruling *Glucksberg v. Washington* on June 16, 1997, as the Court ruled that the constitution does not provide the people with the right to end their own life and referred the issue back to states, which by their own initiative can enact measures that allow aid-in-dying under certain circumstances<sup>425</sup>. While euthanasia is illegal in the United States, assisted suicide or the removal of life support has been approved by local initiatives in ten of the states and only in very recent times, mainly after the first decade of the twenty-first century<sup>426</sup>. Therefore, the issue itself is still a very actual and highly divisive one as

---

<sup>420</sup> Smietana, Bob. *Cloning Report Breeds Confusion*, Christianity Today, June 2004, 18.

<sup>421</sup> For the decision made by the United Nations see <https://legal.un.org/committees/>. Accessed September 11, 2020.

<sup>422</sup> About the scientific disagreements on reproductive cloning see <https://www.aaas.org/resources/american-association-advancement-science-statement-human-cloning>. Accessed September 11, 2020; On the debate around the legal impact the manufacturing of human clones would have comported, see Havstad, Joyce. *Human reproductive cloning: A conflict of liberties*, Bioethics, 2008, 24, 71-77.

<sup>423</sup> Euthanasia and assisted-suicide are two different end-of-life treatments. In euthanasia, a second party directly causes the death of the individual. In assisted-suicide, a physician prescribes the necessary drugs to terminate one’s own life but it’s the patient himself who voluntarily takes the medications, causing his own death.

<sup>424</sup> A complete description of the law, its effects and eligibility has been provided by the Oregonian government in <https://www.oregon.gov/oha/ph/ProviderPartnerResources/EvaluationResearch/DeathwithDignityAct/Pages/faqs.aspx#whatis>, Accessed September 27, 2020.

<sup>425</sup> Moore, Art. *‘Right to Die’ Debate Returns to States*, Christianity Today, August 11, 1997, 50.

<sup>426</sup> California, 2015; Colorado, 2016; District of Columbia, 2017; Hawaii, 2019; Maine, 2019; New Jersey, 2019; Oregon, 1994; Vermont, 2013; Washington, 2008. See Meisel, Alan. *A History of the Law of Assisted Dying in the United States*, SMU Law Review, University of Pittsburgh 2019. [https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract\\_id=3491401](https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=3491401). Accessed September 25, 2020.

from one side initiatives subjected to state-wide referenda have been passed or refused always by a small margin, from the other the American public has been displaying an increasingly stronger support for the assisted-suicide option<sup>427</sup>. For example, through the nineties and early two-thousands among the American public the average support for aid-in-dying never dropped below 64% if not when considering those sub-groups characterized by strong church attendance, such as Evangelicals and conservative Catholics, where support for the practice averages around 37% thus half of the national data. This short overview helps to better understand the scope of the issue among the Religious Right and the approach conservative Christians have adopted in confronting it.

The approach displayed by Evangelicals towards end-of-life issue has been characterized by much theoretical debate and by very little political action. When looking at the arguments brought forward against aid-in-dying, most of these largely mirror the contemporary ones on embryonic research. Recurring is the idea that allowing people to seek aid-in-dying would eventually result in the devaluation of the life of “the sick, the elderly, the disabled and the poor”, thus leading to a future in which these people would be simply disposed of for the wellness of society<sup>428</sup>. Another recurring element is the accusation made against advocates of aid-in-dying measures of being pursuing economic goals over the value of life, as “death is cheap and medical care towards the end of life can be costly”<sup>429</sup>. Furthermore, the connection between right-to-die and abortion has also been brought forwards and not only by Evangelicals. Indeed, advocates of the aid-in-dying legislation tried to link the two issues together under the understanding that the constitutional right to privacy on which *Roe* had been based could also be applied to assisted-suicide<sup>430</sup>. The Supreme Court unanimously ruled against this assumption in the aforementioned *Glucksberg v. Washington* case, thus ending also any further attempt to base assisted suicide on the right to privacy premises. Beside these slippery-slope arguments, dystopian visions and constitutional discussions, the strongest religiously connotated argument brought forward by Evangelicals has been that the whole idea of eschewing suffering by death is not a Christians attitude but rather a product of a secular view of the human being that considers suffering as a “pointless evil”<sup>431</sup>, thus lamenting what they perceived to be the “near disappearance of Christian cultural though pattern”<sup>432</sup>, meaning the idea that life always has a meaning even when ridden with suffering and as such should be protected. At the same time though, a consistent answer or alternative to the right-to-die issue has never truly materialized beyond opposition. Proposals were made, such as improving counselling to terminally ill patients or improving palliative care to alleviate the sufferings without causing death<sup>433</sup>, but these never became political initiatives

---

<sup>427</sup> Brenan, Megan. *Americans’ Strong Support for Euthanasia Persists*. Gallup Poll, May 31, 2018. <https://news.gallup.com/poll/235145/americans-strong-support-euthanasia-persists.aspx>. Accessed September 25, 2020. Further data and percentages on the support for assisted-suicided are drawn from this source.

<sup>428</sup> Bernardi, Peter J. *Is Death a Right?*, Christianity Today, May 20, 1996, 29.

<sup>429</sup> Cameron, Nigel. *Living Wills and the Will to Live*, Christianity Today, April 6, 1992, 23.

<sup>430</sup> Bernardi, Peter J. *Is Death a Right?*, 29-30.

<sup>431</sup> Neff, David. *The Suicide Machine*, Christianity Today, August 20, 1990, 14.

<sup>432</sup> Ivi.

<sup>433</sup> Schiedermayer, David. *Oregon and the Death of Dignity*, Christianity Today, February 6, 1995, 18-19; Cameron, Nigel. *Living Wills and the Will to Live*, 24.

and neither priorities on the Religious Right agenda. Furthermore, while official positions of conservative churches maintained opposition to any form of treatment whose final goal is to provoke one's death, a division within the ranks emerged around the removal of life support from patients whose condition is so severe that life support merely postpones death rather than prolonging life<sup>434</sup>. Notably, in reporting the decision of a Washington court to strike down a ban on assisted-suicide, *Christianity Today* itself criticized the court ruling of lacking the "crucial ethical distinction between direct killing and action that allow people to die"<sup>435</sup>. What might have seemed the *incipit* for the development of a more complex but consistent position on the end-of-life instead appears as an expression of the ongoing disagreement within conservative Christians, as the issue has never been developed again.

The lack of a decisive position that could produce alternatives and strong argumentations beyond simple opposition and the absence of political mobilization might be intertwined. As seen, the American public opinion has been consistently growing towards support of end-of-life treatments in the decades considered, thus putting conservative Christians on a strong minoritarian position. Disagreements on the removal of life support further complicated the efforts of finding a more pragmatic solution to address the issue, which remained opposed almost by default, meaning with no stronger argumentation than opposition itself. Furthermore, the fact that in the decades considered all but the Oregon initiative had been defeated at state referenda contributed in the issue not being perceived as a political priority. Indeed, among the issues considered in this dissertation end-of-life are those that received attention from conservative Christians at least on a political level.

Nonetheless, some considerations can be made on the approach itself and the choice made by the Religious Right to substantially eschew the issue on a political level. First, it's evident how many arguments behind the opposition to end-of-life treatments were being derived directly from others ongoing debates such as abortion and embryonic research. At the same time, while the embryonic debate found a strong parallel in abortion, assisted-suicide was being left almost to itself as the only connection with abortion had been a juridical one which was moreover stuck down almost immediately by the Supreme Court. Second, the lack of a parallel issue was also combined with the inability of conservative Christians to develop narratives shared by a non-religious public, something they had instead managed to produce with abortion, gay-rights and even the embryonic debate. Opposition to end-of-life instead never moved consistently beyond strong religious reasonings, thus precluding the possibility to make viable inroads among a lesser religious public opinion. Finally, there were no legislative or political necessities compelling conservative Christians to confront the issue immediately, as initiatives to legalize end-of-life treatments had largely failed.

---

<sup>434</sup> *Religious Groups' Views on End-of-Life Issues*, Pew Research Center, November 21, 2013. <https://www.pewforum.org/2013/11/21/religious-groups-views-on-end-of-life-issues/>. Accessed September 26, 2020.

<sup>435</sup> Bernardi, Peter J. *Is Death a Right?*, 29.

