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Radical Religious Rebels: The Rise and Fall of Jerry Falwell and the Moral Majority

A thesis

presented to

the faculty of the Department of History

East Tennessee State University

In partial fulfillment

of the requirements for the degree

Master of Arts in History

by

Andrew Bell

August 2008

Dr. Elwood Watson, Committee Chair

Dr. Katherine Weiss

Dr. Henry Antkiewicz

Keywords: Contemporary American History, American Religious and Social History

ABSTRACT

Radical Religious Rebels: The Rise and Fall of Jerry Falwell and the Moral Majority

by

Andrew Bell

In this thesis, I intend to illustrate the impact that Jerry Falwell had upon the rise of religious fundamentalism within the United States during the latter part of the 20th century. By elucidating the various factors that led Jerry Falwell from a little-known minister from Lynchburg, Virginia to becoming the figurehead of the movement known as the Religious Right, I wish to show how one of more controversial figures in both the religious and political spheres of contemporary American history became one of the more influential and infamous men of recent times. By focusing on the predecessors of Jerry Falwell along with the events that helped shape his career, I hope to provide a contribution to the scholarship of the nation's religious upbringing, especially in the modern era, as well as trace the career of one of the more infamous and noteworthy figures of both American political and religious history.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank my three thesis readers whose support and guidance have been incalculable. Dr. Watson, who was my thesis advisor, kept me on the right track and has been of great assistance in helping to construct and refine my thesis. Dr. Weiss gave me much advice in how best to write my thesis as well as made numerous suggestions that were extremely helpful. Dr. Antkiewicz was also of invaluable support in giving me a solid foundation on how to formulate my thoughts and ideas along with adding to my knowledge of history as a whole. My friends and family are also deserving of my gratitude and love, for without them this thesis would not be what it is.

DEDICATION

To C. Amber for being the admirable and wonderful person that you are

EPIGRAPH

“There is a religious war going on in this country. It is a cultural war as critical to the kind of nation we shall be as the Cold War itself. This war is for the soul of America.”

-Pat Buchanan at the 1992 Republican National Convention

“I’ve always been fascinated by religion, the way people act upon their beliefs...pro-lifers murdering doctors”

-Bill Hicks

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CHAPTER 1

“WHEN THE GOING GETS WEIRD, THE WEIRD TURN PRO”: THE EVOLUTION OF RELIGIOUS FUNDAMENTALISM WITHIN CONTEMPORARY AMERICAN HISTORY

It is hard to trace the rise of the “Religious Right” within American culture as the country has had a long historical tradition of influential religious movements, most notably the Puritans and the Great Awakening, which were in prelude to the growth of conservative religious fundamentalism in the political realm from 1960 onwards. The Great Revival of the early 19th century was a large factor in the shaping of an influential subculture within society that adhered to the primary task of the revival, which was the winning of lost souls for God. These followers of the Great Revival felt that they were laying the groundwork for a new era of history in which God’s kingdom would manifest itself on Earth. This fundamental and conservative view of the Bible would have a role in the shaping of the growth of the evangelical movement over a century later. Yet, by the middle of the 19th century, several different forces, including the Civil War and a rapidly industrializing society, led the early evangelical movement to splinter before it was able to gain much of a foothold within mainstream American society. Perhaps the two most formidable threats to the evangelical movement, Darwinism and the idea of a historically-based criticism of the Bible, led to a change in direction within the course of the conservative religious leaders in America during the late 19th and early 20th centuries.

The response of religious leaders during this time frame was to modify the teaching of the Bible through the teaching of theistic evolution and the endorsement of a socially-conscious interpretation of the Gospel, although some still held fast to their fundamentalist viewpoint, personified by Dwight L. Moody and Billy Sunday. Moody espoused an idea called dispensationalist premillennialism, which contended that there were distinct eras of God's dealing with humanity that would eventually lead to the rapture and the second coming of Christ, and through his Moody Bible Institute in Chicago, was able to become a prominent visionary to those who believed in the inerrancy of the Bible. Billy Sunday, a former baseball player, had a more folksy approach to spreading the gospel yet had similar success as Moody, and both men were able to tap into the growing disenchantment within some circles during the early part of the 20th century. World War I and the events leading up to it proved beneficial for fundamentalists as it confirmed to them that the end times were fast approaching, and during this time, they were also very influential in the Prohibition movement as well. The 1930s had a similar parallel to the same sort of problems that conservative fundamentalists faced in the 1990s: the teaching of scientific principles that were not in accordance with scripture and the increased influence of biblical criticism in churches. Fundamentalism did face numerous public setbacks in the 1920s and 1930s, most notably due to the Scopes trial of 1924, but they were able to remain a viable, if underground, force in American society through various evangelical alliances, the establishment of Bible schools that espoused a fundamental viewpoint, and the extraordinary use of publications and radio to inform their base of contingent and pertinent issues.

After World War II, conservative Christians became more concerned about the welfare of the youth of America as seen by the establishment and rise of such groups as Youths for Christ and Campus Crusade. A prominent figure to take advantage of this new scenario in this post-World War II period was Billy Graham who became popular in the late 1940s. After the Korean War broke out, Graham became more influential within the realm of the American political scheme as he played a pivotal role in persuading Dwight Eisenhower to run for President in 1952 and was a staunch opponent of communism, the hot-button issue of the time. Despite the fact that Graham was nominally a Democrat, he was more closely identified with the Republican Party and built a strong relationship with both Eisenhower and his Vice-President Richard Nixon. While communism was universally vilified within American society during the 1940s and 1950s, racism was a more difficult issue to cope with for Graham and his supporters. Yet Graham tended to support the integration practices of the time, making him somewhat of an anomaly as compared to other evangelicals in that he had a less abrasive approach to the public, which added to his popularity during that time.

The 1960 election brought about a chance for religious conservatives to try and transform American politics directly, something they had not done in a widespread manner before, by trying to influence the outcome of the presidential race. These religious conservatives threw their support behind Nixon in an effort to combat the Catholic vote of Democratic nominee's John F. Kennedy's followers, yet as election day neared Billy Graham halted his partisan efforts as Kennedy allayed fears that a Catholic candidate would be too closely affiliated with the Pope to be an effective President. The Kennedy election was the first of what was to be two crucial political setbacks for not

only Republicans but also religious conservatives during the early 1960s. The issue of race relations also became a pressing issue during this time period with Lynchburg, Virginia being a microcosm of the evangelical movement during the tumultuous 1960s, not only because of a young minister named Jerry Falwell and his activities but also for the civil rights clashes that occurred in the town. Falwell, while initially being a part of the pro-segregation movement, eventually became more accepting of the notion of integration, although he always maintained a dislike for Martin Luther King, Jr., and as time progressed Lynchburg became an integrated society which is shown by Falwell's Thomas Road Church becoming more accepting of racial harmony within the community.

The early 1960s, while for the most part placing conservative Christian groups on the margins of society, also allowed for some headway to be made as right-wing political groups began to pick up significant amounts of new members as Cold War events and the civil rights movement brought more likeminded citizens into their fold. Barry Goldwater, who did not have the same religious ideology as most right-wing Christians, was nevertheless seen as the saving grace of the Republican Party, "the man on horseback" who would swing the GOP back to a more conservative base and put the country back in the right direction, an idea that would be increasingly more important later on with the rise of Falwell's Moral Majority. Although the 1964 election was a landslide win for Democrat Lyndon Johnson, the campaign was not a total loss for Republicans and evangelicals as it catapulted Ronald Reagan, an actor who was beginning to make a name for himself in the Republican political scene, to national prominence within the conservative movement, primarily due to his noteworthy speech during the final days of

Goldwater's campaign. Another influential asset to come out of Goldwater's defeat in 1964 was the idea of a grassroots organizational structure that mobilized large numbers of people over a widespread area in order to achieve some sort of political goal and was to be a prominent feature in later evangelical movements. As the 1960s progressed, the nation seemed to be heading in a more liberal direction, as seen by Johnson's Great Society plan and the growth of campus demonstrations against the war in Vietnam, yet groups such as Campus Crusade played a role in counteracting these forces although they had limited success, especially in California which was the bulwark of the nation's liberal movement. The elections of Ronald Reagan as governor of California in 1966 and Richard Nixon winning the 1968 Presidential race helped swing the mainstream politics of America back to a more conservative footing and provided a forum for conservative, fundamentalist Christians to have a place within politics.

There were several noteworthy social problems that cropped up during the 1960s that tested the mettle of the burgeoning evangelical grassroots movement. Perhaps the most noteworthy of these is the idea of school prayer within the public education system which was deemed unconstitutional in the 1962 Supreme Court case *Engel v. Vitale*. The outlawing of official school prayer was to prove to be an important catalyst in evangelical movements over the next twenty years with Jerry Falwell's Moral Majority leading the charge, and would play an integral role in the foundation of religious based private schools during the last part of the 20th century. Another major social problem in the 1960s was that of changing sexual mores, an issue that was especially troublesome for many evangelical Christians. Anaheim, California was the epicenter of this tumultuous clash as the teaching of sex education was the main crux of the problem as most

conservatives in the area felt that the curriculum for the course was too graphic for most middle and high school aged children. Through the concerted efforts of like-minded parents and community officials, the controversial program was eventually reconstituted to a more palatable form that appeased the troubled citizens of Anaheim. Another situation that raised the ire of conservatives was that of school textbooks and the catalogue of some public libraries were seen as too controversial for many adherents of the political right, and was especially contentious in Charleston, West Virginia where the situation escalated to violence at times. The idea that books, and especially school textbooks, were crucial in the education of society led the conflict and the rhetoric between the two sides to become heated at times, and led some observers to view it as a culture war, a theme that would resurface again over the course of the next twenty years. The textbook showdown in West Virginia concluded with a partial victory for both sides of the debate, yet it showed that conservatives, most notably Christian fundamentalists, were able to put together an effective grassroots campaign, much like in Anaheim, in order to combat a perceived social injustice.

The mid-1970s saw America rife with disillusionment due to the Presidential crisis stemming from Watergate, which even shocked ardent Nixon supporter Billy Graham as to the devious nature of the acts that precipitated the scandal, and the conclusion of the Vietnam fiasco in Southeast Asia. During this time of seeming turmoil and a sense that the country was adrift without a moral compass, the idea of being “born again” spiritually was an idea that was becoming more palatable within the contexts of mainstream society. The 1976 election partially testifies to this concept as Jimmy Carter, who portrayed himself as a “born-again” Christian, was able to tap into the feeling of

disenfranchisement that abounded in America at that time, and his campaign helped bring the terms of evangelical, born-again, and other religious notions into the national political limelight. Carter also stressed the importance of the family within the fabric of society, which made him admirable in the minds of evangelicals, and coming from the Democratic Party he was able to garner a larger voter base of those turned off by the corrupt and crooked practices of the Nixon administration. The honeymoon between evangelicals and newly elected President Carter was to be short-lived, however, as their paths became increasingly divergent over the next several years, years that would lead to the formation of the Moral Majority and the catapult that fundamentalists needed to achieve political capital.

The 1970s also saw conservative religious groups remobilizing on a grassroots level in various civic and cultural matters, a method that would prove to be an effective political tool in the following decades. This effort was most notably seen when the tax-exempt status of private Christian schools came under scrutiny by the Internal Revenue Service that raised the ire of Falwell and other evangelical leaders. Another chance for conservatives to unite in a common cause was President Carter's conference on the state of America's families that allowed evangelicals to form coalitions of those favoring traditional, conservative values in order to help illustrate the growing power of this long dormant segment of the voting populations. Even though the Carter conference on the family was not a rousing success for the "pro-family" movement, partially due to walk outs at each of the three conferences and miscalculations by the leaders of the burgeoning movement on the amount of supporters it actually had in its fold, it did rally

evangelicals into becoming active in political matters, especially after they lost faith in the once promising Carter administration.

The foundations of the “New Right” movement were put in place after Barry Goldwater’s defeat in the 1964 presidential election and began in earnest after the implementation of *Roe v. Wade* by the Supreme Court in 1973. This historic case, which pertained to the controversial issue of abortion and the precept that a woman has the right to choose whether or not to carry her unborn child to full-term or not, crystallized the conservative movement around a common cause, a topic that was controversial and universally loathed by evangelicals and those politically identified as right-wing. The goal of displacing Carter in the 1980 election via political means along with the abortion issue led to the establishment of the Moral Majority, which was established in 1979 by Jerry Falwell and his associates. The Moral Majority was able to form an Anschluss of like-minded conservatives to mold a political direction for evangelicals with former California governor Ronald Reagan gaining their support for the upcoming presidential contest. Although the 1980 election showed that the Moral Majority and evangelicals were viable participants in the political arena due to their effective support of Reagan, they still faced their share of discontent with national politics after Reagan appointed Sandra Day O’Conner, who was a moderate and had ambiguous views on the issue of abortion, as well as the lack of support for the pro-life Helms-Hyde bill in Congress.

This dichotomy of being thrust into the national spotlight while not being able to achieve all of their stated goals would be a standard for the events that were to follow in the 1980s and 1990s in regards to not only the Moral Majority but also American evangelical movements as a whole. The AIDS epidemic provides a case in point to this

intriguing position in which evangelicals found themselves under the auspices of the seemingly friendly Reagan administration. AIDS, or Acquired Immuno-Deficiency Syndrome, made its way into the American public's consciousness in the early 1980s as a unique disease that had, at that time, unknown symptoms and ways of transmittance. This new medical and social phenomenon gave evangelical conservatives a new opportunity to illustrate how God was disenchanted with American society, as some prominent leaders thought it was God's judgment on a sordid way of life. C. Everett Koop, an anti-abortion conservative who was appointed Surgeon General by Reagan and was initially supported by evangelicals, soon raised the ire of various religious groups as he supported a pro-birth control approach, including the dispensation of prophylactics to America's youth, to solving the AIDS epidemic. Koop's ostensible position towards not only the controversial AIDS topic but also sexual mores within the country as a whole were in direct contrast to how conservatives felt those types of social problems should be dealt with, and showed how despite the early hopes for a truly evangelically minded presidential administration, those sentiments were dashed in the long run as seen by the Moral Majority's slow fall from grace over the course of the decade.

As the influence of Falwell's Moral Majority waned in the late 1980s, other evangelical leaders came to the forefront of the conservative political scene as witness by Pat Robertson's meteoric, albeit brief, run in the 1988 Republican presidential campaign. Robertson was especially effective in Michigan's primary as he used his grassroots organization through his various religiously affiliated subsidiaries, most notably the television program *The 700 Club*. Although Robertson's campaign ultimately failed, it did mobilize a core constituency within the Republican party, a faction that would

eventually become the vanguard behind the formation of the Christian Coalition, a political action group that would eclipse, and eventually supplant, the Moral Majority's sway over evangelically-oriented conservative voters. The Christian Coalition, which was spearheaded by Robertson and the then relatively political amateur Ralph Reed, was able to carry over the prominent influence that Falwell's group once had over the fundamentalist constituency, and was also able to drum up support for various causes, with Operation Rescue, an anti-abortion group that protested in a vehement and sometimes openly defiant and hostile fashion at various reproductive health centers across the country, being a prime example.

Bill Clinton's election in 1992 appeared in a superficial sense to be a dramatic defeat for not only the Christian Coalition and the conservative evangelical movement as a whole but also the Republican Party and the political right wing as well. Yet, despite this seemingly dramatic *coup de grace*, Clinton's rise to the Office of the Presidency put a face on modern liberalism as the former Arkansas governor was a pro-choice, pro-liberal Democrat, two features that roused the rancor of both evangelicals and conservatives alike after the conclusion of the Cold War. The Christian Coalition even saw a rise in membership in 1993 as well as a copiously large amount of like-minded officials at the state and local levels achieving positions of power within the mechanisms of the governing apparatus. Along with the anti-abortion, anti-homosexual, and pro-traditional family values planks to their platform, groups like the Christian Coalition and individuals like Randall Terry added anti-plurality to their respective ideologies which also made it easier to influence most Americans due to the American public's ambivalence on several key issues that were caused in part by the plethora of various

subjects upon which a citizen could base their vote. As the 1990s drew to a close and a new millennium dawned, there was uncertainty on who would become the leader of this growingly diverse yet powerful segment of both the political arena and society as a whole.

A brief sketch of fundamentalism may be helpful and illuminating in explaining the intricacies of Falwell's rise to power within the community, and while reemphasizing some of the facts above, I believe is necessary to gain a grasp of the context within which Falwell was working. The term fundamentalism has acquired a certain amount of notoriety in terms of religion, oft times having unflattering and negative connotations attached to it. The term itself is derived from a series of early 20th century publications which set out to elucidate the fundamentals of the Christian faith. Arising as a response to liberal or modernist theology, fundamentalist doctrine involves five main tenets according to Ed Dobson and Ed Hindson: the inspiration and infallibility of Scripture; the deity of Christ; the substitutionary atonement of Christ's death; the literal resurrection of Christ from the dead; and the literal return of Christ in the second advent or coming¹. Through the establishment of like-minded churches and Christian schools as well as the spectacular growth of fundamentalists in the electronic media, the movement had become by the 1980s a viable and burgeoning religious "denomination".

