

UNIVERZA V LJUBLJANI
FAKULTETA ZA DRUŽBENE VEDE

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**Religion in American Politics: Evangelical Christians and the Separation of
Church and State**

Master Thesis

Religija v ameriški politiki: evangelijski kristjani in ločitev cerkve od države

Magistrsko delo

Ljubljana, 2012

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*And to all the wonderful people in my life –
my loving family,
my irreplaceable friends,
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Religion in American Politics: Evangelical Christians and the Separation of Church and State

In the past few decades, American evangelical Christians have transformed from a religious group into a formidable political force. Organized as the Christian Right, they now exercise the dominant influence within the Republican Party and through it considerably influence American politics as a whole. Aside from the fact that it poses a threat to the principle of church-state separation, evangelical political activity is troubling because it is based on highly conservative social views, derived from their belief in the inerrancy of the Bible. They strongly oppose the rights of homosexuals, gender equality, abortion, and modern science, while advocating religious moral values as the foundation of society. Since evangelicals are currently the biggest religious group in the United States, they also possess considerable voting power which in many cases enables them to elect conservative political candidates who are willing to work on enacting their political agenda. This is problematic because their conservative views, when put into practice, inevitably have a highly negative impact on social development and the advancement of human rights. Political observers have many times predicted its imminent end, but before the upcoming presidential election, it seems that the Christian Right is not yet ready to give up its political influence.

Key Words: religion, politics, United States, evangelicalism, separation of church and state.

Religija v ameriški politiki: evangelijski kristjani in ločitev cerkve od države

V zadnjih nekaj desetletjih so se ameriški evangelijski kristjani prelevili iz religijske skupine v mogočno politično silo. Organizirani v okviru krščanske desnice imajo danes prevladujoč vpliv znotraj republikanske stranke, posledično pa pomembno vplivajo na ameriško politiko kot celoto. Poleg tega, da predstavlja grožnjo načelu ločitve cerkve od države, je politična aktivnost evangelijskih zaskrbljujoča ker je utemeljena na izrazito konservativnih pogledih na nekatera družbena vprašanja, izpeljana iz prepričanja o nezmotljivosti Biblije. Močno nasprotujejo pravicam homoseksualcev, enakosti med spoloma, splavu, in moderni znanosti, medtem ko poudarjajo religiozne moralne vrednote kot temelj družbe. Ker so evangeličani trenutno največja religijska skupnost v Združenih državah Amerike, imajo tudi precejšnjo volilno moč ki jim v številnih primerih omogoči izvolitev konservativnih političnih kandidatov, ki so pripravljene delovati za uresničitev njihovega političnega programa. To je problematično, ker imajo njihovi nazadnjaški pogledi, če so preneseni v prakso, neizbežno močan negativen vpliv na družbeni razvoj ter napredek na področju človekovih pravic. Politični opazovalci so že nekajkrat napovedali njen neizbežni konec, vendar pred prihajajočimi predsedniškimi volitvami izgleda, da se krščanska desnica še ni pripravljena odpovedati svojemu političnemu vplivu.

Ključne besede: religija, politika, evangelicizem, Združene države Amerike, ločitev cerkve od države.

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INTRODUCTION

The present master thesis examines the role of evangelical Christianity in American politics. The argument it follows is that in the past few decades, evangelicalism in the United States transformed itself from a politically passive religious community into a formidable political force which exercises great impact within the Republican Party, and consequently considerably influences American politics as a whole.

One of the main features of evangelicalism, which is also the reason why evangelical Christians were selected as an example through which the thesis addresses the role of religion in American political sphere, is the fact that compared to other religious groups in the United States, evangelicals are much more politically engaged and present in political life. They form the core of the so-called Christian Right, and they play an indispensable role within the Tea Party movement, which has largely characterized the developments in the U.S. political arena in the last two years. Many observers express concern over the impact of Christian fundamentalism, a term often interchangeable with evangelicalism, on U.S. policy. The administration of George W. Bush is often exposed in this regard, but he was not by any means the only U.S. president who was convinced that politics and morals are inseparable and that the latter should be derived from religious values because America was established as a Christian nation. This explains why religious rhetoric is almost universally present in the speeches of American presidents, while by contrast, candidates who are publicly identified as atheists have virtually no chances of political success.