## 6.4 Considerations on Part II. Chapter 6

Now that the arguments behind support and opposition to embryonic stem-cells research have been widely explained, it's noteworthy to consider how much political weight the discussion actually assumed for Evangelicals. By looking at the political debate and its developments previously mentioned, two points appear evident: first that at least at high political levels these bioethical issues were a matter of concern, and second that the discussion had never been about the liceity of the research but rather whether or not it should have been publicly funded. Starting from the former, concerns on cellular research had been expressed under all the presidencies since the late eighties. The Reagan administration placed the first bans on the federal funding of new cellular therapies, in particular those performing transplantation of fetal tissues, and the subsequent Bush administration maintained and defended such decisions. Under the Democratic presidency of Clinton, attempts made in order to promote the federal funding of new embryonic researches were met with strong resistance by the Republican dominated Congress, resulting at best in a convoluted compromise that allowed research to be funded as long as the process of harvesting embryonic stem-cells was being carried out by a third party. Finally, under the Bush presidency the Religious Right managed to exercise once again its strong lobbying pressure, resulting not only in the 2001 compromise allowing federal funding only for some specific researches, but also in the subsequent vetoes the president exercised during his second mandate<sup>436</sup>. It would be only under the Obama presidency that some of the restrictions on federal funding of embryonic stem-cells would be reversed<sup>437</sup>. Reflecting on the second point advanced, the fact that the nature of the political debate focused on funds rather than liceity creates a discrepancy between what the Religious Right lobbied for and what it proclaimed. Indeed, when in 2001 President Bush stroke a compromise by allowing federal funds for stem-cells researches on already open projects, despite arguing that federal funding would condone the destruction of human life for medical purposes the Religious Right in the end welcomed the decision either with elation or with mild delusion, but did not condemn the president's middle-way approach<sup>438</sup>. In the years following Bush decision, the arguments moved by the conservative Christians did not change minimally as they continued to denounce embryonic experimentation as "destruction of human life" and calling for an intensification of studies about adult stem-cells, but such positions never materialized in an united political front lobbying for the ban of stem-cells research.

Among the many and possible reasons behind the absence of a concrete political effort, the one that seems to appear as more prominent relates to the simple absence of an effective and uniform position among the broader religious constituencies these organization were made of. First of all, embryonic research presented

---

<sup>436</sup> Stout, David. *In His First Veto, Bush Blocks Stem Cell Bill*, The New York Times, July 19, 2006. <https://www.nytimes.com/2006/07/19/washington/19cnd-stem.html>. Accessed September 11, 2020.

<sup>437</sup> Stout, Davis & Gardiner, Harris. *Obama Reversing Stem Cell Limits Bush Imposed*. The New York times, March 6, 2009. <https://www.nytimes.com/2009/03/07/us/politics/07stem.html>. Accessed September 11, 2020.

<sup>438</sup> Blunt, Sheryl H. *Embryo Split Prolifers*. 25. As examples of the mild but not opposing attitude of the Religious Right towards Bush decision, The Family Research Council welcomed the initiative with mixed feelings while Dobson hailed the president's decision as the right one.

a moral dilemma among two positives rather than one positive and one negative, since it juxtaposed the prospect of defending one life with that of healing life-threatening diseases, thus in both cases the value of life appeared as being central. This moral dilemma contributed in the issue not becoming one sided, as it had happened in contrary with abortion where the opposition between ‘self-autonomy’ and ‘defense of life’ became from the eighties a strong contrast easily usable by both sides to polarize the debate. The presence of adult stem-cells facilitated the assumption by Religious Right leaders and conservative Christians of a position against embryonic research because it presented the opportunity to bypass the moral dilemma as a whole, but this did not happen with the whole Evangelical community and neither with the political world, since attempts to expand funds were being carried by both parties together and blocked only by the presidential vetoes. Indeed, as the debate became more prominent on the public scene in the early two-thousands, support among the American public for the use of embryonic stem-cells steadily grew while opposition decreased, a trend that affected also Evangelicals who by the mid of the decade were almost divided in half over the topic<sup>439</sup>. Furthermore, embryonic research represented not only a completely new topic, but one that exceeded scientific discussions and sparked interdisciplinary confrontations. The bioethical debate on the use of embryos and the advancement of cellular research spanned from the ethical discussion around the beginning of life to economic preoccupations about new monopolies, from the political debate on governmental funds to the legal definition of personhood. Therefore, what constituted by itself an already difficult and unexplored scientific field was made far more complex by the addition of a series of parallel discussions marked by moral dilemmas and equally probable or improbable slippery slope arguments. Thus, despite having received considerable attention from the Evangelical world and from the Religious Right, the bioethical issues of embryonic research and stem-cells never assumed a dimension comparable to that of abortion and gay-rights. While the position Evangelicals assumed in relation to these latter issues has become almost part of the very same Evangelical political identity, the same cannot be said for embryonic research where a variety of opinion still persists to this day and divides the constituency almost in half between those who support and those who oppose the researches. Mobilizing a constituency for political and electoral reasons by using such a complex debate was therefore not only non-feasible, but potentially dangerous. Incurring into an internal debate on such a complex issue such as embryonic research, a topic whose potential outcomes were still a matter of disagreement among the very same scientific community, was probably deemed as simply not worthy as it would have potentially jeopardized the efforts made in other more felt fields, such as abortion and homosexual rights.

---

<sup>439</sup> A research on the cultural trends of the American public around the bioethical issues in the early two-thousands can be found at <https://www.pewresearch.org/politics/2006/08/03/pragmatic-americans-liberal-and-conservative-on-social-issues/>. Accessed September 11, 2020.

## Conclusions

It has been the aim of this dissertation to analyze the recent political history of the American Religious Right and its Evangelical constituency. The central argument that has been defended maintained that due to the perduring alliance with the Republican party, the prolonged exposure to the world of politics and the desire to develop a more efficient political presence, the Religious Right matured in the nineties and early two-thousands a new political approach with a pragmatic nature. To support the defended thesis, this dissertation has focused its attention in its first part on the relations between the Religious Right and the political world proper, meaning the U.S. main parties and the three presidents that have succeeded one another in the decades considered, and in its second part on those issues that conservative Christians came to consider paramount for the social and moral future of the American society, meaning abortion, gay-rights and the new bioethical issues connected with embryonic research.

In Part I, the arguments in favor of the central thesis of this dissertation have been presented and defended by looking at the developments the Religious Right underwent in its contact with the political world proper in the nineties and early two-thousands. During the course of this two changing decades, the Religious Right came to term with the necessity of maturing politically and adapting to the logics of politics in order to enhance its influence. The political coalition abandoned its more thunderous and uncompromising aspects in favor of a new approach more in tune with the rules of the political world, thus adopting a more prone to compromise policy making behavior made of give-and-take logics. In doing so, the Religious Right moved beyond its more inflexible aspects and came to accept gradualism as a licit mean for the pursuit of its goals. Furthermore, next to this change in policy making the organizations forming the Religious Right also refocused their organizational structure in favor of wider and more decentralized models, thus moving beyond the Moral Majority model made of strong identification with one leader and over-reliance on lobbyism at federal level only. Instead of solely developing a presence in the federal capital in order to influence politics at their highest levels, the organizations created and reinforced local chapters through all the States, with the aim of engaging significant battles all over the nation and through all the levels of the political pyramid, from city councils to Congress. This decentralized approach provided the Religious Right with a better organized grassroot base, which further enhanced not only the political influence of the organizations themselves, but also their ability to support social conservative candidates sympathetic to their views and projects.