The nation's religious heritage is integral to the study of fundamentalism due to the priority that the movement places upon the religious nature of America's Founding Fathers and the fact that many of the original colonies were founded on a religious concept of some sort or other. Dobson and Hindson reaffirm this notion by contending:

¹ Ed Dobson, Ed Hindson, and Jerry Falwell, "The Fundamentalist Phenomenon", p. 6-11

“The development of religious dissent and nonconformity in Europe led to the ultimate migration of thousands of Protestants to colonial America in the seventeenth century. One cannot help but observe that Columbus’ discovery of America came less than twenty-five years before the beginning of the Reformation in Europe. It was as if God had preserved a great ‘Island in the Sea’ as a place of refuge for the persecuted believers from continental Europe. While it is true that the early colonists came to North America in search of economic wealth, it must also be observed that their religious motivation was of great importance, too.²”

The Great Awakenings of the 18th and 19th centuries were also important forerunners of the fundamentalist movement as were Methodism and premillennialism or the view that Christ’s return will usher in a new millennium or era in mankind’s history, which can also be seen as eliminating the necessity of history in general. The battle between fundamentalism and modernism came to a breaking point during the first three decades of the 20th century with the rise in influence of fundamentalism being caused by the publication of *The Fundamentals: A Testimony in Truth* as well as the enormously influential Scofield Bible. This controversy was perhaps best seen in the Scope Trial which pitted William Jennings Bryan against Clarence Darrow, and was typically seen as a defeat for the fundamentalists who were portrayed as somewhat backward and overtly conservative. Despite the perceived setback at the Scopes trial, several characteristics emerged that would help distinguish the fundamentalist movement from thence on with an uncompromising commitment to dogma, a separatist attitude, the establishment of individual, theological “empires”, and the subsequent polarization of the movement as a whole.³

² Ibid, p. 27

³ Ibid, p. 76-7

In the decades since the Scopes trial, fundamentalism gradually evolved from a fringe movement to a widespread religious phenomenon. In the 1930s, fundamentalists increasingly turned their attention to creating more Bible institutes that were more in line with their ideology as well as using the radio as a new method of evangelical ministry with Charles Fuller being a notable example. The 1940s and 50s saw the advent of various ecumenical organizations in order to help unite fundamentalists and evangelicals along with the rise of Billy Graham which surprisingly was a divisive factor within the community as he adhered to some fundamentalist tenets but was seen as a hypocrite by some due to his not being in line with the movement of every subject, especially dealing with the Catholic Church. This line of criticism was later leveled against Jerry Falwell as his organization, the Moral Majority, was seen as becoming too secular by some members of the movement. The years between 1960 and 1980 also saw the rise of the Charismatic movement, another splinter group that emerged during this time, as well as the concept of the super-church.

After decades of separatist tendencies and stagnation as a whole within the movement, fundamentalism experienced a resurgence in the late 1970s and early 1980s in which their political clout was exemplified for the first real time. A commitment to not only separation from other denominations but also secular society is seen in Falwell's remark:

“Here at Liberty Baptist College, for example, we require our faculty and students to abstain from the use of alcoholic beverages and tobacco. We do not permit indulgence in illegal drugs. We forbid attendance at dances or the Hollywood theater. We take a strong stand against pre-marital and extra-marital sex. As separatists, we feel we can support our position in all these matters with Scripture. In other words, fundamentalists and separatists take a position for the inerrant Word of God and all it has to say, and

against worldliness and carnal living which damages the testimony of the believer and the church.⁴”

This precept of disassociating one’s self or group from all secular influences and those who associate with such led to even more fragmentation, yet the mainstream of fundamentalists were able to come a sort of coherence in the community with Dobson declaring, “While we appreciate the concern of the extreme Fundamentalists over keeping the Church on the right track, we must not allow them to categorize and label everyone to death. The real fundamentalist majority must lead the movement in the 1980s and thereby prevent the tendency to react to the extreme right.⁵” Despite all of the numerous successes of the resurgent fundamentalist movement, Dobson and Hindson point out some of the shortcomings that must be addressed as the movement continued to grow including the lack of capacity for criticism, a resistance to change, absolutism, and authoritarianism⁶. Falwell also encouraged evangelicals and fundamentalists alike to be more proactive in their communities as well as stressing the need for education, which would be the cornerstone of his ministry:

“Our unique philosophy of education rests upon our belief that the Bible is the authentic and reliable guide and authority for all areas of life. Our view is based on the conviction that knowledge of Christ is essential to the physical, mental, and social aspects of our faith and practice. It emphasizes a proper relationship among the family, the church, and the school. Our goal should be to produce a new generation of thousands of young people who will make solid citizens for America’s future. We need a spiritual army of young people who are pro-life, pro-moral, and pro-American. We need to train a

⁴ Jerry Falwell, “Let Us Hang Together,” *Faith Aflame* magazine (May-June 1977), p.2

⁵ Dobson, Hindson, & Falwell, p.133

⁶ *Ibid*, p. 149-55

generation of young people who can carry this nation into the twenty-first century with dynamic Christian leadership.⁷”

I intend to illustrate in this thesis how the most powerful and well-known Christian political action group, the Moral Majority, and its leader Jerry Falwell was able to take the ideas and concepts of other evangelical leaders and mold it into a viable framework. As much has already been written about the actions of the Moral Majority, I hope to examine the varying influences in Falwell’s ideology, as well as bring into light how his own background and personal history affected his system of thought. By doing this, I hope to add a concise yet informative piece to the overall scholarship of how politics and religion intermingled in the latter part of the 20th century.

⁷ Ibid, p. 160

CHAPTER 2

MODERN LIFE IS RUBBISH: FRANCIS SCHAEFFER'S OUTLOOK ON CONTEMPORARY SOCIETY AND ITS INFLUENCE ON JERRY FALWELL

In the pantheon of 20th century American evangelical leaders, the person who had the greatest influence on the ideology of Jerry Falwell and the Moral Majority was Francis Schaeffer. One of the foremost proponents of Protestant traditionalist thought in the last half of the century as well as a leading Christian apologist in an era of growing secularism and modernism, Schaeffer, through his religious commune of L'Abri in Switzerland and his numerous religious tracts and books, was able to bring about a new stage of political activism within the context of the evangelical community which played a crucial role in the development of the Moral Majority's stance on a variety of issues. Schaeffer was also key in Falwell's development of how modern society should reform itself to the principles of an earlier, more pious epoch, and in Schaeffer's case it was the early Church and the Reformation that were to be held as the standards of a truly beneficial social system. Due to Schaeffer's theology having a pronounced and profound effect on the evolution of Jerry Falwell's dogma, which was sometimes precariously close to plagiarism on the efforts of the latter, he is very worthy of the scholarship that is often not afforded to him when discussing the rise of the Moral Majority and the growing evangelical participation in America's political system during the 1980s.

Perhaps the most noteworthy work within Schaeffer's canon and certainly the one that had the most direct influence on Jerry Falwell's fundamentalist system of thought was "How Should We Then Live?" which was published in 1976 and gave a basic

overview of the history of Western thought as well as depicted the ways in which modern society has deviated from the path that God had laid out for it. Written from the viewpoint that there is a flow to history and culture that Schaeffer argues are interconnected within the minds of individuals in society, “How Should We Then Live?” contended that the internal thoughts of people are directly correlated to external action throughout the course of mankind and are affected by one’s presuppositions that were put into place mainly by society and family. In the beginning of his work, Schaeffer traced out three courses of human history, stating “the philosophic seeks intellectual answers to the basic questions of life. The scientific has two parts: first, the makeup of the physical universe and then the practical application of what it discovers in technology. The direction in which science will move is set by the philosophic world view of the scientists. People’s religious views also determine the direction of their individual lives and of their society.¹” Schaeffer began his study of Western history and culture by looking at the Greco-Roman world as he viewed them as the predecessors of that line of thinking.

Francis Schaeffer’s main contention when discussing Greco-Roman society was that its foundation, which were the *polis* structure of government and a polytheistic religion, were fundamentally faulty in his view as it had no infinite God and thus no moral structure to measure up to the rigors of everyday life. Since the Romans placed so much emphasis on the idea of personal divinity especially their concept of a supreme human emperor, beginning with Julius Caesar, as being the pinnacle of the state religion, Schaeffer believed that, much like modern society, the secular methods of that era led to its ultimate demise. In the stead of Roman religion rose Christianity which provided a

¹ Francis Schaeffer, “How Should We Then Live?” p. 20

strong counterpoint to this concept in that it offered universal values that were taught by Jesus and, in Schaeffer's opinion, withstood the test of time and gave society a strong foundational base that was integral in his conception of how society should be formulated. As Christianity began to challenge Roman authority, the followers of this new faith rebelled against the Romans which made them the targets of discrimination since they challenged the very essence of the empire. Yet, due to the fact that the basis of Roman society was constructed on such an insecure foundation, that of relative morals and personal deities, it was destined to fail as seen in its gradual decline and eventual demise at the hands of the barbarian invaders during the 4th and 5th centuries BCE². By using the Greco-Roman world as a comparison for today's modern society, Schaeffer pointed the downfalls of placing too much credence in secular ideals, a precept that Jerry Falwell would seize upon in his works.

Despite all of the accolades that Francis Schaeffer placed upon the early Christian Church, especially in its role in bringing an end to the secular Roman empire, the early church gradually became more humanistic between the 4th and 7th centuries which is manifested, in Schaeffer's view, in the art of the era that went from a natural realism early on to more symbolic Byzantine style as time progressed. In this era of Christianity, the authority of the Bible took a secondary role within the hierarchy of the Church as Schaeffer believed that man was trying to ascend to a position that only God should have, stating, "A humanistic element was added: Increasingly the authority of the church took precedence over the teaching of the Bible. And there was an ever-growing emphasis on salvation as resting on man's meriting the merit of Christ, instead of on Christ's work

² Ibid p. 26-9

alone.³” As Europe and the Christian church entered into what is known as the Middle Ages, society struggled to deal with the contrast of excessive wealth and a growing monastic ideal within the philosophy of the church. Yet Schaeffer contended that medieval Europe was a thoroughly Christian society in which the church had a pervasive impact, which in turn was almost a corrupting influence due to the ever-growing secular effect of church officials. Schaeffer depicted the combination of secular and ecclesiastical learning in his argument, “but if a robust Christian faith could handle non-Christian learning without compromising, it was all too easy for Greek and Roman thought forms to creep into the cracks and chinks of a faith which was less and less founded on the Bible and more and more resting on the authority of church pronouncements⁴”, which again reemphasized the Protestant scholar’s view of how the ideal society should be based on the word of God and not the actions of mankind. As Europe made its transition from the Middle Ages to the Renaissance, Schaeffer proclaimed that it was not a change in man that precipitated the transformation of culture but a shift of man’s place to the center of the cosmos with the author accurately describing this grace vs. nature tension aptly, “beginning from man alone, Renaissance humanism-and humanism ever since-has found no way to arrive at universals or absolutes which give meaning to existence and morals.⁵” As Schaeffer lamented the growing precedence of humanist thought over divine morals as Europe entered into a new epoch, he pointed to Thomas Aquinas as the embodiment of this humanist Christianity and asserted that Wycliffe and Hus were two forerunners of the Reformation and the return to

³ Ibid p. 32

⁴ Ibid p. 43

⁵ Ibid p. 55

a Bible-centered system of thought, which as one can gather was what Schaeffer felt was best for society as a whole.

The next phase of Western history was for Francis Schaeffer the most pivotal in the course of society's development, and what he described as being the concurrent movements of the Renaissance and the Reformation. In Schaeffer's view, both the Renaissance and the Reformation evolved simultaneously with each being a reaction to the same inherent problem within society, which was the gradual distortion of both religious and secular life, and was caused by the elevation of church/human authority to rival the supremacy of the Bible. According to Schaeffer, the Renaissance, which took place primarily in southern Europe, redefined the way man thought of himself, asserting "man made himself increasingly independent and autonomous, and with this came an increasing loss of anything which gave meaning, either to the individual things in the world or to man⁶". The art of that particular era embodied this sentiment by trying to elevate man to a higher place in nature which Schaeffer felt was exemplified well in Michelangelo's famous sculpture, David. This concept of mankind trying to overextend its place within what had been a prearranged scheme of God being at the pinnacle, and man trying to supercede God's rightful position was one of the inherent downfalls of the Renaissance's philosophy, and one that would remain until the modern age. The synthesis of Christianity and Platonism was another feature of the Renaissance that Schaeffer analyzed, especially in terms of the ideology of that historical stage, which like other sources of modern humanism, proved that the end result was pessimism since there was nothing of substance at the foundation of society since everything was relative to

⁶ Ibid p. 68

what man perceived its position to be instead of what God rightfully ordained mankind's role should be.

The growing humanistic element that was an integral part of the Renaissance is contrasted by the Reformation, a religious movement that took root in northern Europe at around the same period. Admiring the efforts of Hus and Wycliffe, who were forerunners of Martin Luther, in bringing about a more biblical-based version of society, Francis Schaeffer deemed that the works and ideas of leading Reformation individuals were occurring as the Renaissance and its emphasis on humanist thought were reaching its peak in southern Europe. During the Reformation, Schaeffer stated, "the church was under the teaching of the Bible-not above it and not equal to it. It was *Sola Scriptura*, the Scriptures only. This stood in contrast to the humanism that had infiltrated the church after the first centuries of Christianity. At its core, therefore, the Reformation was the removing of the humanistic distortions which had entered the church."⁷ While giving the Reformation epoch an inordinate amount of praise, Schaeffer was careful to point out that this time period was certainly no golden age of mankind's history, although it did gradually bring about a marked improvement upon society due to the Gospel-centered nature of the movement. In a key statement that would have repercussions in Falwell's religious thinking, Schaeffer depicted that era as a better model for society as a whole since "the biblical insistence on the responsibility of people-even of monarchs-to God's law turned the political tide in those countries where the Reformation emphasis on the Bible as the only final authority took root"⁸, and Schaeffer contended that this was the main reason why northern European countries were more politically ordered than its

⁷ Ibid p. 82

⁸ Ibid p. 108

Renaissance counterparts along with why it was advantageous for monarchs to follow the principles of the Reformation, which in turn was a key influence on the founders of the United States. Despite all of its successes, Schaeffer did detail two main drawbacks of Reformation thought which were its conception of race, with slavery being the epitome of this, as well as a miserly use of inherited/accumulated wealth, yet on the whole the Protestant philosopher had a very complimentary view concerning the benefits of this quasi-religious revolution.

As he examined the path of how Europe and Western thought as a whole progressed from the Renaissance/Reformation to the Enlightenment and Scientific Revolutions of the 17th through 19th centuries, Francis Schaeffer was forced to contend with a fundamental problem in theological discourse: the niche of science within the context of religion. While discussing these two seemingly incompatible fields, Schaeffer traced the evolution of Enlightenment thought from the humanistic base of the Renaissance, arguing, “The utopian dream of the Enlightenment can be summed up by five words: reason, nature, happiness, progress, and liberty. It was thoroughly secular in its thinking. The humanistic elements which had risen during the Renaissance came to flood time in the Enlightenment. Here was man starting from himself absolutely. And if the humanistic elements of the Renaissance stand in sharp contrast to the Reformation, the Enlightenment was in total antithesis to it.”⁹ Schaeffer opined that the Enlightenment was based on system of deism that maintained God created the world but contributed little, if nothing else, to its overall function from thence onwards. Being based on humanist principles instead of divinely ordained ones, Schaeffer argued that the ideals of this so-called progressive age actually led to an increasing amount of civil strife within

⁹ Ibid p. 121

Europe, culminating in Napoleon's authoritarian rule in post-Revolutionary France. In illustrating this point, Schaeffer drew many parallels between the 18th century French Revolution and the Russian revolution two centuries later as he deemed that they were both based on foundationless, humanistic principles that ultimately led to moral decay and a corruption of God's will. In spite of all the criticism that Schaeffer had for the ideas of the Scientific Revolution and Enlightenment periods, he contended that the two did not have to be incompatible with Christian dogma with him citing the fact that numerous prominent scientists, such as Isaac Newton, Francis Bacon, and Robert Oppenheimer, were also followers of Christianity.