The political rise of evangelicals began in the 1970s, largely as a response to the social changes brought about by the civil rights movement in the previous decade. Socially conservative evangelical Christians, whose faith is fundamentally based on the belief in biblical inerrancy, interpreted the modern developments as a clear sign of American moral decay which needed to be prevented. Various evangelical political organizations emerged as a result, with the goal of restoring traditional Christian values in a nation that has clearly lost its way. They soon became organized as the Christian Right, a political entity which managed, with the help of certain conservative political strategists, to establish itself as an increasingly important segment of the Republican Party. It lobbies for the implementation of conservative policy based on the so called culture war issues, the major concerns being opposition to abortion, homosexual rights, gender equality, and modern science. These issues are in themselves outdated, discriminative, and represent a big step backwards in promoting human

rights, but what makes the situation really problematic is that in order to pursue their goals, evangelical political organizations engaged passionately in voter mobilization, encouraging nearly a hundred million American evangelicals participate politically and vote for conservative candidates who are willing to work on enacting their social agenda. Due to a large number of evangelicals in the United States, their electoral power soon caught the attention of the general public, as well as scholars and pundits, who could never quite determine the potential and the actual political power of the Christian Right. Many have dismissed it as a flash in the pan or predicted its imminent end after every political failure, yet it seems to reappear time and again even stronger than before. With the upcoming presidential election approaching, the debate over the role of religion in American politics has once again erupted in all its potency.

Since it is a topical issue, the thesis strives to offer a comprehensive evaluation of the role that religion plays in the American society, examining the institutional framework and the historical development of the relationship between church and state, both of which are crucial for the understanding of the current situation. Furthermore, it also attempts to determine and analyze some of the specific consequences that the religious invasion of the political sphere produces, in order to illustrate how and why the interference of religion with the government can be problematic. Clearly, the topic is very complex and the space available limited, so it is at times impossible to take every aspect, every position and every opinion into account. The subject that is deliberately omitted or at least considerably truncated, however, is the role of evangelicals in the current presidential campaign, because no reliable scientific research or analysis dealing with this matter are yet available.

The research question this thesis tries to answer is whether or not it can be argued that evangelical political activism represents a violation of the principle of church-state separation, which was arguably one of the core principles on which the American democracy was built, but evangelicals strongly oppose it. To answer this question, especially from a European perspective, certain peculiarities of American religious life, such as the American civil religion, need to be taken into account.

Because the aim of the thesis is in-depth comprehension of a social phenomenon, the research method applied is qualitative analysis of predominately secondary sources. However, due to the abundance of literature available on the discussed topics, it is inevitable that the data from certain sources does not always tally with others, which can be attributed to different

interpretations and standpoints of the authors. Of course, different perspectives are often useful when trying to present the issue in question objectively and from different angles. Sometimes, however, these discrepancies make it difficult to discern the factual information, and in other cases, when the sources are not so recent, the information can be outdated. Wherever that was the case, primary sources such as statistical data or transcripts of speeches were used instead of the secondary ones. Clearly, primary sources like legal and historical documents were also used when establishing the institutional framework of the relationship between religion and government. It could also be argued that this thesis as a whole is in fact a case study of American evangelical Christianity, which was chosen as an example because it cannot be ignored in contemporary discussions about church-state relations in the United States.

The text is divided into three major segments. The first one deals with the institutional framework of religion in United States and is divided in four chapters. First chapter deals with the treatment of religion in the Constitution and the so-called religious clauses of the First Amendment. The second one covers the principle of church-state separation, the Christian nation myth which the evangelicals use to argue against separation, the secularists' responses to evangelical attacks on separation and the European perspective on issues of secularism and the separation of church and state. The third one covers the specifics of American civil religion, and the fourth offers a historical overview of Christianity's role in American public life. The second segment is dedicated to defining evangelicalism. It begins with a chapter about terminology, including an explanation why "evangelicalism" and "fundamentalism" are often interchangeable. The second chapter describes the main doctrinal characteristics of evangelicalism, based on which the third establishes a working definition that explains what exactly is meant by evangelical Christianity in present thesis, because a universal definition of the movement does not exist. The fourth chapter covers the culture war issues that form the basis of evangelical political activity. It divides them into issues relating to traditional family values, such as gender equality and homosexual rights, sanctity of life issues like abortion and stem-cell research and issues related to evangelical mixed feelings about modern scientific developments. The segment is concluded with a brief overview of some problematic implications of evangelical beliefs and practices. The last of the three segments is dedicated to evangelical political activity in the United States. Chapter one presents evangelical political organizations such as the Moral Majority, the Christian Coalition and Focus on the Family. Chapter two describes how evangelicals, organized as the Christian Right, found their way

into the Republican Party. The third chapter is dedicated to American presidency and the role of evangelicals in electoral politics. It covers the presidencies of five American presidencies, beginning with Jimmy Carter and finishing with George W. Bush, whose double term in a way represented the highlight of evangelical politics. The fourth examines some specific consequences that the influence of the Christian Right produced in American domestic and foreign policy. Last but not least, the fifth one covers the period after the presidency of George W. Bush, the emergence of the Tea Party movement and the changes within the evangelical movement expressed by a partial shift to more moderate policies.