Part II of this dissertation has instead focused on those issues conservative Christians came to define as paramount for the defense of the American social and moral tissue. Public policy issues as abortion, gay-rights and new bioethics have provided compelling historical examples to observe the changing political behavior of the Religious Right. Starting from abortion, in the early days of their political activism Evangelicals moved to assume a strong pro-life position and championed the reversal of *Roe v. Wade* and the passage of a Human Life Amendment. Through the eighties and early nineties this has been the only approach accepted by the Religious Right and any discussion about more feasible compromises was harshly dismissed as not possible. This approach proved to be largely unsuccessful and with the rise of the pro-choice Clinton

presidency it became clear that landmark changes were now far from the Evangelical reach. After a period of internal confrontation, the Religious Right undertook a different path and decided to lobby not for a ban of the practice, considered unrealistic and impossible to obtain in that political scenario, but rather for the passage of a series of limitations on its availability and allowed procedures. The strategy repaid the efforts made and the success prompted conservative Christians to maintain this approach also under more favorable political conditions, with the new key words for political engagement being “undermining without overruling”. Gay-rights presented a similar and yet different scenario for Evangelical political activism. It has been shown how, differently from the abortion debate, the Religious Right attempted not to strike a compromise on the issues surrounding the expansion of gay-rights because this would have meant taking part in the social acceptance of homosexuality. It has been explained how this contrast represented not a step-back in the political evolution of the Religious Right but rather a consequence of the understanding Evangelicals had of homosexuality and of the position of political strength they had assumed. The fact that Evangelicals considered homosexuality biblically wrong and socially dangerous brought them into seeing any compromise on the issue as a *de facto* acceptance of same-sex attraction, something they could have not allowed. The Religious Right managed to maintain this uncompromising position against an increasingly more accepting culture thanks to the position of strength it had assumed following its political evolution, thus supporting only those candidates who held the same uncompromising views on the issue. Further strength came from the legal and juridical context in which the debate around gay-rights took place. Indeed, if abortion represented a practice protected on a federal level by a landmark Supreme Court decision, gay-rights and same-sex marriage in particular were still being opposed both on a legislative and juridical level. For its final chapter, Part II has focused on the new bioethical issues that have unfolded following important scientific breakthroughs in the field of embryonic research in the late eighties. Although less impactful on a political level for the mobilization of the Evangelical constituency and the evolution of the Religious Right than the previous two issues, embryonic research and the use of embryonic stem-cells have been taken into consideration for the debate they sparked in American society. Conservative Christians joined the debate since its beginnings and tried to contextualize a complex topic within the already structured pro-life position, adapting already established arguments about the sanctity of life and its defense.

By the end of the early two-thousands, the Religious Right emerged as a very different political force from what it had been at times of the Moral Majority. While stopping the encroaching secularization of the American society and restoring the social and moral tissue of the U.S. alongside religious lines remained the final goals of this political coalition, the pursuit of the same drastically changed. Space was left for a more pragmatic approach to policy making, anchored on gradualism as a principle and compromise as a mean. Having come to term with the reality of politics meant realizing that the uncompromising approach of the Moral Majority model was flawed from the beginning, unfit for the rules of the political world. Confronted with this realization, Evangelicals were left with two choices: retiring once again in their traditional political indifference, or changing to become a stronger political force. They chose the latter.

## Bibliography

- Agenda for the Nineties*, Christianity Today, January 15, 1990.
- Balch, David L. *Homosexuality, Science and the "plain sense" of Scripture*, Grand Rapids, Eerdmans, 2000.
- Balmer, Richard. *Evangelicalism in America*, Waco, Baylor University Press, 2016.
- Banwart, Doug. *Jerry Falwell, The rise of the Moral Majority and the 1980 election*, Western Illinois Historical Review, Vol. V, Spring 2013. <http://www.wiu.edu/cas/history/wihr/pdfs/Banwart-MoralMajorityVol5.pdf>.
- Barna Research Group. *How People of Faith Voted in the 2008 Presidential Race*, January 28, 2009. <https://www.barna.com/research/how-people-of-faith-voted-in-the-2008-presidential-race/>.
- Barna Research Group. *Survey Explores Who qualifies As an Evangelical*, January 18, 2007. <https://www.barna.com/research/survey-explores-who-qualifies-as-an-evangelical/>.
- Barnes, Fred. *Issues for 1989: Abortion*, Christianity Today, January 13, 1989.
- Bates Stephen. *Tim LaHaye Obituary*, The Guardian, July 28, 2016. <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2016/jul/28/tim-lahaye-obituary>.
- Bebbington, David W. *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain: A History from the 1730s to the 1930s*, London, Unwin Hyman, 1989.
- Bernardi, Peter J. *Is Death a Right?*, Christianity Today, May 20, 1996.
- The Biotech Temptation*, Christianity Today, July 12, 1999.
- Blunt, Sheryl H. *Embryos Split Prolifers*, Christianity Today, September 3, 2001.
- Blunt, Sheryl H. *Lives Measured in Minutes*, Christianity Today, November 13, 2000.
- Blunt, Sheryl H. *Partisanship in the Pews*, Christianity Today, April 2, 2001.
- Blunt, Sherley H. *Spoils of Victory*, Christianity Today, January 2007.
- Blunt, Sheryl H. *The Giuliani Choice*, Christianity Today, June 2007.
- Blunt, Sheryl H. *The Man Behind the Marriage Amendment*, Christianity Today, September 2004.



Bock, Darrell. *The Politics of the People of God*, Christianity Today, September 2005.

Booth, William. *Doctor Killed During Abortion Protests*, Washington Post, March 11, 1993.

Briggs, Kenneth A. *Baptists, In Shift, Ask Members to Seek Antiabortion 'Climate'*, The New York Times, June 18, 1976. <https://www.nytimes.com/1976/06/18/archives/baptists-in-shift-ask-members-to-seek-antiabortion-climate.html>.

*Bringing in the Votes*, Christianity Today, April 27, 1992.

Britannica. *The State of Tennessee v. John Thomas Scopes*, <https://www.britannica.com/event/Scopes-Trial>.

Britannica. *Roe v. Wade*. <https://www.britannica.com/event/Roe-v-Wade>.

Britannica. *Engel v. Vitale*. <https://www.britannica.com/event/Engel-v-Vitale>.

Britannica. *Dred Scott v. Sandford*. <https://www.britannica.com/event/Dred-Scott-decision>.

Britannica. *Obergefell v. Hodges*. <https://www.britannica.com/event/Obergefell-v-Hodges>.

Britannica. *Romer v. Evans*. <https://www.britannica.com/event/Romer-v-Evans>.

Britannica. *Lawrence v. Texas*. <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Lawrence-v-Texas>.

Brenan, Megan. *Americans' Strong Support for Euthanasia Persists*, Gallup Poll, May 31, 2018. <https://news.gallup.com/poll/235145/americans-strong-support-euthanasia-persists.aspx>.

Bryant, Anita. *The Anita Bryant Story: The Survival of Our Nation's Families and the Threat of Militant Homosexuality*, Old Tappan, Fleming H. Revell, 1977.

Brown, Terry, ed. *Other Voices, Other Worlds: The Global Church Speaks Out on Homosexuality*, London, Darton Longman and Todd, 2006.

Brownstein, Ronald. *GOP Leaders embrace Christian Coalition Plan*, Los Angeles Time, May 18, 1995. <https://www.latimes.com/archives/la-xpm-1995-05-18-mn-3259-story.html>.

Burge, Ryan P. *Evangelicals Show No Decline, Despite Trump and Nones*, Christianity Today, March 21, 2019. <https://www.Christianitytoday.com/news/2019/march/evangelical-nones-mainline-us-general-social-survey-gss.html>.

*Bush's Faith Based Plans*, Christianity Today, October 25, 1999.

Cadge, Wendy, Day, Heather, Wildeman, Christopher. *Bridging the Denomination-Congregation Divide: Evangelical Lutheran Church in America Congregations Respond to Homosexuality*, Review of Religious Research, Vol. 48, No. 3, 2007, 245-259. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/20447442>.

Cameron, Nigel E. de S. *Defender of Dignity*, Christianity Today, June 10, 2002.

Cameron, Nigel. *Living Wills and the Will to Live*, Christianity Today, April 6, 1992.

*Can we come to the party?*, Christianity Today, October 2008.

Carlson, Michael. *Billy James Hargis: Rightwing preacher laid low by sexual scandal*, The Guardian, December 10, 2004. <https://www.theguardian.com/news/2004/dec/10/guardianobituaries.religion>.

Carnes, Tony. *A Presidential Hopeful Progress*, Christianity Today, October 2, 2000.

Carnes, Tony. *Amending Marriage*, Christianity Today, April 2004.

Carnes, Tony. *Bush's Defining Moment*, Christianity Today, November 12, 2001.

Carnes, Tony. *Disappointed but Holding*, Christianity Today, February 2006.

Carnes, Tony. *Republican Candidates Court Conservative Early, Often*, Christianity Today, April 5, 1999.