In his line of reasoning in trying to bring science and Christianity into sync with one another, Schaeffer argued that a breakdown in scientific study occurred when God was positioned as a marginal component within science as a whole as well as man becoming a mere cog within a system in which they have no control. To demonstrate the practicality of this thesis, Schaeffer wrote, "In the humanism of the High Renaissance, flowing on to maturity through the Enlightenment, man was determined to make himself autonomous. This flow continues, and by the time we come to modern modern [sic] science man himself is devoured: Man as man is dead. Life is pointless, devoid of meaning¹⁰," which is perhaps the most succinct statement that Schaeffer formulated which had the biggest sway on Jerry Falwell's belief in the degradation of contemporary society. Schaeffer, in "How Should We Then Live?", also cast doubt on the evolutionary theories of Charles Darwin, linking that line of thought to Social Darwinism and eugenics. In concern to the subject of philosophy, Schaeffer believed that a major breakdown happened when optimistic, forward-thinking thought, which he believed was

¹⁰ Ibid p. 148

embodied in the works of the Reformation, was eclipsed by a more nihilist viewpoint as expressed by what he felt to be the four main culprits in this regard which were Rousseau, Kant, Hegel, and Kierkegaard.

In the realm of theology, Francis Schaeffer believed that it had deteriorated due to the influx of humanism, stating:

“Thus, through the Reformation had rid the church of the humanistic elements which had come into it in the Middle Ages, a more total form of humanism entered the Protestant church, and gradually spread to all the branches of the church, including the Roman Catholic. The concept of man beginning from himself now began to be expressed in theology and in theological language. Or we can say that these theologians accepted the presuppositions of rationalism. As the Renaissance had tried to synthesize Aristotle and Christianity and then Plato and Christianity, these men were attempting to synthesize the rationalism of the Enlightenment and Christianity.¹¹”

Believing that this idea of theological liberalism, which went hand-in-hand in his view with modern pessimism, had spread throughout the world in three ways, namely geographically, culturally, and socially, Schaeffer argued the most of society was imbued with a growing fragmentation and sense of alienation due to the lack of any moral absolutes. Schaeffer again used the subject of art to illustrate this idea, stating his view of the historical ties to art succinctly, “The historical flow is like this: The philosophers from Rousseau, Kant, Hegel and Kierkegaard onward, having lost their hope of a unity of knowledge and a unity of life, presented a fragmented concept of reality; then the artists painted that way. It was the artists, however, who first understood that the end of this view was the absurdity of all things.¹²” Along this line of thought, Schaeffer contended

¹¹ Ibid p. 175

¹² Ibid p. 190

that formal philosophy has been replaced to an extent by the media, specifically cinema, popular publications, and music, in how it puts forth a pessimistic, humanistic viewpoint to the masses.

As society plunged further and further into a nihilistic, apathetic abyss due to the fact that humanism, with man beginning only from himself, had eradicated absolute morality, Francis Schaeffer felt, from that basis, there was no new way to have any overarching ethical mores, leaving the individual effectively to his or her own devices, leading ultimately to a feeling of indifference. Perhaps the most noteworthy ideology to spring out of this negative view of the world, in Schaeffer's opinion, was Marxism-Leninism which for him represented the greatest contemporary threat to a rightfully, Christian-based social structure due to its materialistic foundations as well as the corrupt nature of the Soviet regime, a concept that Falwell would be quick to capitalize upon. Schaeffer believed that Marxism-Leninism was the quintessential humanist, governing scheme as it shows how baseless communism truly is pragmatically. Schaeffer also examined the lack of moral absolutes within the context of the American legal system, pointing to *Roe v. Wade* as a prime example of this depraved ethical system. Along this line of thought, Schaeffer argued that abortion was primarily based on arbitrary medical reasons, in that the American federal courts asserted that the fetus does not constitute human life, when biological studies had shown that a week-old embryo has the potential for human life, and in terms of legality as well as Schaeffer felt that it negated the 13th and 14th amendments of the United States constitution. In an idea that Falwell would be quick to capitalize on, Schaeffer also argued that abortion could easily lead to euthanasia and that this lack of concern for human life, which would be the subject of one of his

later works, could lead modern society towards the path of ancient Rome and a gradual fall from grace.

With the loss of Christian principles, Schaeffer argued that a rise in an elite class, which is represented well by manipulative authoritarian governments, had taken its place, stating “there is a tension in modern people, especially perhaps among students: Modern people want to be free to shape their own destiny, and yet they think they know they are determined.¹³” In a prescient idea for the time in which it was written, Schaeffer argued that television, along with mass media in general, also had a manipulative influence upon society and could be used as an effective political tool that is ironically one of the mediums by which Falwell was able to achieve his fame within the evangelical community. With no moral absolutes, which lends itself to the onset of authoritarianism, modern society is faced with many types of pressures including economic breakdown, as more people try to live only for personal affluence, increased welfare, and a growing disparity between rich and poor which in turn leads to conflicts over natural resources¹⁴. All of this gives credence to Schaeffer’s belief that people act based upon their particular views of the world around them. In concluding his overview of the history of Western thought, Schaeffer concisely stated the book’s overall goal was that “this book is written in the hope that this generation may turn from the greatest of wickednesses, the placing of any created thing in the place of the Creator, and this generation may get its feet out of the paths of death and may live.¹⁵”

The work by Jerry Falwell that best ties into Francis Schaeffer’s theology, showing the direct influence of the latter on the former, is “Finding Inner Peace and

¹³ Ibid p. 229

¹⁴ Ibid p.246-52

¹⁵ Ibid p. 258

Strength”. Published in 1982 during the halcyon days on the Moral Majority, this instructive guide to one’s everyday life is the perfect segue way into the discussion of Jerry Falwell’s life and canon of work as a whole. Believing that every person desires inner peace and strength, Falwell set out to show how this could be accomplished through a Christian lifestyle and ethos, even in the midst of chaotic times of turmoil. By striving to do God’s will in all that one says and does, Falwell contended that one would find the tranquility one was searching for by becoming a Christian, “When you learn to lean upon the Lord, to trust Him implicitly, to consult Him continually, to wait patiently for Him, to let His Word become your very life, when you are sensitive to what God is saying to you through people, through circumstances, and especially through the inner witness of the Holy Spirit, living in the will of God will become as normal and as natural to you as breathing.¹⁶” This implicit belief that Jesus Christ was the absolute only way to achieve everlasting life in heaven illustrates the fundamentalist nature of Falwell’s line of thought yet also shows the intrinsic sway that Schaeffer’s work had over the leader of the Moral Majority.

Once one realized that God desires a relationship and fellowship with every single person, Falwell viewed that living a Bible-centered life was the cornerstone of achieving not only salvation but also a spiritually fulfilling life as well. Ever since the fall of Adam and Eve, man, according to Falwell, has always been separated from God which had led to unfulfillment to all those who do not know of the redeeming power of Christ, which in turn also leads those unbelievers into the ways of sin and Satan¹⁷. In order to overcome this cosmic chasm, one must have a personal relationship with Jesus, acknowledging the

¹⁶ Jerry Falwell, *Finding Inner Peace and Strength*, p. 20

¹⁷ Falwell, p. 35-9

great price that He paid on the cross so that all may have a change to receive everlasting life. This decision to give oneself over to Christ is naturally the paramount choice in a person's life according to Falwell.

After a person turns their life over to Christ and becomes a Christian, the desire for worldly objects and possessions will continue, which may be a trial for the new convert. In order to get past this potential pitfall, Falwell stated, "Holy living according to the Bible consists of daily being set apart to God by confessing and forsaking sin, by feeding on and being obedient to the Word of God, and by being led by the Spirit of God so that we can have daily strength, guidance, and protection. The victorious Christian life is practical and it is possible. Christ in you is the hope of glory. It is God's desire that we walk in the light as He is in the light, so that we may be vessels unto honor."¹⁸ The church was also an important focus of guidance and sanctuary for a new Christian with fellowship with others being an excellent source of building one's new and burgeoning faith. The Holy Spirit is also especially important in Falwell's guide to the life of a new Christian in that it is an integral part of the religion as a whole as well as often being the source of inner peace once one knows that they are bearing the fruits of God. This is exemplified in Falwell's statement on how the Holy Spirit has affected his own personal life, declaring "I am deeply grateful to God for the presence of the Holy Spirit in my life. He is the Person who first prepared my heart, convicted me of my sin and my need of Christ, and regenerated me by God's power. The Holy Spirit has been, since that hour I was saved, the person who has sealed and kept me for God's eternal glory. The Holy Spirit has filled me daily, as I have sought Him, that I might not be the victim and servant of sin and that I might be able to serve God in power. The Holy Spirit has comforted

¹⁸ Falwell, p. 85

me in my every heartbreaking experience and has taught me truth, day by day, and hour by hour.¹⁹”

The Bible should be the main course of study for the new Christian or those seeking to attain inner strength and peace, as it is an essential and efficient life guide and a provenance of inspiration. Alongside Bible study, prayer was a path to converse directly with God and a means to strengthen one’s faith, something that Falwell claimed had a profound effect on his own personal life and a practice that he devoted several hours a day for in order to become closer to God. In terms of faith, Falwell viewed it as an unwavering trust in God, perhaps the most key element for any Christian. Discussing faith also led Falwell to launch into a diatribe very reminiscent of Schaeffer in depicting the deficiencies of secular humanism and how its emphasis on placing man at the pinnacle of creation was the epitome of modern-day unbelief²⁰.

In concluding his work on building one’s faith through the establishment of inner peace and strength, Falwell discussed the aspect of the labor of love and how one must be open to God’s command in order to make oneself useful to those around them and in order to be of the greatest service to God. A Christian must also show God’s love to others by doing good onto all mankind and spreading God’s message throughout the world through evangelical works. Embracing suffering was also seen as worthwhile for Falwell as it shows affinity for Christ’s plight on the cross and “your reaction and response to trouble during the hours of your suffering will determine the extent to which God can effectively use your life for His glory. When the world sees a real Christian, it sees one who might be in trouble but who knows the Word of God and is grounded in His

¹⁹ Falwell, p. 121

²⁰ Falwell, p. 158-61

faith, joyfully telling of the saving power of Jesus Christ, and always thankful to God in all things.²¹” By accomplishing all of these virtues, Falwell maintained that one could truly find inner peace and strength through a Bible-oriented life.

Another Francis Schaeffer tome that is important in our discussion is “The Mark of a Christian”. In this work, Schaeffer set out to illustrate the characteristics of a true Christian, one that transcends the bounds of what modern life portends one to be. This mark of which Schaeffer spoke is documented in John 13:33-35 where Jesus stated that his primary concern for mankind after his death was that individuals loved one another as He loved them, and this idea of love towards all is what Schaeffer felt was paramount. Since all men are created in the image of God, it is necessary according to Schaeffer to love all members of mankind, not just fellow Christians which he illustrated via various Biblical scriptures, notably I John 3:11 and I Thessalonians 3:12. Surmising his overall view of universal love, Schaeffer stated that “in the midst of the world, in the midst of our present dying culture, Jesus is giving a right to the world, Upon his authority he gives the world the right to judge whether you and I are born-again Christians on the basis of our observable love towards all.²²” This idea of Schaeffer is one that is not readily seen in the thoughts and concepts of Falwell and the Moral Majority which is somewhat ironic given the Lynchburg minister’s reliance on the works of Schaeffer.

Through his study of Western society and how it evolved to where it is in the modern era; however, Francis Schaeffer is certainly a forerunner of Jerry Falwell’s ideology and political practices, a concept that would be made even more apparent in his collaborative work with future Surgeon General C. Everett Koop. It is through the works of Schaeffer

²¹ Falwell, p. 205

²² Francis Schaeffer, “The Mark of the Christian”, p. 13

and Koop as well as others within the realm of human rights, and specifically abortion, that I wish to discuss first before viewing the works of Jerry Falwell. I believe that by doing this, one can gain a grasp on how important the abortion issue was for not only Falwell's life but also the establishment of the Moral Majority.

CHAPTER 3

HILLS LIKE WHITE ELEPHANTS: THE ISSUE OF ABORTION WITHIN THE CONTEXT OF THE IDEOLOGY OF JERRY FALWELL AND THE RELIGIOUS RIGHT

In order to see how the Religious Right and especially Jerry Falwell and his fundamentalist antecedents have viewed abortion, it is first important to trace the history of the legislation pertaining to abortion, paying particular attention to *Roe v. Wade* and the actions of the Supreme Court under Chief Justice Burger. The authors of “Abortion and American Politics” contend, “*Roe vs. Wade* was a test case for the times and registered an on-going political struggle by women for equal rights and self-determination. Yet *Roe* was not an outcome of the kind of organized special-interest litigation that remains identified with the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People’s assault on racially segregated public schools that began in the 1930s and ran through the 1970s, or the kind of orchestrated antiabortion litigation that came after *Roe*.¹” On the pro-life side, *Wade* tried to show that with the advent of new medical technology, new legislation would have to be enacted in order to keep up with the advances of protecting the “life” of the fetus, whereas *Roe* attempted to prove the antiquated nature of the Texas state statute that prohibited all abortions and was the cornerstone of the Court’s decision. The Supreme Court’s decision, which was decided 7-2 in favor of *Roe*, rested on the opinion concerning the implementation of the 14th

¹ Barbara H. Craig and David M. O’Brien, *Abortion and American Politics*, p. 5

Amendment and its ideas of what constituted privacy issues throughout the history of constitutional law.

Special interest groups have played a primary role in the lobbying for and shaping of government legislation on abortion. The role of groups such as the Moral Majority, and in a more extreme light Operation Rescue, brought the pro-life stance back into the forefront after *Roe v. Wade* by trying to pass congressional legislation, as seen by the Helms bill that sought to restrict the access to abortions, and state laws that were conducive to slowly overturning *Roe*. This subsequently led to an upswing of activity in the pro-choice movement that culminated in a march in Washington D.C. that drew 300,000 before the Supreme Court was to hear the pivotal *Webster v. Missouri* in April 1989. Although *Webster* did curtail federal funding of abortions, it did not overturn *Roe* and signaled the importance of the courts and the need for each perspective side to reform their tactics as such.

The battle within Congress was the next step in the process of challenging *Roe* as evidenced by the Hyde Bill whose goals can be summed up as, “Politics is said to be the art of the possible. A constitutional amendment to undo *Roe* was not a very realistic immediate prospect for abortion opponents. The far more promising approach was to try to reduce the availability of abortion.”² Hyde and his supporters were eventually successful in stemming federal funding for abortions except in dire circumstances, while the Helms Bill sought to establish the fetus as a human being, thus having rights under the 14th Amendment, through congressional legislation and ultimately a constitutional amendment, but this was ultimately defeated within the Congress. It is worthy to note

² Craig & O’Brien, p. 110

that the Moral Majority supported both bills in the attempt to overcome the “evils” of abortion and would continue to fight for pro-life legislation throughout its existence.

Public opinion was also strongly influenced during this time as Americans came to grip with the impact of *Roe v. Wade*. Craig and O’Brien state insightful statistics as to who exactly get abortions:

“It is estimated that about one-fifth of American women of reproductive age have had an abortion. Approximately 1.5 to 1.6 million abortions are performed in the United States annually, a figure that has remained relatively constant, although the rate of abortions in relation to the number of women of childbearing age dropped about 6 percent between 1980 and 1987. More than half of all abortions are performed on women in their twenties; 70 percent are performed on women between the ages of eighteen and twenty-nine. About half of induced abortions are performed before the ninth week of pregnancy, and less than 1 percent are performed more than twenty weeks after the woman’s most recent menstrual period. Few women seek abortions because they have been the victims of rape, or because their lives are threatened, or because of seriously deformed fetuses. In fact, the three reasons combined probably account for less than 5 percent of all abortions. Instead the explanations most often given are that a baby would change the woman’s or the family’s life adversely or that a baby cannot be afforded. In 1987 over 80 percent of legal abortions were performed on unmarried women; in that year more than 57 percent of all pregnancies of unmarried women ended in abortion.³”

This information can be backed up in various works and according to one scholar in the field of abortion and public opinion, “Most abortions that take place do so for precisely the reasons most Americans disapprove: financial or psychological reasons or convenience.⁴” as well as illustrating the problematic nature of the issue as a whole:

³ Craig & O’Brien, p. 251-3

⁴ Victoria A. Sackett, “Between Pro-Life and Pro-Choice”, *Public Opinion*, April/May 1985, 55.

“It is undoubtedly correct that the majority is not prepared to accept abortion as a ‘right’ with the positive glow that surrounds that concept. Still, if the polls are looked at in toto [sic], it does seem fair to conclude that the majority does recognize abortion as [italics are Craig & O’Brien’s] *a troublesome, problematic, morally wrenching, wish it would go away, occasional necessity that I hope it never does but may someday face me, and in case it does I want the option (though I doubt I would want to exercise it) to decide what to do myself*. And though most people are uncomfortable about discussing the issue in terms of rights, there does seem to be a rather strong majority that wants to keep it legal and available for those who need it whatever the Court does with its *Roe* decision. This position might be best described as a *right in effect*, if not *in effect a right*.⁵”

Yet, despite the statistical findings of various public opinion polls, the members of the Religious Right continued to condemn the practice of abortion and it is to their opinions that we now turn.

In keeping with his Christian viewpoint of how society should be structured, Francis Schaeffer believed that the main measure of how a society or culture should be evaluated is on what priority it gives to human rights. In the book “Whatever Happened to the Human Race”, Schaeffer with the help of C. Everett Koop analyzes how contemporary American society has dealt with this all-important issue, giving the reason for their writing as “we feel strongly that we stand today [the book was written in 1979] on the edge of a great abyss. At this crucial moment choices are being made and thrust on us that will for many years to come affect the way people are treated. We want to try to help tip the scales on the side of those who believe that individuals are unique and

⁵ Craig & O’Brien, p. 273

special and have great dignity.⁶” In constructing their case for the essential need for society to value and uphold human rights, Schaeffer and Koop claimed that there are two types of concepts or certainties in every era of history, the thinkable (concrete) and unthinkable (abstract), which tend to shift over the course of time. In this vein, the authors contended that the values of one generation may be out of touch with the next, and they saw this phenomenon occurring at a more rapid pace in recent time as society has gone from a Judeo-Christian foundation to a secular, humanistic one where the value of human life has been eroded. Similar to Schaeffer’s assertions in “How Should We Then Live”, the increase in child abuse and especially abortion in recent decades is the manifestation of this ongoing degradation of mankind, and like his previous work Schaeffer and Koop reserved a special status for abortion, contending “of all subjects relating to the erosion of the sanctity of human life, abortion is the keystone. It is the first and crucial issue that has been overwhelming in changing attitudes toward the value of life in general.⁷” The Supreme Court decisions also raised the ire of the authors as they thought the actions of the federal judiciary allowing abortion on-demand was the most profound loss of human right since slavery, if not even superceding that historical atrocity. In proving their thesis on the depravity of the abortion procedure, the authors went into great detail about the “barbaric” acts that are committed through that contentious practice, paying particular attention to the “brutal” methods involved and the treatment of the embryo as part of the mother’s body when, in their view, it is in fact a separate entity. In a sentiment that would be restated by Falwell, Schaeffer and Koop asserted that it was contemporary social and sexual mores that lead to abortion becoming

⁶ Francis Schaeffer and C. Everett Koop, “Whatever Happened to the Human Race”, p. 16

⁷ Ibid p. 31-4

more permissible within American society, and was the main underlying factor in leading the country to an immoral state of affairs.

In the minds of Francis Schaeffer and C. Everett Koop, the act or idea of infanticide was closely linked to abortion which they argued was the next step in a society run amok morally and spiritually. When describing the concept of infanticide the authors were primarily depicting cases of severely handicapped newborns being euthanized but they also believed that it could potentially lead to the murder of unwanted children in a general sense, much like their view that abortion was getting rid of an “accidental” mistake. It was this lack of respect for the rights of the unborn by the public at large that led Schaeffer and Koop to make their assertion about infanticide, and they believed that due to advances in prenatal and neonatal technology children with cognitive disorders could lead productive lives, thus giving credence to their claim that every life was worthy or at least should be given the opportunity of realizing God’s potential for it. Drawing again on parallels with slavery as well as Nazism, the authors felt that doctor or parent’s decision to exterminate an infant was an egregious, Lucifer-esque error of human rights, declaring that “without the Judeo-Christian base which gives every individual an intrinsic dignity as made in the image of personal-infinite Creator, each successive horror falls naturally into place. Combine arbitrary law (in which a small group of people may decide what is good for society at that moment of history) with the Supreme Court ruling on arbitrary abortion and the gates are opened for many kinds of killing under the guise of social good.⁸” This concept was seized upon by not only Falwell and the Moral Majority but also was a key argument by those who favored keeping Terri Schiavo, a Florida woman who was at the center of a political maelstrom

⁸ Ibid p. 87

over “the right to die” in the late 1990s and early 2000s, alive through the auspices of artificial support. Following the authors’ path in the current and potential future erosion of human rights, the topic of euthanasia, which is distinguished from infanticide by focusing primarily on the elderly, was discussed as a possibility, yet is perhaps the weakest of Schaeffer and Koop’s assertions as it is primarily based on what might transpire as a result of the ominous tone of the Supreme Court’s decisions after *Roe v. Wade*. In all three cases that detailed modern society’s devaluation of human rights, abortion, infanticide, and euthanasia, the authors believed that this regression should be halted by putting the maintenance of human rights ahead of all else, and that churches and places of worship should play a key role in helping to stem this tide. By having a Christian-based moral compass, Schaeffer and Koop thought that the Bible and church provide the necessary remedies for society’s ills.

In constructing their argument for a Judeo-Christian basis for righting the injustices pertaining to the loss of human rights, Francis Schaeffer and C. Everett Koop contrasted their system with the failures of modern society that they believed stemmed from secular humanism that had eradicated all absolute values, leaving man alienated. Further illustrating this principle, the authors asserted:

“There are, then, only two main alternative world views to Christianity, both of which begin with the impersonal. The West has a materialistic view and is nonreligious. The East has an immaterialistic [sic] view and is religious. But both are impersonal systems. This is the important point; by comparison, their differences pale into insignificance. The result is that, in both the West and the East, men and women are seen as abnormal aliens to the way things really are. In Eastern terms they are spoken of as maya or illusion; in Western terms, as absurd machines.⁹”

⁹ Ibid p. 139

In Schaeffer and Koop's opinion, Christianity provided the only feasible foundation in terms of a life or social philosophy in that it was the sole solution that accounted for man's fallen status as well as providing the plausible answer to modern society's social ills by portraying a sense of morality as dictated by the Bible with every person being valued due their being created in the image of God. This reliance on Christian dogma, in turn, is also perhaps the weakest link in the authors' argument as it tended to give more credence to historical events as depicted in the Bible, which was done at the expense of other historical ethos, and believing that Christianity was more instrumental and influential in the shaping of the course of human history. This idea is seen in the statement, "Both the Old Testament and the New Testament claim to be truth, in contrast to that which is not true, and this truth is rooted in history. We have only one hope, and it rests on a serious commitment to the existence of God and the reliability of His Word, the Bible, in all the areas in which it speaks.¹⁰" Despite the overvaluing of the Bible in comparison to other historical ideologies, Schaeffer and Koop set out a framework for evangelicals to enter the political and social spheres in a viable way and laid the foundation for the Moral Majority to become the significant force that it was.

In the evolution of the Jerry Falwell's stance against abortion, and consequently Roe vs. Wade, Bernard Nathanson played an integral role into the formulation of the Moral Majority's vehement stance in the controversial issue. Nathanson is/was a prominent obstetrical-gynecologist who had been the director of the world's largest abortion clinic before beginning to have qualms with the procedure, and thus leading him on a personal journey that would see him become one of the leading pro-life proponents.

¹⁰ Ibid p. 183

In his book, “Aborting America”, Bernard Nathanson details the story in not only how he became involved in the contentious issue but also insightfully depicts how both the pro-life and pro-choice camps formulated their ideological strategies. Raised in a Jewish household, Nathanson emphasizes from the initial stages of his work that there are no religious reasons involved in his anti-abortion stance, which is supported by his early endeavors in the field. The first time Nathanson came face to face with the abortion issue was while he was in medical school when he and his then girlfriend experienced an abortion which ultimately ended that relationship and brought the abstract idea into a concrete reality. After a short tour of duty with the Air Force, Nathanson went into the medical profession, and in “Aborting America” he paints a descriptive portrait of the archaic procedures that were being performed during the 1950s, especially given today’s “modern” standards in which the procedures of decades past seem primitive and grotesque, when he began his ob-gyn practice and began performing abortions. While in the elementary stages of his medical career, Nathanson begins to experience some ethical lassitude towards the practice, yet before he denounces abortion altogether he becomes a prominent pro-choice advocate with the help of Lawrence Lader who was one of the influential figures behind the National Association for the Repeal of Abortion Laws (NARAL), and would help shape Nathanson’s views on the matter.

The years surrounding Bernard Nathanson’s involvement with NARAL are especially crucial in the formulation of his anti-abortion stance, and also portray how the country’s abortion laws were mandated in the late 1960s and early 1970s. With Lader at the helm, NARAL takes an activist approach in first repealing the state of New York’s abortion statutes, which were then seen as somewhat crucial in helping to define the

federal guidelines on the subject. Nathanson goes into detail about how NARAL provided out-patient clinics, which was fairly progressive for that time as almost all abortions were previously performed in hospitals, as well as the salacious and unsavory characters who were then opened up to operating outside of the context of the established medical community, thus giving rise to concern about the welfare of those women who decided to go through with said processes. Nathanson's changing opinions on abortion itself, ironically, began to manifest themselves after the passage of *Roe v. Wade* in 1973. This variance in ideological stance was due to a combination of factors, of which the most important for our discussion were the advances in prenatal research and technology along with the idea that the procedure no longer constituted a real danger to the health of the mother, therefore turning the focus of the debate to the rights of the fetus. Because of this radical shift in the ethical scenario of the situation, Nathanson gave up his position within NARAL and was ostracized by the pro-choice community, which was fortuitous for Jerry Falwell, the Moral Majority, and the pro-life camp as a whole as they gained a well-known and respected figure within the debate, thus adding credence to their cause.

The crux of not only "Aborting America" but also Bernard Nathanson's affiliation with the pro-life community and evangelical fundamentalists is his rather frank discussion on the semantics and physiology involved in the abortion procedure. In his depiction of his own thoughts and feelings on the matter, Nathanson explains that he feels that the terms used in the abortion arena, such as pro-life, pro-choice, and even the word abortion itself are loaded words that have been misapplied by each side of the argument. The basis of Nathanson's frank illustration of the abortion procedure is the term "alpha" which he uses to define what is typically known as the fetus and provides a unique

starting point for his ideas on the abortion controversy. Nathanson also disagreed with the premises of both sides of the abortion argument, which parallels his distaste for the terminology involved but goes into insightful detail about the development of the “alpha” that is perhaps the only truly objective way to look at whether the “alpha” constitutes life. At six weeks, the “alpha” has enough brain function to qualify as life¹¹ and is also the point when the mother’s body recognizes that the “alpha” is a foreign, autonomous body. The viability of the “alpha” outside of the mother, which is around twenty weeks when the “alpha” can potentially live outside and without the help of its mother, is another concept that Nathanson dissects and does not necessarily agree with, deeming it inadequate in terms of describing the ethical issue of abortion, and thus rendering most of the mainstream views on that subject as invalid.

Nathanson aptly encapsulates his views on the acrimonious, and often problematic ways, to define life by stating “the science of the abortion debate is simply not in dispute. Personhood does not really depend upon consciousness, but upon people recognizing the human life that is there among us, beyond this strange talk of ‘human beings’ who are yet not ‘persons,’ beyond the word games and the straw men, beyond the guppies and the kittens, beyond the labels that writers devise to camouflage their point system for assigning value to human lives, and beyond an insubstantial utilitarian ethic that fails to come up to the lowest levels of human justice.¹²” Beginning his thoughts on the ethics of abortion, Nathanson declared, “If we do not protect innocent, non-aggressive elements in the human community, the alternative is too horrible to contemplate. Looked at this way, the ‘sanctity of life’ is not a theological but a secular concept that should be

¹¹ Bernard Nathanson, “Aborting America”, p. 200

¹² Nathanson, p. 226

perfectly acceptable to my fellow atheists. In the concise form, ‘Do no harm,’ it remains the fundamental code for physicians, religious or non-religious.¹³” It is at this point in his discussion where Nathanson and Falwell’s views on the subject at hand begin to come together, despite the differences in religious ideology. Nathanson also clearly stated where abortion is a viable option and when it is not, in stating “intrauterine attack is unjust if it is aggressive rather than in self-defense, if it is not a last resort and other alternatives to it are available, or if the deadly means are out of proportion with the problem to be resolved and the good results that will come from the abortion¹⁴”, which is a good foundation for Falwell using Nathanson as a source for his anti-abortion stance. Nathanson believed that abortion has created a trivialization of life in which the mother can use any possible reason for the procedure, a malapropism that abortion is alleviating social ills such as a baby/ “alpha” being born into poverty, and that it can lead to eugenics which Nathanson somehow ties into an unjust pregnancy, such as if the “alpha” is conceived under dubious or incestuous circumstances or is known to have defects. In all of these instances, Nathanson contends that the “alpha” can still have a meaningful life¹⁵ which is somewhat curious coming from a practicing medical professional who feels that under any circumstances that “alpha”/baby is a worthwhile individual worthy of protecting.

In Bernard Nathanson’s gradual evolution from pro-choice activist to staunch pro-life supporter, he underwent numerous changes in his perception of abortion, something that he describes succinctly by articulating that:

¹³ Nathanson, p. 227

¹⁴ Nathanson, p. 229

¹⁵ Nathanson p. 230-9

“There are 75,000 abortions in my past medical careers, those performed under my administration or that I supervised in a teaching capacity, and the 1,500 that I have performed myself. The vast majority of these fell short of my present standard that only a mother’s life, interpreted with appropriate medical sophistication, can justify destroying the life of this being in inner space which is becoming better known to us with each passing year. I now regret this loss of life. I thought the abortions were right at the time; revolutionary ethics are often unrecognizable at some future, more serene date. The errors of history are not recoverable, the lives cannot be retrieved. One can only pledge to adhere to an ethical course in the future.¹⁶”

Being the figurehead of one of the world’s largest abortion clinics who repudiated his former work gives Nathanson an added dimension of certainty and importance for Falwell using him as a basis for his pro-life views. Nathanson’s view and influence on Falwell is also evident in the statement “subliminally, the massive governmentally sanctioned loss of life made abortion thinkable. The scope of societally accepted abortions, the very statistics, is frightening. Some 988,267 were officially recorded by the federal government in our Bicentennial year, a 16 percent increase over 1975.” This would mean that there are one million or more a year, year in and year out, or one abortion per 3.2 babies born and many millions since Justice Blackmun’s [Supreme Court justice who presided over *Roe v. Wade* decisions]. “In the nation’s capital, abortions actually outnumbering live births each year. The statistics mean that a uniquely wealthy nation has sequestered off and rejected a large component of life, a component that we know more about than ever before.¹⁷” It is this somewhat melodramatic yet equally powerful quote and use of statistical information that gives Nathanson’s views added credence in the eyes of many pro-life proponents, including Jerry Falwell, and

¹⁶ Nathanson p. 248-9

¹⁷ Nathanson p. 250-1

Nathanson's belief that "an unexamined utilitarian ethos, and a corresponding 'situation ethic,' have led us to this monstrous abortion situation¹⁸" furthers this concept.

Throughout his discourse on abortion, Bernard Nathanson emphasized the magnitude of the medical procedure upon the whole of society, something that could, and is certainly beginning to in his opinion, corrupt the foundation of mankind. Nathanson contended that abortion is an erosion of traditional Western values, most notably being a pronounced violation of the Hippocratic Oath, the cornerstone of the medical profession, in which life has no intrinsic worth when Nathanson's explanation of the biological development of the "alpha" shows that it in fact does. Along the lines of Falwell's fundamentalist ideology is Nathanson's contention that the traditional role of the family within society has also been degraded since "pregnancy and childbirth are cohesive in their effect on the family, while sex apart from the family and childbearing is never socially cohesive; on the contrary, it is a chaotic force¹⁹" which neatly coincides with the Moral Majority's opinion on the subject matter. In summarizing his views on the abortion controversy as a whole, Nathanson fittingly discusses his thesis, asserting "the obvious scientific conclusion is that 'alpha' is demonstrably an independent human entity (life). The obvious moral conclusion is that 'alpha's' destruction cannot be justified unless, on clear medical grounds, the mother's life is at stake. A life is a sound humanistic basis on which to sanction the intentional destruction of human life; nothing else is. The sociological conclusion is that abortion is not just a private matter; it has do with all of us.²⁰" In synthesizing both the pertinent biological data and subsequent social consequences, Dr. Nathanson gave fundamentalist evangelicals the applicable fodder in

¹⁸ Nathanson p. 251

¹⁹ Nathanson p. 257

²⁰ Nathanson p. 259

making their case in the abortion controversy by giving them an expert in the field to draw upon. For Nathanson, it is up to theological leaders to determine the validity of ethical dilemmas concerning the soul of the alpha, but for obstetricians, in his view, once scientific evidence of the “alpha’s” presence is manifested, the unborn should be protected by law. The concluding sentence of “Aborting America” is perhaps Nathanson’s most powerful argument for the pro-life faction, averring that “only the recognition of the ‘alpha’ is but one of us, and that we must welcome it back into the community of mankind, will serve us as a reliable guide for our implacable future.²¹”

Throughout his work, Bernard Nathanson’s views were mostly objective as a whole although his ideas on the future of the abortion issue, for example believing that eugenics and gene manipulation were in the not so distant future as well as the ethical standards of what constitutes life, are certainly in line with Falwell’s beliefs concerning the issue. By providing reliable scientific analysis from a prominent figure within the ob-gyn community, Nathanson’s “Aborting America”, which was published at about the same time as the genesis of the Moral Majority, gives a succinct discussion on the controversy without going into too much theological or partisan rhetoric, thus providing the scholar with an excellent vantage point in which to garner information. Nathanson’s arguments, as mentioned above, also gave Falwell and the Moral Majority a reputable source with which to bolster their claims of the validity of the pro-life movement. In line with this symbiotic relationship is Nathanson’s negative opinion on *Roe v. Wade*, which he contended was too vague about numerous significant points, as well as the fact that Dr. Nathanson does not believe that the Supreme Court should be legislating from the

²¹ Nathanson p. 286

judicial auspices, a contention that would be repeated frequently in a wide variety of topics by conservative evangelicals.