Carnes, Tony. *Republicans, Religious Right Stunned by Voters Rebuke*, Christianity Today, December 7, 1998.

Carnes, Tony. *'Swing Evangelicals'*, Christianity Today, February 2004.

Carnes, Tony. *Talking the Walk*, Christianity Today, October 2008.

Carnes, Tony. *The Twelfth of Never*, Christianity Today, January 2004.

Carnes, Tony. *Wooing the Faithful*, Christianity Today, October 2004.

Carpenter, Joel A. *Fundamentalist Institutions and the Rise of Evangelical Protestantism*, Church history, March 1980, pp. 62-75.

Casey, Shaun A. *The Making of a Catholic President: Kennedy v. Nixon 1960*, Oxford/New York, Oxford University Press, 2009.

Christian Action Network. <https://Christianaction.org/>.

*Changing Hearts and Laws*, Christianity Today, March 5, 2001.

*Chipping Away at Roe v. Wade*, Christianity Today, August 20, 1990.

*Christians Decry Rights Bill*, Christianity Today, September 12, 1994.

Coats, Dan. *The Politics of Patience*, Christianity Today, August 10, 1998.

Cohen, Cynthia B. *Renewing the Suff of Life: Stem Cells, Ethics and Public Policy*, Oxford/New York, Oxford University Press, 2007.

Collins, Kenneth J. *The Evangelical Moment*, Grand Rapids, Baker Academic, 2005.

Colson, Charles. *Is the Religious Right finished?*, Christianity Today, September 6, 1999.

Colson, Charles & Pearcey, Nancy. *Moral Education After Monica*, Christianity Today, March 1, 1999.

Concerned Women for America. <https://concernedwomen.org/about/who-we-are/>.

Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith. *Instruction for Respect of Human Life in its Origins and on the Dignity of Procreation. Replies to Certain Questions of the Day*, Rome, February 22, 1987. [https://www.vatican.va/roman\\_curia/congregations/cfaith/documents/rc\\_con\\_cfaith\\_doc\\_19870222\\_respect-for-human-life\\_en.html](https://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/documents/rc_con_cfaith_doc_19870222_respect-for-human-life_en.html).

Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith. *Letter to the Bishops of the Catholic Church on the Pastoral Care for Homosexual Persons*, Rome, October 1, 1986. <https://www.ewtn.com/catholicism/library/letter-to-the-bishops-of-the-catholic-church-on-the-pastoral-care-of-homosexual-persons-2081>.

Conkle, Daniel O. *Religion, Politics, and the 2000 Presidential Election: A Selective Survey and Tentative Appraisal*, Indiana Law Journal, Vol. 77, No.2, 2002, 247. <http://www.repository.law.indiana.edu/ilj/vol77/iss2/3>.

Courage International. <https://couragerc.org/>.

Courage International. Twelve Steps Program. <https://couragerc.org/resource/twelve-steps/>.

*A Crack in the Wall*, Christianity Today, October 7, 2002.

Cromartie, Michael. *One Lord, One Faith, One Voice?*, Christianity Today, October 7, 1996.

Crtichlow, Donald T. *The Politics of Abortion and Birth Control in Historical Perspective*, University Park, Pennsylvania State University Press, 1996.

Cryderman, Lyn. *A Movement Divided*, Christianity Today, August 12, 1988.

Cryderman, Lyn. *Am-Bushed?*, Christianity Today, Sept 24, 1990.

Cryderman, Lyn. *Exit Right*, Christianity Today, August 18, 1989.

Curtis, Carolyn. *Political Partisanship Resisted*, Christianity Today, July 17, 1995.

Curtis, Carolyn. *Putting Out A Contract*, Christianity Today, July 17, 1995.

Cutrer, Corrie. *Love the President, Hate the Policy*, Christianity Today, October 2, 2000.

Dallas, Joe. *Born Gay?*, Christianity Today, June 22, 1992.

Davies, Bob. *Ex-Gay Sheds The Mocking Quote Marks*, Christianity Today, January 7, 2002.

Department of Health and Human Services. *Regenerative Medicine*, August 2006.  
[https://stemcells.nih.gov/info/Regenerative\\_Medicine.htm](https://stemcells.nih.gov/info/Regenerative_Medicine.htm).

Digitale, Robert. *San Francisco Set to Define 'Family'*, Christianity Today, October 20, 1989.

Dignity USA. <https://www.dignityusa.org/history>.

Dobson, Edward G. *Taking Politics out of the Sanctuary*, Christianity Today, May 20, 1996.

Dowland, Seth. *'Family Values' and the Formation of a Christian Right Agenda*, Church History, Vol. 78, No. 3, 2009, 606-631. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/20618754>.

Duffy, Nick. *European Parliament condemns gay cure therapy and tells EU member states to ban it*, Pink News, March 1, 2018. <https://www.pinknews.co.uk/2018/03/01/european-parliament-condemns-gay-cure-therapy-and-tells-eu-member-states-to-ban-it/>.

Durham, Martin. *The Christian Right, the far right and the boundaries of American conservatism*, Manchester, Manchester University Press, 2000.

Eberly, Don. *Is the Religious Right finished?*, Christianity Today, September 6, 1999.

The Editorial Team of Christianity Today. *Why 'Christianity Today'?*, Christianity Today, October 15, 1956.

Episcopal Church. Official Position on Stem-Cells.  
<https://episcopalchurch.org/library/document/issue-stem-cell-research>.

Evangelicals for Social Action. <https://www.evangelicalsforsocialaction.org/about-esa-2/history/>.

Evangelical Press Association. *'CTI' is now 'Christianity Today'*.  
<https://www.evangelicalpress.com/cti/>.

Evans, John H. & Hudson, Kathy. *Religion and Reproductive Genetic: Beyond Views of Embryonic Life?*, Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion, Vol. 46, No.4, 2007, 565-581. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/4622009>.

Everton, Sean F. *The Promise Keepers: Religious Revival or Third Wave of the Religious Right?*, Review of Religious Research, Vol. 43, No. 1, 2001, 51-69. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/3512243>.

Falwell, Jerry. *Is the Religious Right finished?*, Christianity Today, September 6, 1999.

Falwell, Jerry. *Letter from Jerry Falwell on keeping Old Time Gospel on Air*, August 13, 1981. <https://texashistory.unt.edu/ark:/67531/metadc177440/>.

Falwell, Jerry. *Listen, America!*, New York, Bantam, 1980.

Family Research Council. <https://www.frc.org/family-formation>.

Federal Drug Administration. <https://www.fda.gov/>.

Feminist for Life. <https://www.feministsforlife.org/about-us/>.

Fenton, Elizabeth. *Religious Liberties: Anti-Catholicism and Liberal Democracy in Nineteenth-Century U.S. Literature and Culture*, Oxford/New York, Oxford University Press, 2011.

Ferranti, Jennifer. *'D and X' Abortion Ban Faces Presidential Veto*, Christianity Today, December 11, 1995.

Findlay, James F. *Religion and Politics in the Sixties: The Churches and the Civil Rights Act of 1964*, Journal of American History, Vol. 77, No.1, 1990, 66-92. <https://academic.oup.com/jah/article-abstract/77/1/66/757627?redirectedFrom=fulltextrelig>.

Fitzgerald, Frances. *The Evangelicals: The Struggle to Shape America*, New York, Simon & Schuster, 2017.

Focus on the Family. <https://www.focusonthefamily.com/>.

Focus on the Family. <https://www.focusonthefamily.com/about/foundational-values/>.

Focus on the Family. <https://www.focusonthefamily.com/pro-life/>.

Focus on the Family. <https://www.focusonthefamily.com/pro-life/option-ultrasound-program-2/>.

*For Whom Would Jesus Vote?*, Christianity Today, November 2004.

Frame, Randy. *Conservative Christians in the Cross Hairs?*, Christianity Today, July 14, 1997.

Frame, Randy. *High Stakes for the Religious Right*, Christianity Today, October 3, 1994.

Frame, Randy. *Quick Change Artists*, Christianity Today, December 12, 1994.

Frame, Randy. *Payback Time?*, Christianity Today, March 6, 1995.

Frame, Randy. *Seeking a Right to the Rite*, Christianity Today, March 4, 1996.

Frame, Randy. *Showdown in Atlanta*, Christianity Today, September 16, 1988.

Frame, Randy. *The Evangelical Closet*, Christianity Today, November 5, 1990.

*Free Speech for Politicians*, Christianity Today, May 2003.

Fried, Marlene G. *From Abortion To Reproductive Freedom: Transforming a Movement*, Boston, South End Press, 1990.

Frykholm, Amy J. *Rapture Culture: Left Behind in Evangelical America*, Oxford/New York, Oxford University Press, 2004.

Gallup Poll. Poll on homosexual rights. <https://news.gallup.com/poll/1651/gay-lesbian-rights.aspx>.

Gallup Poll. Poll on abortion. <https://news.gallup.com/poll/1576/abortion.aspx>.

Gardner, Christine J. *Wild Card Election*, Christianity Today, October 26, 1998.

Gayner, Jeffrey. *The Contract with America: Implementing New Ideas in the U.S.*, The Heritage Foundation, October 12, 1995. <https://www.heritage.org/political-process/report/the-contract-america-implementing-new-ideas-the-us>.

Geinder, Chris. *The Court Cases That Changed L.G.B.T.Q. Rights*, New York Times, June 19, 2019. <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/06/19/us/legal-history-lgbtq-rights-timeline.html>.

Geng, Chunling. *The Great Influence of 'Stop-Era' and Its Tactics on the Un-Ratification of the ERA*, Canadian Social Science, July 1, 2012.

Giles, Thomas S. *Test Tube Wars*, Christianity Today, January 1, 1995.

Golberg, Michelle. *Palin and the Christian Right*, The Nation, September 24, 2008. <https://www.thenation.com/article/archive/palin-and-Christian-right/>.

*Gospel Independence*, Christianity Today, July 2008.

Graham, Billy. *Just As I Am*, New York, Harper One, 1999.

Green, Jocelyn. *Voting Values*, Christianity Today, December 2007.

- Green, Steven K. *Inventing a Christian America: The Myth of the Religious Founding*, Oxford/New York, Oxford University Press, 2015.
- Greenhouse, Linda. *Becoming Justice Blackmun: Harry Blackmun's Supreme Court journey*, New York, Times Books, 2005.
- Griffith R. Marie. *Moral Combat: How Sex Divided American Christians and Fractured American Politics*, New York, Basic Books, 2017.
- Guinn, David E. *Handbook of Bioethic and Religion*, Oxford Scholarship Online, September 2006. <https://oxford.universitypressscholarship.com/view/10.1093/0195178734.001.0001/acprof-9780195178739>.
- Gushee, David P. *A Matter of Life and Death*, Christianity Today, October 1, 2001.
- Gushee, David P., and Justin Phillips. *Moral Formation and the Evangelical Voter: A Report from the Red States*, Journal of the Society of Christian Ethics, Vol. 26, No. 2, 2006, 23-60. [www.jstor.org/stable/23561813](http://www.jstor.org/stable/23561813).
- Hansen, Collin. *The Other Election*, Christianity Today, August 2008.
- Harp, Gillis J. *Protestants and American Conservatism*, Oxford/New York, Oxford University Press, 2019.
- Harris, Harriet A. *Fundamentalism and Evangelicals*, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1998.
- Hatch, Nathan O. & Hamilton, Michael S. *Can Evangelicalism Survive Its Success?*, Christianity Today, October 5, 1992.
- Havstad, Joyce. *Human reproductive cloning: A conflict of liberties*, Bioethics, 2008.
- Heath W. Carter and Laura R. Porter eds. *Turning Points in the History of American Evangelicalism*, Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, Michigan, 2017.
- Hertz, Todd. *New Coalition Rallies Against Human Cloning*, Christianity Today, January 7, 2002.
- Homosexuality and the Bible*, Christianity Today, November 5, 1990.
- Humphrey, Edith M. *What God Has Not Joined*, Christianity Today, September 2004.
- Interfaith Alliance. <https://interfaithalliance.org/about-us/our-mission/>.
- Israel, Charles Alan. *Before Scopes: Evangelism, Education and Evolution in Tennessee, 1870-1925*, Athens, Georgia, University of Georgia Press, 2004.

*It's Not About Stem Cells*, Christianity Today, October 2004.

Jhon Paul II, *Evangelium Vitae*, Rome, March 25, 1995. [http://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/it/encyclicals/documents/hf\\_jp-ii\\_enc\\_25031995\\_evangelium-vitae.html](http://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/it/encyclicals/documents/hf_jp-ii_enc_25031995_evangelium-vitae.html).

Johnson, Emily S. *This is Our Message*, Oxford/New York, Oxford University press, 2019.

J.K. Findlay, M.L. Gear, P.J. Illingworth, S.M. Junk, G. Kay, A.H. Mackerras, A. Pope, H.S. Rothenfluh, L. Wilton. *Human embryo: a biological definition*, Human Reproduction, Vol. 22, No. 4, 2007, 905-911. <https://academic.oup.com/humrep/article/22/4/905/695880>.

Karrer, Robert N. *The National Right to Life Committee: Its Funding, Its History, and the Emergence of the Pro-Life Movement Prior to Roe v. Wade*, The Catholic Historical Review, Vol. 97, No. 3, 2011, 527-557. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/23052569>.

Kauffman, Richard A. *Does Call to Renewal Skirt partisan politics?*, Christianity Today, October 28, 1996.

Kelley, Donald R & Shields, Todd G. *Taking the Measure: The Presidency of George W. Bush*. College Station, Texas A&M University Press, 2013.

Kellner, Mark A. *Marriage Savers*, Christianity Today, April 3, 2000.

Kellstedt, Lyman & Green, John & Guth, James & Smidt, Corwin. *Religious Voting Blocs in the 1992 Election: The Year of the Evangelical?*, Sociology of Religion, Vol. 5, No. 3, 1994, 307-326. <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/249291433>.

Kennedy, John W. *Candidates Court Family Values Vote*, Christianity Today, October 7, 1996.

Kennedy, John W. *Pro-Life Movement Struggles for Viability*, Christianity Today, November 8, 1993.

Kennedy, John W. *Preach and Reach*, Christianity Today, October 2008.

Kennedy, John W. *Senate Showdown*, Christianity Today, September 2004.

Kennedy, John W. *The marriage battle begins*, Christianity Today, September 2003.

King, N.M., Perrin, J. *Ethical issues in stem cell research and therapy*, Stem Cell Res, Vol. 5, No. 85, 2014. <https://stemcellres.biomedcentral.com/articles/10.1186/scrt474>.

King, Wayne. *Bakker, Evangelist, Resigns His Ministry Over Sexual Incident*, The New York Times, March 21, 1987. <https://www.nytimes.com/1987/03/21/us/bakker-evangelist-resigns-his-ministry-over-sexual-incident.html>.



- King, Wayne. *Swaggart Says He Has Sinned; Will Step Down*, The New York Times, February 22, 1988. <https://www.nytimes.com/1988/02/22/us/swaggart-says-he-has-sinned-will-step-down.html>.
- Kinney, Robert. *Homosexuality and Scientific Evidence: On Suspect Anecdotes, Antiquated Data, and Broad Generalizations*, The Linacre Quarterly, Vol. 83, No. 2, 2016, 364-390. <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1179/2050854915Y.0000000002a>.
- Knippers, Diane. *The Great Right Hope*, Christianity Today, February 6, 1995.
- Konway, Karen S. & Butler, Michael R. *State Abortion Legislation as a Public Good—Before and After Roe v. Wade*, Economic Inquiry, Vol. 30, No.4, 1992, 609-626. <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/abs/10.1111/j.1465-7295.1992.tb01284.x>.
- Koury, Charlotte. *Therapeutic cloning: Promises and issues*, McGill journal of medicine. MJM: an international forum for the advancement of medical sciences by students. Vol. 10, No. 2, 2007, 112-120. [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/51399873\\_Therapeutic\\_cloning\\_Promises\\_and\\_issues](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/51399873_Therapeutic_cloning_Promises_and_issues).
- Krass, Leon R. & Wilson, James Q. *The Ethics of Human Cloning*, Washington D.C., AEI Press, 1998.
- Kruse, Kevin M. *One Nation Under God*, New York, Basic Books, 2015.
- LaHaye, Tim & LaHaye, Beverly. *The Act of Marriage*, Grand Rapids, Zondervan, 1976.
- Larson, Edward J. *Summer for the Gods: The Scopes Trial and America's Continuing Debate over Science and Religion*, New York, Basic Books, 1997.
- Lawton, Kim A. *A Republican God?*, Christianity Today, October 5, 1992.
- Lawton, Kim A. *Bush: Start with revival*, Christianity Today, October 26, 1992.
- Lawton, Kim A. *Christian Coalition Moves Ahead Despite Growing Political Pains*, Christianity Today, October 28, 1996.
- Lawton, Kim A. *Clinton Signs Law Backing Heterosexual Marriage*, Christianity Today, October 28, 1996.
- Lawton, Kim A. *Could This Be the Year?*, Christianity Today, April 7, 1989.
- Lawton, Kim. A., *Curing or Killing?*, Christianity Today, May 18, 1992.
- Lawton, Kim A. *Democrats Gain Momentum*, Christianity Today, September 2, 1988.