CHAPTER 4

EVEN A STOPPED CLOCK GIVES THE RIGHT TIME TWICE A DAY: THE LIFE & RELIGION OF JERRY FALWELL

In the course of the history of 20th century American religious history, there have been few figures that were as polarizing as Jerry Falwell. Revered by his followers and considered zealous and egregious by his opponents, Falwell was a key figurehead in the revival of political intervention by religious leaders in the late 20th century and created a name for himself by a rhetorical and polemic style all his own. Perhaps most known for his work through the Thomas Road Baptist Church which he established in 1956 as well as Liberty University both of which are in Lynchburg, Virginia, Falwell's efforts with the Moral Majority, which he helped co-found in 1979, would propel him into the national spotlight and cement his legacy as a forerunner of modern evangelical political activism. Throughout the 1980s during the Moral Majority's zenith in which the organization would acquire substantial sway within the Republican Party under the administration of President Ronald Reagan, Falwell was a lightning rod for all sorts of controversy and was rarely out of the headlines of the nation's newspapers and the newly established television news networks. Whether or not one agrees with either his ideological stance or his political rhetoric, one must give Jerry Falwell his just due in the complex discussion of how religion and politics intermingled during the last three decades of the 20th century.

In the May 16, 2007, edition of the New York Times, Peter Applebome wrote a befitting obituary of Jerry Falwell who had passed away the day before in which the fundamentalist minister was depicted in a more humanistic light than had been afforded to him in recent years. In the obituary, Applebome states that “behind the controversies was a shrewd, savvy operator with an original vision for effecting political and moral change. He rallied religious conservatives to the political arena at a time when most fundamentalists and other conservative religious leaders were inclined to stay away. And he helped pulled off what had once seemed an impossible task: uniting religious conservatives from many faiths and doctrines by emphasizing what they had in common.¹” The article was an appropriate tribute to a man who had been both praised and demonized, a dichotomy that Falwell himself understood very well. In his autobiography, “Strength for the Journey”, which was published in 1987, Jerry Falwell discussed the turbulent history of his family, and how it played an integral role in his career as both pastor and religious/political icon. Written during the waning days of the Moral Majority’s hegemony of political clout and after he attempted to salvage televangelist Jim Bakker’s organization Prayer Time Live (PTL), Falwell gives the reader an insightful glance into his background and the evolution of his ideology. By combining a rich and colorful familial history as well as the minister’s own reflections on the momentous affairs of his lifetime, “Strength for the Journey” provides the scholar with an excellent starting point from which to view Falwell’s extraordinary rise to fame and national prominence.

¹ Peter Applebome, “Jerry Falwell, Moral Majority Founder, Dies at 73,” New York Times, 16 May 2007, sec. Obituaries

Jerry Falwell begins his autobiography with the minister reminiscing about how he has lost touch with his family history since his quasi-meteoric rise to a national political figure. Falwell commences the story of his family's background by stating that the history of his forefathers has parallels with the Biblical narrative as it illustrates how sin and/or Satan has played a role in not only his own personal life but also the course of mankind as a whole. To further epitomize this point, Falwell recounts the murder of his great-granduncle John which he believes exemplifies the intrinsic nature of the sinfulness of man, stating in poignant fashion "man was not created to murder his fellow man. Something has gone terribly wrong with the creation. Evil is at work in the world, and no family can be protected from it."² Yet, all was not grim within the annals of the Falwell familial lore as Jerry also recounts the merrier times of the past including numerous anecdotes about the courtship between his father and mother. Falwell's father Carey, like his father before him, were successful entrepreneurs yet were also, ironically enough, avowed atheists with the primary catalyst behind Carey's aversion to religion being the death of his daughter and Jerry's late sister, Rosha, who seemingly was the pride and joy of his life. Carey Falwell was also a notorious source of illegal moonshine during the Prohibition era and killed his own brother in self defense, an event that Jerry Falwell would point to as a turning point in his father's life with the minister indicating that the actions of his uncle Garland, who led an infamously boisterous lifestyle in his own right, were actually the manifestation of Satan's bidding on the Falwell family. To further this point of how sin has affected his own personal past, Jerry Falwell contends that the nation in modern times has forgotten the importance of sin within everyday life, believing that "when the idea of sin disappears, the possibility of forgiveness goes with it. And without

² Jerry Falwell, *Strength for the Journey*, p. 9

forgiveness, the world is lost. Our relationships with God and with each other deteriorate and we live miserable, hopeless lives. But when we admit the possibility of sin, we hold up the possibility of forgiveness as well. And with forgiveness, there is hope that our relationships with each other and with God can be restored again.³” It is this concept of logic and relating the tales of his own history to that of the nation as a whole that would characterize not only “Strength for the Journey”, but also Falwell’s canon as a whole.

After the traumatic manslaughter of his own brother, Carey Falwell, according to his son, was never the same man, and that Jerry’s mother was left to shoulder the emotional burden, with her and her family, the Beasleys, being an important early spiritual influence on young Jerry, as opposed to the unreligious ways of his father’s clan. When Jerry and his twin brother Gene, who surprisingly gets little mention throughout “Strength for the Journey”, were born in 1933, the Falwells were relatively affluent given the desperation that most of the country faced during the Depression years. While his father was able to enjoy the fruits of his material wealth, Carey’s regret and guilt over the death of Garland, two years prior to the birth of Jerry, would plague him for the rest of his life, leading to alcoholism and domestic violence further down the line. Jerry Falwell retells the episode in his life by observing that in his father that “violence and anger were not qualities basic to his character but fruits of the unforgiven sin still growing in his life⁴”, again touching on his recurrent point of the constitutive role of sin within the history of mankind.

As Jerry Falwell began school in the fall of 1940, World War II was raging in Europe and his home life was becoming more and more troubled. Yet, during these

³ Ibid, p. 27

⁴ Ibid p. 52

seemingly chaotic times, Falwell took sanctuary within the confines of his school and educational process which he deemed was spiritually nurturing, and, in his opinion, are in a direct contrast to today's academic life where religion has been marginalized. World War II brought about an economic downturn for the Falwells as Carey was forced to sell several of his family's businesses and began to take increasing solace in the consumption of alcohol. Commenting on his father's final years, Falwell declares that "during his seventeen years of suffering, I don't know one man who thought to explain to Dad what the Apostle Paul made clear almost 2,000 years ago. 'The wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.' My father desperately needed to find God's forgiveness. Gradually his unforgiven guilt led to alcoholism, and his alcoholism led to death."⁵ A notable exception to the world's forsaking Carey's detrimental disease, however, was Virginia Glass McKenna, who was an acquaintance of Billy Sunday's, and was pivotal in bringing about Carey's deathbed conversion to Christianity. Falwell uses this example to illustrate, once more, the importance of sin, and subsequent forgiveness thereof, contending that from the Old Testament to the New Testament there is a correlation between the two, as signified by the sacrificial lamb of the Old Testament and Jesus Christ in the New Testament.

Although the conversion of Carey Falwell was somewhat miraculous in the context of his family's history, young Jerry did not place much emphasis in his father's coming to Christ a few weeks prior to his demise. In fact, Jerry Falwell still maintained a secularist lifestyle during his adolescence, and the evangelical minister even claimed that he was a part of a local "gang", even though the anecdotes that Falwell relates about this rebellious time pale in comparison by today's standards of hooliganism. It was not until

⁵ Ibid p. 72

Falwell began attending Lynchburg College in the early 1950s that the future fundamentalist figurehead would begin his road to personal piety, and surprisingly enough, according to Falwell himself, it was almost on a lark. During Jerry's childhood, his mother would listen to the radio evangelist Charles Fuller in the hopes of bringing her son closer to God, and this tactic eventually paid off one winter's evening in 1952. On a cold January night, Falwell decided to attend Park Avenue Baptist Church in Lynchburg with some of his fellow "gang" members, and what began as an irreverent attempt at entertainment ended up being a turning point in Jerry Falwell's life as he entered into the confines of a welcoming church fold as well as being the first time he encountered his future wife Macel Pate. After being converted on that seemingly ordinary Sunday night with the help of an affable elderly member of the church, Jerry Falwell began his odyssey into the realm of Christian evangelicalism, a step that would not only irrevocably influence his own life but also the lives of countless others.

With Falwell's conversion, he plunged headlong into his new life as a Christian through daily Bible study and semi-daily church activities where he started his sometimes arduous but ultimately fulfilling courtship of Macel Pate which in his autobiography has quite a bit of space devoted to that budding relationship, mostly through countless anecdotes of their time together. Through his continuing growth as a Christian, Falwell came to the conclusion that he would be best suited as a Baptist minister as he pledged to enter Bible college and drop out of the engineering program that he was then pursuing. Later describing this critical moment in his life, Falwell stated, "The problem with too many fundamentalist evangelicals is that spiritual growth begins and ends with rebirth. In fact, I discovered early in my spiritual journey that being born again is just the

beginning.⁶” Giving priority to the actions of a newly found Christian after their conversion, Falwell’s assertion goes against the grain of most fundamentalist tenets and sets him apart from his contemporaries in this regard. Another insightful comment that Falwell has about this time is found in his discussion of what being a Christian meant to him, believing “Christian discipleship-following Jesus every day for the rest of your life-is not an option; it is His command. It takes work, sacrifice, discipline, and determination. And what I learned of Christian discipleship at the Park Avenue Baptist Church in those short months after my conversion was wonderful; but it was only the beginning.⁷”

Attending Baptist Bible College in Springfield Missouri, Jerry Falwell experienced formal theology outside of the brief introduction he received after his “rebirth” in Lynchburg. Gaining a solid educational foundation, Falwell graduated and returned to Lynchburg where he found Park Avenue Baptist in disarray due to the turmoil surrounding a core group of members, of roughly thirty-five in number, desiring to establish a new congregation as they opposed some of the regulations Park Avenue was then trying to implement. Falwell, after much deliberation and thoughtful prayer, decided to lead this new group of parishioners, and this small yet devout assembly of Christians purchased a storefront property on Thomas Road, on the then outskirts of Lynchburg. This schism within the Park Avenue Baptist Church was greeted as a beneficial occurrence by those who split off from the church but was much to the chagrin of the status quo of the area’s Baptist community. While Falwell at this time felt alienated by his peers within the fellowship of Lynchburg’s Baptist community, he

⁶ Ibid p. 128

⁷ Ibid p. 128

strongly believed that, through the power of prayer, he ultimately did the right thing in forming Thomas Road Baptist. In attempting to draw new members to Thomas Road, Falwell contended that “working to fill a church is not just an exercise in pride. At the heart of my Christian faith is the strong belief that people who do not know Christ as Lord and Savior are spiritually lost and that we who know Him are responsible to share His story with those who don’t. From the first day of our own conversion, we are called to Christian witness. Sharing the faith is at the very center of what it means to be a Christian, and there is no better way I know than to share it door-to-door, person-to-person in our neighborhood.⁸” In the above statement, one can see how Falwell somewhat lamented the fact that his own father was not able to receive the beatitudes of Christian love before the few weeks he had in his life; yet Falwell’s quasi-egalitarian grassroots campaign to bring new members into the Thomas Road family did achieve a sizeable amount of success as the church was able to grow substantially early on in its existence.

To complement his early days of ministry, Jerry Falwell also entered into the foray of the Lynchburg’s media arena by starting a daily radio program that helped to increase his influence in the area as well as bring even more people into his congregation, and would be a large part of Falwell’s approach for the rest of his career as he would be one of the first evangelists to tap into the potential of radio and, later on, television. Falwell also increased his growing stature within the religious and social communities by establishing a treatment center for alcoholics at his brother Gene’s farmhouse which was part of what he later termed his spiritual development and observing “during those first days of my ministry in Lynchburg I began to develop a balance between the need for

⁸ Ibid p. 180

action and the need to wait upon God. For some Christians, action is everything. For others, prayer is the beginning and the end. But the longer I live, the more I am convinced that in the balance of these two worlds, the inward and the outward journey, comes spiritual health.⁹” By striking a fine equilibrium between the spiritual and material realms, Falwell was able to reach more people than his peers and created a new style of evangelical ministry that would be replicated many times over by his successors. In terms of the alcoholic rehab center, the Elim Home for Alcoholics, that he helped found, Falwell believed that while “our actions are backed by prayer and our prayers lead to action, we are walking in His footsteps and we have the power that He has promised us. Elim Home for Alcoholics is a living proof of the power of prayer and action together.¹⁰” By combining the pragmatic and devout into a viable mode of ministry, Jerry Falwell was able to capitalize on the need for a “modern” evangelical fundamentalism within the greater Lynchburg community, something that he was able to do as well on a larger scale later on in his career.

In terms of his personal life, Jerry Falwell made great strides in achieving what he set out to accomplish when he first met Macel Pate, as the two married on April 12, 1958, and would eventually have two boys and a girl together. This idea of a newly found family, according to Falwell, gave his life a new focus and direction and leads him to go into lengthy detail about the importance of family within the context of his career as a pastor. In “Strength for the Journey”, Falwell also looks back at the race issues that were occurring during the early days of his ministry in the 1960s, taking an almost apologetic view of his then ideas about segregation and contending that he was a product of that

⁹ Ibid p. 226

¹⁰ Ibid p. 231

racist bygone era. In taking a sort of revisionist view of his own personal history, Falwell asserted his almost libertarian viewpoint in declaring:

“I was just thirty-one years of age. I was born and raised in the deep South. I had grown up in a segregated society. I had been a Christian for less than a dozen years, and though my study of the Scriptures had left me with a growing restlessness with the traditional Southern position, I felt bullied and unjustly attacked by the army of white Northerners marching into the South, demanding that we follow their dictates in the running of our community and in the ordering of our lives. I was angry that suddenly the Supreme Court, the Congress, and the President had assumed rights once granted to the states, and I protested loudly the arrogant, disruptive, and often violent wave of demonstrators arriving daily in the South. I was determined to maintain the right to decide for ourselves how we would live together, black and white.¹¹”

Eventually, however, Falwell would come to terms with the fact that God does not judge people on the basis of their skin color but on their merit of their character, and Thomas Road Baptist began to accept black members shortly after, ironically enough since Falwell showed an open distaste for Martin Luther King, Jr. throughout his early career, the assassination of King in 1968, much to the dismay of some of his congregants.

In discussing the early days of Thomas Road Baptist Church and the strategy he employed to acquire new members, Jerry Falwell would often paraphrase, much like Aimee Semple McPherson decades earlier making “Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever¹²” her evangelical credo, the biblical text in which Jesus tells his disciples to “be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth¹³” to describe how the newly established church went about recruiting prospective visitors by a series of small steps. Yet, as Thomas Road expanded

¹¹ Ibid p. 277

¹² Hebrews 13:8 New Revised Standard Version Bible

¹³ Acts 1:8, NRSVB

exponentially after its first formative years, Falwell noticed a massive expansion in his ministry and its influential clout within the Lynchburg area. Reminiscing about this era in the development of his church, Falwell argued, “It seemed like a miracle to that handful of believers who had worked together from the beginning. And though God had blessed His people’s faithfulness, in fact that astounding growth was a result of their constant faithful and sacrificial work and witness.¹⁴”. During this epoch in Falwell’s career, the increasingly prominent preacher began to see the potential in establishing a new Christian college that he hoped would help create five thousand new churches by the year 2000 through the efforts of its graduates. With the assistance of Dr. Elmer Towns a theological education expert, Falwell and Thomas Road Baptist Church, via numerous property acquisitions throughout Lynchburg, was able to launch Lynchburg Baptist College, later Liberty University, in 1971. With the genesis of a theological seminary in the early 1970s, Falwell and his followers felt the need for more space for their ever-growing ministry with Candler’s, now Liberty, Mountain seen as a viable locale for expansion. The burgeoning success of Falwell’s radio and television programs, entitled “The Old Time Gospel Hour”, also gave rise to an impetus to spread Thomas Road’s message throughout the country via the medium of television, beginning with the immediate vicinity. Due to the enormous amount of growth in a relatively short amount of time, the finances of Falwell’s church were severely taxed, sending the leaders of Thomas Road Baptist to pursue somewhat dubious and shady dealing with itinerate bonds salesmen in the efforts to raise capital. These business transactions would, however, lead to both the church and Falwell coming under the scrutiny of Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC) as well as being indicted with fraud and deceit in the U.S.

¹⁴ Falwell, Strength for the Journey p.290

District Court in Roanoke, Virginia. Throughout these turbulent times, Jerry Falwell faced an increasing amount of pressure from both the media and the evangelical movement as a whole, but he was also supported by his family as well as several associates, notably Dr. B. R. Larkin who was a popular radio evangelist in the 1930s and 1940s and was a model for Falwell using the medium to the extent that he did. Thomas Road and Falwell were able to beat the charges against them, much to the relief of the minister who credited the support of his followers and parishioners in helping him during those chaotic times. After the litigation from the church's financial dealings had been taken care and work resumed on building their evangelical empire, a sense of normalcy returned to Jerry Falwell's ministry in Lynchburg. Yet, several noteworthy events in the 1970s would catapult Falwell into the national spotlight as he entered the political arena for the first, bona fide time.

Among the multitude of social events that reshaped the social dynamic of America during the 1970s, the *Roe v. Wade* decision was one of the first factors that influenced Jerry Falwell's eventual foray into politics, and after he and Thomas Road Baptist Church were exonerated of financial misdoings, the minister began to focus more of his attention on this and other pertinent topics. Discussing his change in opinion about entering the political arena, Falwell encapsulated his ideas on the matter by "hoping that words would be enough, I began to preach regularly against abortion, calling it 'America's national sin.' I compared abortion to Hitler's 'final solution' for the Jews and the Court's decision to letting loose a 'biological holocaust' upon our nation. However, it soon became apparent that this time preaching would not be enough. To stop the legalizing of death by abortion, opponents of the *Roe v. Wade* decision were protesting in

the streets. For the first time in my life I felt God leading me to join them.¹⁵” Deeming abortion as the primary social problem facing the nation, Falwell believed that it was a cornerstone for the growing decadence pervading American society as well as destroying the family as a cohesive social unit, and marked a change in Falwell’s ministry as a whole. In his arguing against the evils of abortion, Falwell would often cite the biblical passage of “render to Caesar what is Caesar’s and to God what is God’s” to legitimize his stance for protesting against abortion, and his “I Love America” tours, which were implemented in the late 1970s, were his first efforts to mobilize a large political constituency. Falwell also established a home for unwed mothers and those who were contemplating abortion in Lynchburg to combat the “growing” issue of abortion, and this home was another important precedent for his future work with the Moral Majority.

When Jerry Falwell was first approached about possibly being the head of a religious/political organization, which would eventually become the Moral Majority, the Lynchburg minister was a bit hesitant to work with people of different denominations and faiths, but was persuaded to do so after studying Francis Schaeffer’s concept of co-belligerents in attaining a pragmatic social agenda. Falwell would later recount his wariness about the practicality of forming such an association when he stated:

“Therefore, when I began considering how to put together a political organization that included all Americans I was faced with a terrific problem: my own personal psychological barrier. All of my background from Baptist Bible College and other places and persons providing my religious training made it difficult for me to consider such a prospect. And yet I was convinced that there was a ‘moral majority’ out there among these more than 200 million Americans sufficient in number to turn back the flood tide of moral permissiveness, family breakdown, and general capitulation to evil and to foreign philosophies such as Marxism-Leninism.¹⁶”

¹⁵ Ibid p. 321-2

¹⁶ Ibid p. 345

In June 1979, Moral Majority, Inc., which was the political lobbying arm of the organization, and the Moral Majority Foundation, or the media-education forum of the group, were established under the pro-life, pro-traditional family, pro-Judeo-Christian morals, and pro-American platform. Yet despite this specific platform, Falwell would emphatically maintain that the organization was not intended to be an evangelistic nor a religious movement. In less than eighteen months, this new organization was able to claim that it was a viable force within the context of national politics due to its overwhelming support of Ronald Reagan's victory in the 1980 Presidential election as well as other like-minded officials on the state and local levels, which Falwell and his new association contended was principally due to their efforts. As the stature and prominence of the Moral Majority increased throughout the 1980s, Falwell faced more and more media scrutiny, especially after his comment that God did not hear the prayers of Jews, but by the time Reagan is reelected in 1984, Falwell claimed that the conservative, evangelical bloc was the largest in the country and that millions of citizens were politically active due to the work of the Moral Majority. Yet, by the fall of 1986, the strenuous efforts and tasks involved in heading the Moral Majority began to take its toll on Falwell, leading him to send out a communiqué declaring his intentions to scale down his political involvement and to spend more time with his family and Thomas Road Baptist Church. When writing "Strength for the Journey" in 1987, many analysts suggested that the Moral Majority's waning control of power was due to Falwell's decision to abstain from political matters although Falwell himself countered that the association had never been stronger.

The final episode discussed in “Strength for the Journey” is Jerry Falwell’s decision to help the evangelical organization, Prayer Time Live (PTL), out of financial straits. After much deliberation, Falwell decided to take on the responsibility of leading PTL after its former leader Jim Bakker persuaded him to do so, which forces him to face much more criticism from both the media and other evangelists. Yet, despite all of the controversy surrounding him taking over the fledgling religious group, Falwell maintained that he had made the right decision and would have done so if given the opportunity to do things over. With this problematic event, “Strength for the Journey” concludes its narrative which is a fitting end for the book as most of Falwell’s activities after the late 1980s pale in comparison to the efforts he expended in the earlier parts of his career. By giving the scholar insight into one of the more divisive characters in recent American history, “Strength for the Journey” is an invaluable tool in helping to gain a better understanding of the polarizing figure of Jerry Falwell along with garnering the Lynchburg minister’s own ideas and thoughts on numerous noteworthy events that occurred during his lifetime and career.

The two works that best show Jerry Falwell’s transition from an evangelical minister from Virginia to a nationally recognized political figure are “Church Aflame” and “Capturing a Town for Christ”. These two works, which were coauthored by Elmer Towns, illustrate how even at a relatively early stage in his ministry, Falwell was already planning his initial foray into the secular world of politics and shaping the future of the Religious Right in America. In the work “Church Aflame”, Towns and Falwell examined the nuances of what made Thomas Road Baptist Church stand apart from other churches at that time and how it was ministering to Lynchburg and the nearby

community. The book also illustrates the growth of the church at a time, the early 1970s, when it was America's fastest growing church, which was due in part to its reliance on mass media. Elmer Towns was known for his study "The 10 Largest Sunday Schools", in which he used the same methodology to depict Thomas Road Baptist Church's success, and he would later become vice-president of Lynchburg Baptist College, which was later renamed Liberty University.

The book opens with showing the importance of individual people within the ministry of Thomas Road Baptist as several testimonials are given about the redeeming qualities of the church. This is followed by background information on Falwell who is described as "a man sent by God" and his transformation to a Christian as "his was not a spectacular conversion, but a conversion of eternal consequences."¹⁷ This grandiose characterization of Falwell, paying particular attention to his extraordinary piety and compassion, is the first of many flattering descriptions of the minister, and elucidate on how Falwell was beginning to set himself apart from traditional pastors at an early stage in his career. Contending that man can only be good at one occupation or profession, Falwell dedicated his life to expanding his ministry while also picking up ideas along the way from other churches that he encountered during his travels.

The idea that Thomas Road Baptist Church was too large to meet the needs of its parishioners is taken up by Falwell who refuted the claim in a multi-step argument. Among the reasons given by Falwell in response are that a large-sized church is prescribed Biblically, that it is the best for evangelical work, that it is better in serving large metropolitan areas, that it attracts the respect of the unsaved, and it can supply a well-rounded ministry that other smaller congregations could not afford. The fact that a

¹⁷ Elmer Towns and Jerry Falwell, "Church Aflame", p. 22

large church can be the conscience of a town as well as replacing the need for denominations and being more efficient due to the large staff that typically is employed by a larger group are other reasons that Falwell gave to show that Thomas Road had the best interests at heart when it grew to its enormous size in the course of a few years¹⁸. Falwell emphasized this point in his statement, “We aren’t going to argue with anyone about how big Sunday School should become. We’re just going to keep winning lost people to Jesus, keep teaching the Word of God to every convert; and when we have natural growth, we’ll build another building for the new converts. If we keep on ministering in the future as we have done in the past, we will continue to grow; and if we offend anyone, we’ll have to leave that matter to God.”¹⁹,

Jerry Falwell believed that the primary mandate of the church was evangelism, arguing the right method and message should be used to bring the gospel into the world. The main influence on Falwell’s brand of evangelism is based on the Great Commission, which is found in Matthew 28:18-20, in which Jesus taught his disciples on the importance of evangelism, baptism, and teaching within the concept of the Christian life. This concept was taken up by Falwell to implement a very proactive method of ministering to the community, especially seen in Thomas Road’s usage of the media. To highlight the priority of evangelism, Towns depicted the pastor’s ministerial method in stating, “Falwell expects to win every person to whom he witnesses, and he expects sinners to get saved every time he preaches. This faith in God and compassion for the lost explains the phenomenal evangelistic results at the Thomas Road Baptist Church.”²⁰, This style would be criticized by some as bordering on religious zealotry, yet Falwell’s

¹⁸ Towns & Falwell, p. 34-42

¹⁹ Elmer Towns & Jerry Falwell, “Church Aflame”, p.43

²⁰ Towns & Falwell, p. 55

idiosyncratic manner produced results for Thomas Road and increased his status within the fundamentalist community. In this model of how a church should be structured, the pastor was the prime example of how evangelism should manifest itself within a church although the church as a whole should be a nexus of evangelism through what Falwell termed “saturation evangelism” which entailed ministering in every way possible by any means possible. This concept is readily shown in the church’s use of electronic media with Falwell arguing that “I am challenged by the multimedia available to us for reaching billions of people with the gospel. I thrill [sic] that I have been privileged to live in this age. Because I believe in the imminent return of the Lord Jesus Christ for His Church, then I must be doing all I can as quickly as I can. I realize we don’t have a long time to reach the lost. I believe we shall stand before the judgment seat of Christ accountable for not utilizing every available means at any cost to get the gospel out to every creature. May God challenge our hearts to total saturation. Contact, continuous contact, no limitation.”²¹

In terms of the types of Christian ministry that Thomas Road Baptist Church provided for the Lynchburg community, Sunday school was considered the primary extension of the church’s mission as a whole. Therefore, Falwell placed a great deal of emphasis of Sunday school as a party of his “saturation evangelism” ethos while also of course being a crucial part of the education that church members needed to become better Christians. The bus “ministry” was another facet of the church’s evangelical success as well as the prominent youth ministry, which Falwell contended was the lifeblood of the church and could play a role in establishing new, like-minded churches in the future. Among the other ministries and organization affiliated with the church were the

²¹ Towns & Falwell, p. 79-80

Lynchburg Christian Academy whose Christian-centered education was described as “evangelistic in that: (1) Bible is taught each day in every class. The school requires that each teacher be a Bible instructor, so that biblical content will be integrated with regular curriculum. (2) Chapel is held once a week for each division, at which visiting pastors and church staff members challenge the students. (3) A week of evangelistic meetings or a Bible conference is held each fall and spring. The main program is to reach and win unsaved pupils to Christ.²²” This concept of a solid Christian education would be continued with the establishment of Liberty Bible College in 1971, the same year “Church Aflame” was published. The college and its purpose were further elaborated upon by Towns and Falwell:

“The United States is witnessing a decay of the institutional church, a decline in church membership because of theological liberalism and a turning away from the scriptures, with a substitution of social action for Christian ministry. At the same time God is raising up a movement to carry forward His work of building local churches. This movement is centered in a return to the Biblical fundamentals, a desire to reflect godly Christian living, a purpose to reach the whole world through aggressive New Testament church evangelism, and a sense that the signs of the time point to the imminent return of Jesus Christ to the earth. The college attempts to reflect this movement by God in the latter part of the twentieth century.

The Lynchburg Baptist College was founded upon the theological foundation that ‘the best place to train young people to minister in a local church is in a local church.’ Therefore, the Lynchburg Baptist College is uniquely the educational arm of the Thomas Road Baptist Church. The college hold and teaches the central doctrines of the Christian faith as embraced by the historic conservative, Baptist position.²³”

²² Towns & Falwell, p. 129

²³ Towns & Falwell, p. 153

“Church Aflame” is part an explanation of Thomas Road Baptist Church’s success and part blueprint for others seeking to emulate its prototype. The idea of “saturation evangelism” is also covered in “Capturing a Town for Christ” which further expounds upon the work Jerry Falwell and his church were doing in the Lynchburg community during the early 1970s. Falwell began the work with an explanation of the aims of his ministry and a concise definition of “saturation evangelism”, declaring “I appreciate what our Christian forefathers did, but I believe the key to evangelism is the local church and every church attempting to reach as many for Christ, in every way possible, at every time possible. This will result in every church growing larger and stronger.²⁴” Towns followed this definition up with an expository glance into the workings of Thomas Road Baptist Church, and, in keeping with the information presented in “Church Aflame”, went on to illustrate the various types of ministry the church was involved in as well as testimonials that corroborate the success of Falwell’s “saturation evangelism”. In providing evidence to the success and viability of Thomas Road Baptist Church, Towns cited standards for the capability of churches in general, “Sociologists have used the following points to measure church greatness: (1) numerical growth, (2) involvement of members in the total ministry, and (3) the change in those who attend the church. These three points, along with two other biblical reasons, will measure a great church: (4) ministering to the total needs of members, and (5) saturation evangelism. These last two points have been neglected by most churches since Pentecost. The Thomas Road Baptist Church meets the qualifications of these five

²⁴ Jerry Falwell and Elmer Towns, *Capturing a Town for Christ*, p. 7

points; therefore, it could be called one of the greatest churches since Pentecost.²⁵ In furthering this point, Towns believed that quantity equaled quality, in terms of proselytizing, when it came to measuring a church's success in reaching the surrounding community with the message of Christ. Towns concluded his examination of Thomas Road by contending that the success of the church could be directly correlated with the dynamic personality of Jerry Falwell, which was important due to Towns' belief that evangelistic works could only be as good as the pastor leading them.

The second part of "Capturing a Town for Christ" is devoted to a selection of Jerry Falwell's sermons. The first message concerned the church of Antioch and was used to illustrate his ministry and how it spread the gospel to the world, "It is my conviction that every local church should attempt to capture its city for Christ. Every Bible-believing, Bible-preaching, soul-winning church ought to attempt to win the entire metropolitan area to Christ. That is the prime objective of every church. We ought to try to win every individual, every soul, and every person, beginning at Jerusalem (our Lynchburg), then Judea (the surrounding county), and then Samaria (the state of Virginia for us), and ultimately the uttermost parts of the earth (worldwide missions).²⁶" The main impression one gets from reading these sermons are the manifestation of the first inclinations towards where Falwell wanted to take his ministry as his aggressive evangelism appears in many of the messages that he expounded upon which included self-reliance and perseverance through the will of God and doing one's utmost to spread the Gospel. These sermons also show some signs of the political future of Falwell's career as communists are mentioned, and repudiated, as well as showing a conservative,

²⁵ Falwell and Towns, p. 76

²⁶ Falwell and Towns, p. 113

ultra-capitalist/patriotic inclination. Falwell's symbiosis of religion and politics can be seen in an excerpt from one of his sermons in which he stated, "The destiny of our nation lies in the hands of preachers and their willingness or unwillingness to preach the Word of God, to cry out against sin. I say to preachers everywhere, 'You hold the destiny of America in your hands.' A liberal preacher is not only an enemy of God, he's an enemy of the nation. For God has blessed this nation and honored America above all other nations. The Word of God has been preached here. Our forefathers were men who believed something-who were willing to pay a price and willing to die for the Bible and our land."²⁷ This quote also shows how Falwell ascribed that a single great man, not committees and other such groups, should lead a church and its evangelical mission which shows Falwell's propensity towards a quasi-authoritarian leadership style and brand of politics that become more evident in his later works.