- Lawton, Kim A. *Estranged Bedfellows*, Christianity Today, August 17, 1992.
- Lawton, Kim A. *Is Pro-life Democrat a Contradiction in terms?*, Christianity Today, March 9, 1992.
- Lawton, Kim A. *Religious Groups Push Platform Agenda*, Christianity Today, July 15, 1988.
- Lawton, Kim A. *Republican or Reganites?*, Christianity Today, September 16, 1988.
- Lawton, Kim A. *Seeking Common Ground*, Christianity Today, December 14, 1992.
- Lawton, Kim A. *The New Face(s) of the Religious Right*, Christianity Today, July 20, 1992.
- Lawton, Kim A. *Whatever Happened to the Religious Right?*, Christianity Today, December 15, 1989.
- LeBlanc, Doug. *The Year of the Homosexual Vote*, Christianity Today, October 26, 1992.
- Livio, Susane K. *Group claiming to turn gay men straight committed consumer fraud, N.J. jury says*, NJ.com, January 17, 2019.  
[https://www.nj.com/politics/2015/06/gay\\_conversion\\_therapy\\_fraud\\_trial\\_verdict.html](https://www.nj.com/politics/2015/06/gay_conversion_therapy_fraud_trial_verdict.html).
- Loconte, Joe. *Will The Religious Right gain Momentum in 1994?*, Christianity Today, February 7, 1994.
- Marley, David J. *Phillis Schlafly's Battle against the ERA and Women in the Military*, Quaterly Report on Women and the Military, 2000.
- Marsden, George M. *The Rise of Fundamentalism*. In Heath W. Carter and Laura R. Porter eds. *Turning Points in the History of American Evangelicalism*, Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, Michigan, 2017.
- Marsden, George M. *Understanding Fundamentalism and Evangelicalism*, Grand Rapids, Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1991.
- Martin, William C. *With God on Our Side: The Rise of the Religious Right in America*, New York, Broadway Books, 2005.
- Martin, William. *How Ronal Reagan Wowed Evangelicals*, Christianity Today. August 2004.
- Massa, Mark S. *Anti-Catholicism in America: The Last Acceptable Prejudice*, New York, Crossroads, 2003.
- Massachusetts court backs gay marriage*, Christianity Today, January 2004.
- Matheus-Green, Frederica. *The Hungry Congressman*, Christianity Today, September 1, 1997.

Matthews-Green, Frederica. *Wanted: A New Pro-life Strategy*, Christianity Today, January 12, 1998.

McDermott, Geralt. *What Johnathan Edwards Can teach us about Politics*, Christianity Today, July 18, 1994.

McGreevy, John T. *Catholics and American Freedom*, New York, W. W. Norton, 2003.

McNeill, John J. *The Church and the Homosexual*, Boston, Beacon Press, 2015.

M.D. Koop, C. Everett; Schaeffer, Francis A. *Whatever Happened to the Human race?*, Wheaton, Illinois, Crossway Books, 1983.

Meisel, Alan. *A History of the Law of Assisted Dying in the United States*, SMU Law Review, University of Pittsburgh 2019. [https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract\\_id=3491401](https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=3491401).

Miller, Steven P. *Billy Graham and the Rise of the Republican South*, Philadelphia, University of Pennsylvania Press, 2009.

Mills, Melinda. *How do genes affect same-sex behavior?*, Science, Vol. 365, No. 6456, 2019, 869-870. <https://science.sciencemag.org/content/365/6456/869>.

Moll, Rob. *Rendering Unto Cesar?*, Christianity Today, September 2004.

Moore, Art. *Partial-Birth Bans Make Little Headway in States*, Christianity Today, April 5, 1999.

Moore, Art. *'Right to Die' Debate Returns to States*, Christianity Today, August 11, 1997.

Monroe, Kristen R., Miller, Ronald B., Tobis, Jerome S. *Fundamentals of the Stem Cell Debate: The Scientific, Religious, Ethical and Political Issues*, Berkeley, University of Carolina Press, 2008.

Moran, Jeffery P. *The Scopes Trial: A Brief History with Documents*, Boston, Bedford/St. Martin's, 2002.

Morgan, Timothy C. *Clinton Draws Ire of SBC*, Christianity Today, July 19, 1993.

Morgan, Timothy C. *SBC targets Clinton, Disney, Jews*, Christianity Today, July 15, 1996.

Mouw, Richard J. *Tolerance Without Compromise*, Christianity Today, July 15, 1996.

Moyler, Hunter. *Christianity Today Subscriptions Rose After Op-Ed Calling for Donald Trump's Removal from Office, Magazine Says*, Newsletter, December 23, 2019. <https://www.newsweek.com/Christianity-today-subscriptions-rose-after-op-ed-calling-donald-trumps-removal-office-magazine-1478899>.

Muck, Terry. *The Vision Test*, Christianity Today, April 8, 1988.

Muck, Terry C. *What If We Win?*, Christianity Today, April 21, 1989.

Mugavero, Francis. *Sexuality-God's Gift*, Pastoral Letter of the Bishop of Brooklyn, Chancery, Brooklyn, February 1976.

Mummery C., A. Van Den Stolpe, B. Roelen, H. Clevers, ed. *Stem Cells: Scientific Facts and Fiction*, Amsterdam, Academic Press, 2014.

Myers, Richard S. *Re-Reading Roe v. Wade*, Washington and Lee Law Review, Vol. 71, No. 2, 2014, 1025-1046. <https://scholarlycommons.law.wlu.edu/wlulr/vol71/iss2/12>.

National Association of Evangelicals. *What Is an Evangelical?*. <https://www.nae.net/what-is-an-evangelical>.

National Association of Evangelicals. *For the Health of the Nation*. <https://www.nae.net/for-the-health-of-the-nation/>.

National Association of Evangelicals. *Position on Bioethics*. <https://www.nae.net/bioethics-and-stem-cell-research/>

Neff, David. *The New Ex-Gay Agenda*, Christianity Today, March 9, 1992.

Neff, David. *The Suicide Machine*, Christianity Today, August 20, 1990.

Nicholas, Dan. *Vermont House Approves Civil Unions*, Christianity Today, April 24, 2000.

Nightlight Christian Adoption. Snowflake adoption program. <https://nightlight.org/snowflakes-embryo-adoption-donation/embryo-adoption/>.

Noll, Mark A. *The Politician's Bible*, Christianity Today, October 26, 1992.

*Obama Calls for end to 'gay conversion therapy'*, BBC News, April 9, 2015. <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-us-canada-32227353>.

Olasky, Marvin. *A Gadfly in the House*, Christianity Today, May 9, 1992.

Olsen, Ted. *Call to Renewal Alliance divided over its own Agenda*, Christianity Today, April 8, 1996.

Olsen, Ted. *The Art of Abortion Politics*, Christianity Today, March 2006.

Olsen, Ted. *Where Jim Wallis Stands*, Christianity Today, May 2008.

Olson, Laura R. & Cadge, Wendy. *Talking About Homosexuality: The Views of Mainline Protestant Clergy*, *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*, Vol. 41, No.1, 2002, 153-167. <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/abs/10.1111/1468-5906.00107>.

O'Leary, Denyse. *Embryo Research Contested*, *Christianity Today*, May 24, 1999.