Perhaps the most noteworthy work of Jerry Falwell's canon is his work "Listen, America!" which was published in 1980 and gives the reader a profound look into his often-controversial ideology and is described as "the conservative blueprint for America's moral rebirth". In beginning his somewhat lengthy tome, Falwell depicted the atrocious nature of life in Communist nations and contended that there were three main crises facing America as the 1980s dawned: the supremacy of the Soviet bloc especially in the nuclear arms race, a government-dominated economy which he defines as "welfareism", and a lack of effective leadership at both the national and local level. These problems for Falwell placed an added emphasis on the importance of the upcoming decade in the context of American history, averring, "when history records these ten years, I think it will be fair to project that this will have probably been, since the days of

²⁷ Falwell and Towns, p. 181

the American Revolution, the most important decade this nation has known. This is a grave statement because I believe that the outcome of how we stand as a free people at the end of this decade will depend upon the moral decisions we as a people make in the very near future.²⁸” The sole remedy for this impending moral catastrophe, in Falwell’s opinion, was an increased focus of what God intended for mankind, which are laid out by the dictates and lessons of the Bible, and that “only by godly leadership can America be put back on a divine course. God will give national healing if men and women will pray and meet God’s conditions, but we must have leadership in America to deliver God’s message.²⁹” Despite all of these perceived difficulties facing the country at that time, Falwell maintained a staunch faith about the potential of American society, and that the history of the nation showed how magnificent the United States has been and could continue to be under the proper guidance. Falwell also had a strong admiration for era of the American Revolution, contending that it was a truly significant time in not only the history of the nation but also of the world as a whole. To illustrate this point, he asserted, “Our Founding Fathers separated church and state in function, but never intended to establish a government void of God. As is evidenced by our Constitution, good people in America must exert an influence and provide a conscience and climate of morality in which it is difficult to go wrong, not difficult for people to go right in America.³⁰” This reverence for the days of the Founding Fathers is a concept that is mentioned throughout “Listen, America!”, and plays a crucial role in Falwell’s perception of history.

Jerry Falwell devoted a fairly significant amount of space to his discussion of the Founding Fathers and the early years of American history in order to build a context for

²⁸ Jerry Falwell, Listen America!, p. 7-8

²⁹ Ibid p. 15

³⁰ Ibid p. 19

how modern society has failed to live up to the potential that its forefathers had set out for it. Falwell argued:

“America has reached the pinnacle of greatness unlike any nation in human history because our Founding Fathers established America’s laws and precepts on the principles recorded in the laws of God, including the Ten Commandments. God has blessed this nation because in its early days she sought to honor God and the Bible, the inerrant Word of the living God. Any diligent student of American history finds that our great nation was founded by godly men upon godly principles to be a Christian nation. Our Founding Fathers were not all Christians, but they were guided by biblical principles. They developed a nation predicated on Holy Writ. The religious foundations of America find their roots in the Bible.³¹”

Through this analysis of the nation’s formative years, Falwell believed that the Founding Fathers felt that America had a special destiny in the world, unlike any other country.

Falwell also drew in the examples of the settlers of Jamestown, who were Puritans who came to this land in order to escape religious persecution, and that the first charter of Virginia and the Mayflower Compact, which was written by the Pilgrims who are held in high esteem by Falwell, illustrate the truly religious nature of America’s Founding Fathers. The early education system according to Falwell was also directly related to the church and that colonial life in general was more pious, and therefore better, than that of the society from which the Lynchburg minister was writing. By emphasizing the purity and piety of Revolutionary America, Falwell truly hoped that America could learn from its predecessors and return the country to the prominent status that it once had.

In continuing his depiction of the country’s early history, Jerry Falwell contended that America’s Founding Fathers wanted the nation to be a republic and not a democracy, which tended to skew towards socialist egalitarianism eventually. Falwell contrasted

³¹ Ibid p. 25

this golden age of the nation's history with the era in which he was writing by showing that the 1970s, or the "Me generation", was overly concerned with narcissistic and self-centered goals as secular humanism, another of Falwell's dislikes of modern society, became a more widespread school of thought. Falwell believed that the government had also taken too large a place in individual lives and that personal freedom, which again shows Falwell's quasi-libertarian leanings, was paramount for how the federal government should be structured. Despite all of these shortcomings of modern society, Falwell asserted that there were remedies for American society as proven by the examples of the country's Founding Fathers, and that if contemporary America would revert to those bygone times, the country would not face the turmoil and tumult that it did in the late 1970s. Contending "the answer to every one of our nation's dilemmas is a spiritual one. When we as a country again acknowledge God as our Creator and Jesus Christ as the Savior of mankind, we will be able to turn this nation around economically as well as in every other way³²", Falwell thought that secular humanism and the enormous role that the federal government played in the lives of most Americans had superceded the traditional role of God within society, thus being a major reason why America was then undergoing a cultural and moral decay.

Along the same line as the dominant role that the federal government had in American society is Jerry Falwell's outright hatred of Marxism-Leninism which he viewed as the next step for the nation if it did not resolve its then current malaises. Falwell's avowedly negative view towards communism stemmed from that ideology's lack of respect, in his view, for both religion and individual liberties which he, of course, deemed as integral for a respectable and creditable society. To help illustrate his point on

³² Ibid p. 70

this matter, Falwell used the example of Soviet dissident author Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn, whose works such as *The Gulag Archipelago* and *Cancer Ward* documented the less savory side of that regime, to show the depraved atrocities committed by Stalinist-era Russia, and how it was an abomination of God's will for mankind. Taking an almost McCarthy-like view of the perils of the Soviet Union's might in relation to the safety of American society, Falwell argued that the communist nation's military advantage over the "free world" in the late 1970s was bordering on catastrophic for the United States since "communists know that in order to take over a country they must first see to it that a nation's military strength is weakened and that its morals are corrupted so that its people have no will to resist wrong. When people begin to accept perversion and immorality as ways of life, as is happening in the United States today, we must beware. This should be a danger signal and a warning to our country. Our enemies know that when we are weak morally, and when we have lost our will to fight, we are in a precarious position for takeover."³³ Judging that it was his duty as a minister of the gospel to speak out against the evils of godless communism³⁴, Falwell deemed that it was vital for the American government to get back on par with the Soviets in terms of military capability, and that the nation's society must disavow their nihilistic, tawdry ways in order to prevent the Marxist-Leninist menace from reaching the country's shores. In concluding the first section of "Listen, America!" Falwell gave a brief, slightly biased, overview of the history of the state of Israel, primarily basing his claims on Scriptural references as well as using the Bible to prophesy about the eventual Soviet takeover of Israel, which he claimed is alluded to in the book of Revelation. Aside from this now debunked historical

³³ Ibid p. 82

³⁴ Ibid p. 92

claim, the first section of his ideological tome gives the scholar an excellent vantage point in order to view how the Moral Majority's leader viewed the global affairs of the 1980s, and how America should respond to said events.

In the second section of "Listen, America!" Jerry Falwell discussed the reason's for what he viewed as America's then current predicament of being a society without morals and that had run amok with sinfulness. In his depiction of the American family, Falwell accorded it with the status of being the most fundamental part of society, declaring, "The family is that basic unit that God established, not only to populate but also to control and contain the earth. The happiest people on the face of this earth are those who are part of great homes and families where they are loved, protected, and shielded³⁵", and that the family was essential for maintaining the fabric of mankind as a whole. Falwell also argued that a promiscuous "playboy" attitude by men, the women's liberation movement, and the flood of abortions after *Roe v. Wade* were the three main weapons against the contemporary family. To combat this onslaught against the traditional role of the nuclear family within American society, Falwell espoused a patriarchal viewpoint to resolve those ills, stating that "until men are in right relationship with God, there is no hope for righting our [sic] families of our nation. Because we have weak men who have weak homes, and children from these homes will probably grow up to become weak parents leading to even weaker homes.³⁶" Along this same line of thought and logic, Falwell believed that most of society's juvenile delinquency, at that point, was the result of bad parenting by godless adults, and that if America would reshape its social structures, and especially its educational processes, to one that was in

³⁵ Ibid p. 105-6

³⁶ Ibid p. 111

step with Judeo-Christian doctrine, the nation would be better off as a whole. Falwell concluded his segment on the status of the American family by agreeing with North Carolina Senator Jesse Helm's assertion that the family was crucial in the battle against totalitarianism and socialism.

Jerry Falwell's views on gender and sexuality were very much in line with other fundamentalist evangelicals in that he came from the viewpoint of a traditional, patriarchal society was the best course of action for the nation. Naturally, Falwell was not a supporter, actually having quite a rabid distaste for, of the feminist movement as well as the Equal Rights Amendment, believing that God ordained for each gender to have its own designated place and that the federal government had no right to intrude on social matters of this sort since the Bible had the only clear-cut answer for how social gender mores should be constructed. In terms of abortion, Falwell contended that life begins at conception, and he emphasized his point in this regard by going into minute detail about the development of the fetus, such as the growing brain and motor functions from an early phase of pregnancy, as well as the abortion process itself in which he delves into ghastly detail about the procedure and writes in slightly melodramatic prose when discussing the subject. Falwell also stressed that abortion is the beginning of a slippery downward spiral to infanticide, euthanasia, and genetic manipulation which harkens back to the influence of both Schaeffer and Nathanson upon his precepts concerning this topic. Surmising his view on the sanctity of human life, Falwell stated, "we as a nation must take a Bible [sic] position on morality and begin to teach it everywhere, beginning in our homes, in our schoolrooms, in our communities, and in our states. We must teach children from kindergarten on up how precious life is and how

important it is to preserve life³⁷”, deeming this one of the most crucial concepts that American society faced at the beginning of the 1980s. Homosexuality is another matter that raised Falwell’s ire as he felt, somewhat antiquatedly, that it was of an ungodly nature and caused by the prevalence of broken homes due to ineffective male leadership.

In terms of the cultural values of the United States, Jerry Falwell had much to discourse about due to what he contended was an amoral set of standards that were to blame for the corruption of America’s youth. The medium of television was an aspect of the country’s decadent society that alarmed Falwell who contended that it implicitly endorsed violence and sex. Yet Falwell, who had his own long-running, popular television program at that time, believed that television could be used in a positive way if its efforts were redirected in a wholesome manner. Pornography was deemed as the very epitome of the immorality that was pervasive within society with Falwell arguing that it “destroys the privacy of sex. Parents must teach their children that sex is private and beautiful only in the marriage relationship.³⁸” As for contemporary music, Falwell contended that it was synonymous with the moral decline in America during the late 1970s, and that due to its “sex, drugs, and rock and roll” motto, popular music was corrupting the youth of the United States. By examining the cultural mores of America during the time that he was writing, Falwell tried to make the argument that due to the over-secularization of social values, America was beginning to slip into an abyss of moral lassitude in which the enemies of the country, such as communism, would be able to take root. Education, for Jerry Falwell, was paramount in trying to abate the growing permissiveness of the nation’s youth, but here he was specific in what he considered a

³⁷ Ibid p. 156

³⁸ Ibid p. 173

proper education which was, naturally, Christian-based schooling. Feeling that secular humanism or the lack of piety within the educational sphere was a contributing factor for America's moral decline, Falwell, as seen by his efforts with Liberty University, regarded a Judeo-Christian basis as the only solid foundation for the youth of America instead of the decadent and depraved public education system.

The third and final section of "Listen, America" depicted the need, in Jerry Falwell's view, to build a coalition of like-minded citizens in order to help restore order and moral to America via the power of believing in prayer and the need for national repentance for the nation's sins. Estimating that the five main sins facing the nation were abortion, homosexuality, pornography, humanism, and the fractured family, Falwell was convinced that the nation's "moral existence" hung in the balance and that it would take the largest number of people possible to restore the affairs of the United States to their rightly place. Falwell subscribed to the belief that in order for this to happen voter registration, a better-informed public, which was one of the reasons the Moral Majority was established, and political mobilization were key in trying to combat these perceived wrongs. To this end, Falwell clearly spelled out the impetus for the foundation of the Moral Majority, declaring:

"Our goal is to exert a significant influence on the spiritual and moral direction of our nation by: (a) mobilizing the grassroots of moral Americans in one clear and effective voice; (b) informing the moral majority what is going on behind their backs in Washington and in state legislatures across the country; (c) lobbying intensely in Congress to defeat left-wing, social-welfare bills that will further erode our precious freedom; (d) pushing for positive legislation such as that to establish the Family Protection Agency, which will help ensure a strong, enduring America; and (e) helping the moral majority in local communities to fight pornography, homosexuality, the

advocacy of immorality in school textbooks, and other issues facing each and every one of us.³⁹”

By following these guidelines, Falwell argued that positive change could happen for America, and that by establishing the Moral Majority as a political action group conservative evangelicals would finally have a voice within the context of the nation’s political system. For this and other notable reasons, Jerry Falwell, despite his often backwards and antiquated notions about the problems in America in 1980, was one of the most influential evangelicals of the 20th century, bringing a long dormant political constituency back into the Republican Party’s fold as well as giving a place for religious fundamentalists to make a place for themselves within society as a whole.

A work that follows up on the sentiments of Jerry Falwell’s view on the deterioration of America’s spiritual state in the 1980s is a book written by one of his associates, Cal Thomas. Cal Thomas examined the decline of values and virtues within society, especially during the years that coincided his tenure at the Moral Majority, in his book “The Death of Ethics in America”. Taking his cue from the growing number of social problems, according to the journalist, that were taking place in the country during that time, Thomas believed that the waning emphasis on ethics in American life was due to the fact that “the lack of any personal accountability to a moral code has made immorality respectable in our nation.⁴⁰” In order to rectify this quandary, Thomas put faith that knowledge of God, a concept of sin, a sense of public virtue, and an understanding of public welfare are needed to combat the secularization, and the subsequent moral abyss, of America. According to Thomas, this recommitment to an

³⁹ Ibid p. 227

⁴⁰ Cal Thomas, *The Death of Ethics in America*, p. 22

ethical foundation must start within the church, which has itself as an institution seen its own share of corruption through greed, lying, and hypocrisy by several noteworthy Christian leaders, such as Jim Bakker. Corporate America has also become the epitome of the dearth of ethics in the marketplace as envy and avarice have become common business practices. All of this leads Thomas to compare the 80s to the 1920s which also saw a resurgence in secularization which in turn, in his opinion, led to a more unethical nation.

One of the more corrupting influences in society for Cal Thomas is the education system, which he feels is to blame for the lack of a moral compass for the youth of America, stating, “The place to begin the ethical overhaul is in our schools. The public schools as constituted are totally lost. Anyone who thinks the public schools can or will provide the answer to the ethical collapse also must believe in the tooth fairy. The public schools are the problem, not the solution. The Christian school movement is the answer, and church members with children ought to immediately remove them from public schools and put them in Christian schools or, if possible, begin a home schooling program.⁴¹” By doing this, Thomas contends that children will have the means to combat the licentious and malodorous effects that they now receive from public schools that espouse a value-free culture.

Cal Thomas stated that the erosion of ethical values has not been a recent phenomenon but has accelerated in current times due to a lack of fundamental religious beliefs, “Although religious revivals sometimes slowed creeping secularization for as long as a generation, the general downward spiral of standards has continued because people have not actively implemented the teachings of Christ and his Gospel in their

⁴¹ Thomas, p. 101

lives. Now, a plurality, if not a majority, build [sic] their lives on a foundation of self-interest and moral relativism.⁴²” Traditional family values are the bedrock of society and the most effective way to combat the onslaught of secularization, and through all of this discouraging news, Thomas still holds out hope for the nation, stating “A nation’s strength comes from within, from the moral and ethical standards by which a people live. The decline of those standards has made us vulnerable. Only a return to them will make us strong again.⁴³” Although Cal Thomas would hearken back to these same topics, he would begin to distance himself from his past at the Moral Majority and his association with Jerry Falwell as his career progressed. As a new millennium approached, Jerry Falwell was seen as more and more antiquated by not only the general public but also by evangelicals and fundamentalists as well.

⁴² Thomas, p. 113

⁴³ Thomas, p. 156

CHAPTER 5

FAR AWAY TRAINS PASSING BY: THE WANING DAYS OF JERRY FALWELL'S INFLUENCE ON EVANGELICALS AND THE RELIGIOUS RIGHT

As this thesis has hopefully shown, Jerry Falwell and the Moral Majority were not the innovators of evangelical ideology that they often are credited for in most circles. While they did add some original thought into how Christian fundamentalists could achieve social and political goals, Falwell often used the ideas and frameworks of other scholars in order to implement his agendas. This is not to take any credit away from the work of the Moral Majority within contemporary American history, and how the organization was able to strike a fine balance between theological idealism and political pragmatism. A good way to measure the success of Falwell's Moral Majority, and a fitting conclusion to this thesis, is to examine two of Falwell's close associates in the organization, Cal Thomas and Ed Dobson, and see how they viewed the legacy of the Moral Majority, as well as the works of several other contemporary evangelical writers.

Cal Thomas and Ed Dobson were close affiliates of Jerry Falwell during the Moral Majority's years as a powerful political action group as well as prominent figures at Lynchburg's Thomas Road Baptist Church. Thomas was a former Vice President of communications for the Moral Majority after working as a syndicated journalist, and Dobson had known Falwell for numerous years due to various ministerial duties and evangelical conferences. The book that they coauthored "Blinded by Might" was published in 1999, written nearly a decade after the collapse of the Moral Majority and

once each had resumed his previous career as a journalist and pastor, respectively.

Thomas, holding the key position as the primary press liaison for the organization, asserts that the Moral Majority failed because “we were unable to redirect a nation from the top down. Real change must come from the bottom up, better yet, from the inside out.”¹

This assertion, coming from a powerful member of the association whose main task was to present the Moral Majority’s ideas or stance to the media at large, is especially noteworthy because Thomas feels that people’s minds must be changed before effective legislation can be enacted. The concept, that the moral values of society must be changed fundamentally, namely to be in accordance with those dictated in the Bible, is paramount for Thomas as this would provide the catalyst necessary to achieve lasting success for conservative values and those that espouse them within the political realm and the public in general, yet was not fully realized during the pinnacle of Jerry Falwell’s career.

In his extensive collection of writings as a conservative columnist, Cal Thomas has continuously asserted that power is the penultimate corrupting influence when it comes to religious and political leaders and their relationships with one another. The examples of Jesse Jackson and Billy Graham are used by Thomas to illustrate the point that men of the faith should not have personal friendships with the President which leads the journalist to call into question the need for a symbiosis of church and politics at all. Thomas contends that Jesus’ message as portrayed in the Bible was to be taken as one should maintain a detached, almost aloof view of the world. Thus, in Thomas’ view, Christians should not put too much faith in political matters and the power that comes therewith, leading one to question whether this claim stems as a direct result from the consequences of the Moral Majority’s intimate involvement in such issues in the 1980s.

¹ Cal Thomas & Ed Dobson, “Blinded by Might.

Another insightful revelation of Thomas' work within the influential evangelical organization is seen in his warning about the misuse of Biblical scripture in the scenario of politics, especially when candidates misquote or take certain verses out of context of the message that is actually being advocated within Christ's or the Bible's teachings, and asserts that Christians would be better served doing their evangelizing in private, social arenas. Thomas also vividly depicts the social sentiment the Moral Majority were attempting to tap into and their failures to capitalize on said public feelings when stating:

“In the 1980s, people were led to believe that changing government leadership would keep their teenage daughter from getting pregnant, would clean up television, would reduce drug use, and restore ‘morality’ to America. They believed it because we in the Moral Majority knew they wanted to believe it, so we convinced them it could happen. Many books were sold with quotations from the past, suggesting that the time of the Founders was more moral than the time of Carter and Clinton. (Somehow Republican presidents got a free pass even when they failed to do what we wanted.) But those of us who criticized liberal attempts to use government to impose what we regarded as an unrighteous standard were trying just as hard to use government to impose a righteous standard. We criticized big government, but what we were really criticizing was the other guys who had control of it when we wanted control. So it wasn't big government per se that was evil. Our primary objection was that we weren't running it.”²

Thomas' contention that the Moral Majority's nostalgic preponderance in proclaiming the virtuousness of bygone days is a revealing look into how the group attempted to curry public opinion to their favor, yet is also significant because Thomas feels that churches and the religious community as a whole should try to change to overall outlook of society outside the secular world. While not calling for an outright theocracy based on a fundamental, almost monastic ideal, Thomas after his time spent with the Moral Majority did indeed reform his beliefs on the pragmatism of the conjugation of politics and

² Thomas & Dobson, p. 93-4

religion, and placed more of a priority upon the role of the church in restructuring the overall moral fabric of society.

Cal Thomas surmises the problems between politics and religion well in his contribution to “Blinded to Might”, and depicts the intrinsic problems that arise when the two are mixed. In terms of the problems with combining strong religious principles and legislation, Thomas states in somewhat lengthy yet informative detail:

“In politics, zealotry is often seen as fanaticism. Politics is about compromise, and goals are mostly achieved in increments. Politics and faith are irreconcilable. The former cannot tolerate zealotry; the latter cannot tolerate compromise. This is the reason that the two, when combined, become highly combustible. So any disagreement with the tiniest word, strategy, or goal of a leader in the Religious Right puts one in danger of condemnation and under suspicion for being a compromise. The goal, rather than the methods of obtaining the goal, becomes everything. It is a form of idolatry, obscuring the way of God.³”

By this assertion, one can picture both the supernova-esque campaign that Pat Robertson ran in the 1988 Republican primaries as well as, to a lesser degree, the difficulties that Thomas himself faced while serving with Jerry Falwell in the Moral Majority. While some of Thomas’ claims can be perceived as a bit hasty and somewhat dodgy, like his assertion that Ross Perot’s influence in the 1992 Presidential race was negligible although some analysts would argue against that assumption, his view that trying to achieve substantial change, much like James Dobson of the organization Focus on the Family was attempting to do while Thomas was writing, outside of the confines of the Republican Party are destined to fall short of their idealistic goals. Thomas also draws upon his theological tenets in believing that getting a broad spectrum of voters to subscribe for an

³ Thomas, p.119

explicitly religious platform is nonsensical due to the difference between what God desires in an omnipotent, cosmic sense and what actually transpires in the material world here on Earth, and that one must look to God for the ultimate source of judgment. In this vein, Thomas contends that instead of focusing on the political arena, Christians should show more concern for their families and the immediate communities within which they live via solid, traditional marriages along with sound, Christian-based education. In order to redeem the problems of America, Cal Thomas contends that community involvement and activism based on the example of Jesus' teachings is the best corrective.

With his sound reasoning and a unique background that gives him a perspective that separate him from most of his peers, Cal Thomas offers a poignant insight into the workings of religiously-associated political action groups and the trappings that arise when politics and faith intermingle. Thomas believes that current evangelicals are using the wrong platforms to address the ills of society, and that the church, not political legislation, is the most productive and pragmatic mode to right these proverbial wrongs. Thomas aptly surmises his view of where he feels the evangelical movement should be going in declaring, "we may never change the world, despite our good intentions. God in his infinite wisdom knows what is happening to America and has everything under control. In fact, we have seen the end of the story, and we know that eventually He wins. So why don't we start acting as if we're on the winning side?⁴" In this seemingly paradoxical statement in which the evangelical movement is seen as both fatalistic as well as innately victorious all the while, Thomas paints an apropos scene of what many leading evangelicals saw transpiring in the foreseeable future as an uncertain future loomed.

⁴ Thomas, p. 182

In his portions of “Blinded by Might”, Ed Dobson approaches his subject material from a distinctly more pietistic frame of reference than his co-author, giving his writing a different vantage point upon which to view the decline in influence of the Moral Majority. Dobson begins his discourse with a brief diatribe aimed at the organization’s former enemies, contending that there was no right-wing conspiracy against then President Clinton, a phenomenon he chalks up to Democratic hysteria, and that Falwell has been a convenient outlet for left-wing contempt of conservative evangelical movements as a whole, contending that although the Religious Right “started as a legitimate and rational response to the threat of theological liberalism [has] evolved into a political agenda motivated by fear than conviction.⁵” In Dobson’s opinion, the Moral Majority’s downfall stemmed from trying to accomplish too many, broad reaching social quandaries, such as alleviating world hunger and poverty, instead of focusing their efforts on those issues that mattered most to their constituency, namely abortion and the upholding of traditional, Judeo-Christian social values. Despite these shortcomings, Ed Dobson believed that the Moral Majority impacted the workings of the American social/political modus operandi in three significant ways: the organization forced public debate over controversial societal issues; brought the long dormant subject of religion’s niche within the political system back into the nation’s collective conscience; and perhaps most importantly, awakened millions of Christians to their civic responsibilities⁶.

In sketching his version of the Moral Majority’s quasi-nonpareil status within contemporary American history, Ed Dobson draws upon two seemingly divergent, although altogether fitting, sources. In the first instance, the pastor parallels the

⁵ Dobson, p. 31

⁶ Dobson p. 43

temperance movement during the early 20th century with the modern evangelical organizations that took root some half a century later, arguing that there are many lessons to be learned from the leaders of the Prohibition campaign. In making this ostensibly felicitous historical affinity, Dobson points to the examples of how the government cannot promulgate or dictate cultural values, that the ethos of morality is achieved from the bottom up, and that political legislation must reflect the views of the populace through a process of consensus⁷. Along with these historical lessons, Dobson deemed that Prohibition also proved that the church should stick to ecclesiastical matters, an idea that he alludes to in his second, altogether fitting, provenance which was his childhood in Northern Ireland. Dobson's background in the tumultuous situation that Northern Ireland endured during the better part of the 20th century gave him an extraordinary perspective upon which to base his view on why politics and religion are typically a volatile gallimaufry. Of the notable reasons that are touched upon, Dobson focused his energy on depicting the fostering of intolerance when the two are combined, the fact that when the clergy become latently political they do harm to the Gospel and teachings of Jesus, and that the harsher the rhetoric the greater the likelihood of violence being the end result. While the conflict between the Religious Right, and especially the Moral Majority, and its opponents very rarely, with the group Operation Rescue being a prominent exception, escalated to the point of outright physical acrimony, the comparison that Dobson offered does give some credence to his claims, even if they are a touch outlandish at times, and provides a rather convenient basis of historical evaluation of the Moral Majority's place within the context of American, as well as to a degree international, social movements.

⁷ Dobson, p. 69-70

In his contribution to “Blinded by Might”, Dobson also attempts to draw what the Bible states about political power into the context of the Religious Right. In doing this, he believes that all political power is at the discretion of God, and that government has a divinely ordained role to fulfill within society in that it is an institution that mostly pertains to maintaining order, not proselytizing per se although Dobson does repeatedly emphasize the integral role that Jesus should play in an ideal social scenario. The importance of praying for government officials as well as submitting and honoring them are two roles that Dobson sees as established by the Bible for citizens in the political realm, and that only rare occasions call for civil disobedience in his view. This last corollary again epitomizes the retreat in ideology that many members of the Moral Majority coped with in the aftermath of failing to live up to that organization’s lofty, idealistic goals. Ed Dobson reaffirmed his former colleague Cal Thomas’ assertion that political and religious matters should have their own separate places although this should not be taken as a complete withdrawal or cloistering from secular life as each individually emphasized. Along the same line of thought as praying for one’s political leaders and performing other pertinent civic duties for Dobson is the concept of living a Christian-based life while practicing and adhering to the absolute values of the Bible. Dobson also restresses the influence of how the church as well as the familial unit can reshape society outside of the context of formal politics and pointedly illustrates the negative consequences of what transpires when the two become intermingled, as the rise and fall of the Moral Majority attests to.

In the epilogue to “Blinded by Might”, Thomas and Dobson contrast how much the Religious Right was perceived to have achieved at the mid-term elections in 1994,

and on the same token, how far it fell in the next four years which they contend was due to the Republican Party losing a sizable portion of the evangelical vote, dropping from roughly 66% to 54% in 1998⁸. Concerning the viability of conservative evangelical movements from thence on, the authors believe that “pragmatically, the numbers aren’t there, and they are perceived as being so ‘extreme’ that coalition building is difficult because their views do not attract people of other persuasions who must be included in any political alliance or coalition, Christian or otherwise.”⁹ These and other examples are given by Thomas and Dobson as to why the Moral Majority, as well as the Christian Coalition, was doomed to fail from the start, and that only God can change the course of America, thus contributing, in their collective view, to the need for spreading the Gospel. The book also has a worthwhile interview section that depicts the views and ideas of some allies of the Moral Majority’s cause along with a few former foes, notably Norman Lear. In an insightful yet oddly ironic statement, Lear’s states, in response to Thomas’s question on whether or not the Religious Right has been successful in implementing its agenda, that “I can’t look at the Religious Right and not think it’s successful. I think it’s been enormously successful. It’s very powerful. It exercises enormous influence in public policy and certainly in the direction of the Republican Party and a number of Democrats. ‘Fully’ successful-I think they haven’t been fully successful because America is America. Because there are people like People for the American Way who can blow a whistle and say, ‘Hey, stop!’ We can’t have you folks succeeding in pushing

⁸ Thomas and Dobson, p. 184

⁹ Thomas and Dobson, p. 187

your religious views on the rest of us, because that's not, in our view, the American way.¹⁰”

In order to contrast the views of Thomas and Dobson, a view of two “liberal evangelicals” is helpful in order to gain a perspective on how the other side of the political and religious spectrum has viewed the legacy of the Religious Right. In the book “Why the Christian Right is Wrong”, Robin Meyers, an ordained minister from Oklahoma City, offers up his opinion on why the Christian Right has pervaded the American political system to such an extent that it has corrupted the fundamental doctrine of Jesus’ teachings. Contending that a conservative, fundamentalist ideology had infiltrated the Republican Party and the administration of George W. Bush to such an extent that it had polarized the world’s opinion on not only the country but also Christianity as a religion, Meyers’ work provides a stark contrast to the views of Falwell and Thomas and is a viable source for a more liberal vantage point in the realm of modern evangelicalism. Meyers, who is also a professor of philosophy and logic, felt that the impetus for writing his book came after he gave a speech that was part logical argument against the Bush administration part impassioned plea for a more centrist viewpoint amongst evangelicals, and most of “Why the Christian Right is Wrong” follows up on the basic tenets of that speech. Meyers’ basic stance in his book is to illustrate how the modern evangelical movement in America has been hijacked by the tenets of conservative politics, which was embodied and personified by the Moral Majority, and how the administration of George W. Bush has exacerbated the problems of how a fundamental Christian outlook can lead to dissension not only at home but also abroad. Aptly summarizing his thoughts, Meyers comments of the current preoccupation

¹⁰ Thomas and Dobson, p. 244-5

with adding a religious element to political matters, “This ‘my God is bigger than your God’ mentality is not just a product of human nature. It’s a product of bad theology. The only way in which God will cease being co-opted for the purpose of violence is when we change our way of thinking about God. As long as we are trapped in biblical literalism, the theology of the Fall, and God’s invasion from the sky to rescue some while letting others perish, violence in the name of God will never cease. We will have to reject the idea of a once-perfect Creation from which human beings could fall into sin, because a perfect Creation never existed and we continue to evolve.¹¹” Meyers also goes on to state that “Now we are living in a time of maddening and deadly myths, undergirded by perversions of religion on both sides. Here are three of the deadliest lies that we are asked to believe every day: (1) The war on terror has made us safer. (2) Our enemies’ behavior is not a response to our actions but incremental proof that they hate our freedom and are hopelessly evil. (3) Pulling back from or changing this disastrous course would be an admission that we were wrong and that our soldiers have died in vain. So this is our answer. This is the logic of our time: it is better to go on killing more of them, even if they go on killing more of us, so that we can remind everyone how vital it is that we kill more of them first.¹²” In response to this mixture of religious zealotry and preemptive foreign policy based on a “Pax Americana” foundation, Meyers believes that Christians should unite into more cohesive, proactive community groups that focus on pacific and nonviolent approaches to the world’s problems and bring the evangelical movement back into a more centrist line.

¹¹ Robin Meyers, “Why the Christian Right is Wrong”, p. 122

¹² Meyers, p.44

Meyers' notions are echoed by several noteworthy theologians who have seen the inherent problems associated with the precedent laid out by the Moral Majority. One of these scholars is Jim Wallis whose book "God's Politics" builds upon many of the sentiments that "liberal" evangelists have with the state of both American politics and religion in the early 21st century. Asserting "The real theological problem in America today is no longer the religious Right, but the nationalist religion of the Bush administration, one that confuses the identity of the nation with the church, and God's purposes with the mission of American empire. America's foreign policy is more than preemptive, it is theologically presumptuous; not only unilateral, but dangerously messianic, not just arrogant; but rather bordering on the idolatrous and blasphemous¹³", Wallis believes that the lack of consideration from those on the Religious Right as personified by the Bush administration has led to a rift in modern evangelicalism as well as the nation's standing in the world as a whole. By offering up a "liberal" agenda in order to combat the nation's current problems, Wallis differs than most current evangelicals that have been studied in this thesis which is noted by his comments on what is needed for the future of the country:

"It is indeed the strength and health of the bonds between us that are so key to our future. There are no more important bonds than those between parents and children, and it's time we achieved a political consensus about that. Strengthening marital fidelity, commitment, and longevity should also become a key bipartisan agenda. This includes healthy, monogamous, and stable same-sex relationships- which religious conservatives should be careful not to pit themselves against, regardless of how such relationships are ultimately defined. And the bonds between individuals and families that we call community are absolutely essential if we are to protect the key religious and political

¹³ Jim Wallis, "God's Politics", p. 149

concept of the common good. Protecting these ties that bond could be the beginning of the new political agreements we are in need of today.¹⁴”

As the United States entered into a new century as well as a unique epoch of history after the events of September 11, the evangelical movement as a whole began to move away from the ideology of the “Religious Right” and Jerry Falwell. By the time of his death in 2007, Falwell had largely become a figurehead within the evangelical/fundamentalist community, a far cry from twenty years earlier when he was patriarch of that specific segment of American religion.

¹⁴ Wallis, p. 340

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