O'Leary, Denyse. *Tissue of Lies?*, *Christianity Today*, October 23, 2000.

O'Keefe, Mark. *'Religious Bigotry' Alleged*, *Christianity Today*, December 13, 1993.

*Opposing Views Argued in Court, on the Streets*, *Christianity Today*, May 18, 1992.

Patel, Kant. *Crafting a Cloning Policy: From Dolly to Stem Cell*, *The Social Science Journal*, Vol. 40, No.2, 2003, 350-352. <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1016/S0362-3319%2803%2900019-3>.

Pew Research Center. *How The Faithful Vote*. <https://www.pewforum.org/2008/11/05/how-the-faithful-voted/>.

Pew Research Center. *Religion and the Presidential Vote*. <https://www.people-press.org/2004/12/06/religion-and-the-presidential-vote/>.

Pew Research Center. *Religious' Groups Official Positions on Stem Cell Research*. <https://www.pewforum.org/2008/07/17/religious-groups-official-positions-on-stem-cell-research/>.

Pew Research Center. *Religious Groups' Views on End-of-Life Issues*. <https://www.pewforum.org/2013/11/21/religious-groups-views-on-end-of-life-issues/>.

Pew Research Center. *The Clinton Presidency and the Next President*. <https://www.pewresearch.org/politics/1999/11/11/section-5-the-clinton-legacy-and-the-next-president/#presidential-qualities>.

Pew Research Center. *The Religious Landscape Study*. <https://www.pewforum.org/religious-landscape-study/>.

Perl, Lila. *Cloning*, New York, Marshall Cavendish Benchmark, 2006.

Pierceson, Jason. *Courts Liberalism and Rights: Gay Law and Politics in The United States and Canada*, Philadelphia, Temple University Press, 2005.

Pius XII. *Address to the Italian Association of Catholic Midwives*, Rome, October 29, 1951, [https://w2.vatican.va/content/pius-xii/it/speeches/1951/documents/hf\\_p-xii\\_spe\\_19511029\\_ostetriche.html](https://w2.vatican.va/content/pius-xii/it/speeches/1951/documents/hf_p-xii_spe_19511029_ostetriche.html).

Pius XII. *Address before the convention 'Family Front'*, Rome, November 27, 1951. [https://w2.vatican.va/content/pius-xii/it/speeches/1951/documents/hf\\_p-xii\\_spe\\_19511127\\_associazioni-famiglie.html](https://w2.vatican.va/content/pius-xii/it/speeches/1951/documents/hf_p-xii_spe_19511127_associazioni-famiglie.html).

Planned Parenthood. <https://www.plannedparenthood.org/>.

*Plans for Gay Rights and Giants Lose*, The New York Times, November 9, 1989. <https://www.nytimes.com/1989/11/09/us/the-1989-elections-san-francisco-plans-for-gay-rights-and-giants-lose.html>.

Poindexter, Cynthia. *Sociopolitical Antecedents to Stonewall: Analysis of the Origins of the Gay Rights Movement in the United States*, Social work, Vol. 42, No. 6, 1997, 607-615. <https://academic.oup.com/sw/article-abstract/42/6/607/1847126?redirectedFrom=fulltext>.

*The Post Closet Era*, Christianity Today, November 13, 1995.

The President's Council on Bioethics. *Human Cloning and Human Dignity: An Ethical Inquiry*, Washington D.C., July 2002. <https://bioethicsarchive.georgetown.edu/pcbe/reports/cloningreport/research.html>.

Preston Sprinkle, ed. *Two Views on Homosexuality, the Bible, and the Church*, Grand Rapids, Zondervan, 2016.

The Pro-Life Alliance of Gays and Lesbians. <https://www.plagal.org/>.

*The Prodigal President*, Christianity Today, October 5, 1998.

Promise Keepers. <https://promisekeepers.org/promise-keepers/about-us-2/>.

Pulliam, Sarah. *Election Honeymoon*, Christianity Today, December 2008.

Pulliam Sarah. *Not Easy to Command*, Christianity Today, March 2008.

Pulliam, Sarah. *The party of Faith*, Christianity Today, September 2008.

*A Question of Faith*, Christianity Today, March 2004.

Rabey, Steve. *Courts Strikes Down Homosexual Rights Ban*, Christianity Today, June 17, 1996.

*Rally Round the Flag*, Christianity Today, November 12, 2001.

Reagan, Ronald. *National Affairs Campaign Address on Religious Liberty*, Dallas, Texas, August 22, 1980. <https://www.americanrhetoric.com/speeches/ronaldreaganreligiousliberty.htm>.

Reed, Ralph. *Contract with America*, Washington D.C. May 17, 1995. <https://www.c-span.org/video/?65156-1/contract-american-family>.

Reed, Ralph. *Is the Religious Right finished?*, Christianity Today, September 6, 1999.

Reed, Ralph, *Politically Incorrect*, Dallas, Texas, W. Pub Group, 1996.

*Refocusing the Pro-life agenda*, Christianity Today, March 1, 1999.

*Religious Right Rallies for Gay-Rights Battles*, Christianity Today, July 22, 1991.

Richburg, Keith B. *Falwell and the Moral Majority Declare War on City's 'Perverted Act'*, The Washington Post, September 10, 1981. <https://www.washingtonpost.com/archive/local/1981/09/10/falwell-and-moral-majority-declare-war-on-citys-perverted-act/75537070-76ba-459f-ba2d-606edb9cdde8/>.

Rifkin, Jeremy. *The Biotech Century: Harnessing the Gene and Remaking the World*, New York, Jeremy P. Tarcher/Putnam, 1998.

Riley, Russel L. *Party Government and the Contract with America*, PS: Political Science and Politics, Vol. 28, 1995, 703-707. [www.jstor.org/stable/420521](http://www.jstor.org/stable/420521).

*Robertson Regroups 'Invisible Army' into New Coalition*, Christianity Today, April 23, 1990.

Roetz, Heiner. *Cross-Cultural Issues in Bioethics: The Example of Human Cloning*, Amsterdam, Rodopi, 2006.

Rymph, Catherine M. *Republican Women: Feminism and Conservatism from Suffrage through the Rise of the New Right*, Chapel Hill, University of North Carolina Press, 2006.

Rutherford Institute. <https://www.rutherford.org/about>.

Schaeffer, Francis A. *A Christian Manifesto*, Wheaton, Illinois, Crossway Books, 1981.

Schiedermayer, David. *Oregon and the Death of Dignity*, Christianity Today, February 6, 1995.

Shapiro, Ian, *Abortion And the Supreme Court Decisions 1965-2000*, Indianapolis, Hackett Publishing Company, 2001.

Shea, William M. *The Lion and the Lamb: Evangelicals and Catholics in America*, Oxford/New York, Oxford University Press, 2004.

Sheldon, Jane & Pfeffer, Carla & Jayaratne, Toby & Feldbaum, Merle & Petty, Elizabeth. *Beliefs About the Etiology of Homosexuality and About the Ramifications of Discovering Its Possible Genetic*

*Origin*, Journal of homosexuality, Vol. 52, No. 3-4, 2007, 111-150.  
[https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1300/J082v52n03\\_06](https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1300/J082v52n03_06).

Shuck, Glenn W. *Marks of the Beast: The Left Behind Novels and the Struggle for Evangelical Identity*, New York, New York University Press, 2005.

Sider, Ron. *Abortion Is Not the Only Issue*, Christianity Today, July 14, 1989.

Sider, Ron. *Our Selective Rage*, Christianity Today, August 12, 1996.

Sidney, Ken. *A Question of Character*, Christianity Today, April 6, 1992.

Simons, Andrew. *Brave New Harvest*, Christianity Today, November 19, 1990.

Simpson Wiki. [https://simpsons.fandom.com/wiki/Ned\\_Flanders](https://simpsons.fandom.com/wiki/Ned_Flanders).

Skillen, James W. *Civic-Minded and Heavenly Good*, Christianity Today, November 18, 2002.

Smidt, Corwin & Kellstedt, Paul. *Evangelicals in the Post-Reagan Era: An Analysis of Evangelical Voters in the 1988 Presidential Election*, Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion, Vol. 31, No.3, 1992, 330-38. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/1387123>.

Smietana, Bob. *400k and Counting*, Christianity Today, July 2003.

Smietana, Bob. *Cloning Report Breeds Confusion*, Christianity Today, June 2004.

Smietana, Bob. *When Does Personhood Begin?*, Christianity Today, July 2004.

Smith, Christian. *Christian America? What Evangelicals Really Want*, Berkeley, University of California Press, 2000.

Solinger Rickie, *Pregnancy and Power: A Short History of Reproductive Politics in America*, New York, New York University Press, 2005.

Sojourners 2018 Media Kit. [https://sojo.net/sites/default/files/media\\_kit\\_2018.pdf](https://sojo.net/sites/default/files/media_kit_2018.pdf).

*Souls on Ice*, Christianity Today, July 2003.

Southern Baptist Convention. Sonogram Project. <https://psalm139project.org/>.

Southern Baptist Convention. Official Position on Homosexuality. [http://religiousinstitute.org/denom\\_statements/resolution-on-homosexuality-1976/](http://religiousinstitute.org/denom_statements/resolution-on-homosexuality-1976/).

Southern Baptist Convention. Official Position on Stem-Cell Research. <https://www.sbc.net/resource-library/resolutions/on-stem-cell-research/>.



Stanton, John L. *The Loving Opposition*, Christianity Today, July 19, 1993.

Stafford, Tim. *An Older, Wiser, Ex-Gay Movement*, Christianity Today, October 2007.

Stafford, Tim. *Coming Out*, Christianity Today, August 18, 1989.

Stafford, Tim. *In Reluctant Praise of Extremism*, Christianity Today, October 26, 1992.

Stafford, Tim. *Inside Crisis Pregnancy Centers*, Christianity Today, August 17, 1992.

Stafford, Tim. *The Abortion Wars*, Christianity Today, October 6, 1989.

Stafford, Tim. *The Best Research Yet*, Christianity Today, October 2007.

Staggenborg, Suzanne. *The Pro-Choice Movement: Organization and Activism in the Abortion Conflict*, Oxford/New York, Oxford University Press, 1994.

Stanley, Brian. *The Global Diffusion of Evangelicalism: The Age of Billy Graham and John Stott*, Downers Grove, InterVarsity Press, 2013.

Stout, David. *In His First Veto, Bush Blocks Stem Cell Bill*, The New York Times, July 19, 2006. <https://www.nytimes.com/2006/07/19/washington/19cnd-stem.html>.

Stout, Davis & Gardiner, Harris. *Obama Reversing Stem Cell Limits Bush Imposed*, The New York times, March 6, 2009. <https://www.nytimes.com/2009/03/07/us/politics/07stem.html>.

Stricherz, Mark. *A Law that Shouldn't be Cloned*, Christianity Today, March 2004.

Stricherz, Mark. *Faith-Based Legislation Stalled*, Christianity Today, November 18, 2002.

Stricherz, Mark. *John Kerry's Open Mind*, Christianity Today, October 2004.

Stricherz, Mark. *Kansas Voters Rejects Gay Rights*, Christianity Today, June 2005.

Stricherz, Mark. *New Congress, New Agenda*, Christianity Today, January 2003.

Stricherz, Mark. *No Compromise*, Christianity Today, May 2006.

Stricherz, Mark. *Saved by sonogram*, Christianity Today, March 2003.

Stroud, Ellen. *Law and the Dead Body: Is a Corpse a Person or a Thing?*, Annual Review of Law and Social Science, Vol. 14, 2018, 115-125. <https://www.annualreviews.org/doi/10.1146/annurev-lawsocsci-110316-113500>.

Sullivan, Sean. *What is a 501(c)(4), anyway?*, The Washington Post, May 13, 2013. <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/the-fix/wp/2013/05/13/what-is-a-501c4-anyway/>.

Tada, Joni E. *The Threat of Biotech*, Christianity Today, March 2003.

Trammel, Madison. *Thinking Straight*, Christianity Today, September 2006.

Tumuly, Karen, Cmons, Marlene. *Clinton Revokes Abortion Curbs*, Los Angeles Times, January 23, 1993. <https://www.latimes.com/archives/la-xpm-1993-01-23-mn-1587-story.html>.

Turina, Isacco. *Vatican Biopolitics*, Social Compass, Vol. 60, No.1, 2013, 134-151. <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1177/0037768612471776>.

United Methodist Church. Official Position on Stem-Cells. <http://ee.umc.org/what-we-believe/ethics-of-embryonic-stem-cell-research>.

United State Conference of Catholic Bishops. <https://www.usccb.org/about>.

*The Values-Driven Voter*, Christianity Today, September 2004.

Vestal, Christine. *Stem Cell Research at the Crossroads of Religion and Politics*, Pew Research Center. <https://www.pewforum.org/2008/07/17/stem-cell-research-at-the-crossroads-of-religion-and-politics/>.

Wacker, Grant. *Billy Graham's 1949 Los Angeles Revival*. Heath W. Carter and Laura R. Porter eds. *Turning Points in the History of American Evangelicalism*, Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, Michigan, 2017.

Wade, Nicholas. *The Clone Named Dolly*, The New York Times, October 14, 2013. <https://www.nytimes.com/2013/10/14/booming/the-clone-named-dolly.html>.

Waters, Brent & Cole-Turner, Roland. *God and the Embryo: Religious Voices on Stem Cells and Cloning*, Washington D.C., Georgetown University Press, 2003.

Webster, Alexander F.C., *Homosexuals In Uniform?*, Christianity Today, February 8, 1993.

Weiberg-Salzman, Mirjam & Willems, Ulrich. *Religion and Biopolitics*, Berlin, Springer, 2020.

Westerfelhaus, Robert. *A Significant Shift: A Pentadic Analysis of the Two Rhetorics of the Post-Vatican II Roman Catholic Church Regarding Homosexuality*, International Journal of Sexuality and Gender Studies, Vol. 3, 1998, 269-294. <https://link.springer.com/article/10.1023/A:1023243500332>.

Vogt, Dennis; Brown, Warren S. *Bottom Line Morality*, Christianity Today, April 22, 1988.

*What Does it Mean to be Evangelical?*, Christianity Today, June 6, 1989.

*What's Next For U.S. Women?*, Times, December 5, 1977.  
<http://content.time.com/time/subscriber/article/0,33009,915755-6,00.html>.

Weyrich, Paul. *Is the Religious Right finished?*, Christianity Today, September 6, 1999.

Wheaton College. *How Many Evangelicals are There?*,  
<https://web.archive.org/web/20160130062242/http://www.wheaton.edu/ISAE/Defining-Evangelicalism/How-Many-Are-There>.

Wilding Knope, Denay L. *Over My Dead Body: How the Albrecht Decisions Complicate The Constitutional Dilemma of Due Process & the Dead*, University of Toledo Law Review, Vol. 41, 2009, 169. <https://heinonline.org/HOL/P?h=hein.journals/utol41&i=171>.

Williams, Daniel K. *Defenders of the Unborn: The Pro-Life Movement Before 'Roe v. Wade'*, Oxford/New York, Oxford University Press, 2016.

Williams Daniel K. *God's Own Party*, Oxford/New York, Oxford University Press 2010.

Williams, Daniel K. *Richard Nixon's Religious Right*, In Gifford, Laura Jane & Williams, Daniel K. ed, *The Right Side of the Sixties*, New York, grave Macmillan, 2012.

Willow Creek Church. <https://www.willowcreek.org/>.

Wilson, Joshua C., *The Street Politics of Abortion: Speech, Violence, and America's Culture Wars*, Wilson, Joshua C., Stanford, Stanford University Press, 2013.

White, Heather R. *Reforming Sodom: Protestants and the Rise of Gay Rights*, Chapel Hill, University of North Carolina Press, 2015.

*Worship as Higher Politics*, Christianity Today, July 2005.

Wroe, Andrew & Herbert, John. *Assessing the George W. Bush Presidency: A Tale of Two Terms*, Edinburgh, Edinburgh University Press, 2009.

Yancey, Philipp. *The Riddle of Bill Clinton's Faith*, Christianity Today, April 25, 1994.

Zoba, Wendy M. *Daring to Disciple America*, Christianity Today, March 1, 1999.

Zylstra, Sarah E. *Marriage Matters*, Christianity Today, August 2006.

Zylstra, Sarah E. *One Small Step for Life*, Christianity Today, June 2007.