1 RELIGION IN UNITED STATES: INSTITUTIONAL FRAMEWORK

1.1 Religion in American Constitution

The First Amendment to the U.S. Constitution, ratified in 1791 as the first section of the Bill of Rights, reads: "Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press; or the right of the people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the government for a redress of grievances" (U.S. Const. amend. I). First section of the Amendment is also known as the Religious Clauses, which are further divided into Establishment Clause and Free Exercise Clause.

1.1.1 The Establishment Clause

The wording of the federal Constitution which embodies the Establishment Clause is "Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion". It not only prohibits the establishment of any religion by the government; it also forbids the government to make any law respecting the establishment of religion. To understand why this provision was so important when the First Amendment was drafted and ratified, historical context needs to be taken into account. Many of the early Americans were fugitives escaping from religious persecution of the Anglican Church in England. At that time, the Anglican Church was officially established and financially supported by the state, and the King of England was its head. All other forms of worship were restricted or forbidden, and non-Anglicans were discriminated against, persecuted and often imprisoned (Greenawalt 2008). It is therefore not surprising that the Founding Fathers promoted religious freedom. The absence of an established religion meant that no religion could ever gain an official status. Thus, there would be no grounds on which religious discrimination could be based. However, the Establishment Clause, despite prohibiting establishment of churches, did not try to meddle with the churches that were already established in most States. It did not try to restrict or diminish religion's role in the society, but merely to curb interactions between religion and the new federal government, or better yet, to protect religion from intrusion by the government (Maddigan 1993).

Today, some of the most controversial issues regarding the relationship between the government and religion nowadays rest on the interpretations of the Establishment Clause. For instance, the Supreme Court's ruling that Bible reading and prayer in public schools are

unconstitutional provoked widespread public disapproval comparable only to reactions that followed the decision to invalidate racial segregation and the creation of a constitutional right to an abortion (Greenawalt 2008). The question of the degree of financial assistance the government may offer to religious institutions such as for example parochial schools is also of great public concern. The Supreme Court did not review many direct establishment-clause cases until 1947 when a landmark decision in *Everson v. Board of Education* applied the Establishment Clause, previously limited only to the federal government, to State law. It became binding to the states through the Due Process Clause of the Fourteenth Amendment. This was largely the reason why the number of establishment-clause cases grew substantially in the 20th century, along with the liberation movements and the growing American religious pluralism, making it impossible to endorse for instance prayer in public schools without offending members of minority religions (Cohn 2002).

Another important establishment issue often debated in courts is the display of religious symbols and messages in public places which attracts additional attention every year around Christmastime. In some cases, the Supreme Court's rulings are clear. It is, for instance, unconstitutional to display religious symbols standing alone in government sites. Thus, posting Ten Commandments in every classroom is unconstitutional, and so are crèches in, for instance, city halls. However, religious symbols may be displayed as part of larger holiday displays alongside secular symbols such as the Christmas tree. This Supreme Court policy on the issue is hardly satisfactory for any of the sides, though. Advocates of the church-state separation argue that a fair amount of secular symbols does not erase the fact that religious symbols are displayed as well. On the other hand, religious people may find the mixing of what is sacred to them with secular imagery offensive. The dispute, however, is not only present during the winter holiday season. Recently, the main issues are the permanently installed crosses that have erected on public property in some parts of the country (Boston 2003).

Decisions on whether or not such public acknowledgments of God are constitutionally permissible are aggravated by the specific role that religion plays in American public life. The Founding Fathers took religion's sociological function into account when drafting the American Constitution. Maddigan (1993) argues that this function has not changed significantly in over more than two centuries; it is "where most Americans learn the basic values of honesty, hard-work and mutual self-care that are necessary to sustain democratic government" (308). The interpretations of the Religious Clauses should therefore reflect not

only changes in societal values, but rather the drafters' understanding that religion plays a particular function in the American society, which makes a certain amount of interaction between religion and the government inevitable. However, drawing a clear line between acceptable interaction and a breach of the Establishment Clause is a task that the Supreme Court has not yet managed to tackle. There are certain commonly used standards or tests¹ which help the judges interpret the Establishment clause, but no consistent, universally valid conclusions on the issue have yet been drawn.

1.1.2 The Free Exercise Clause

The second provision of the two Religious Clauses, the Free Exercise Clause, states that the government shall make no law prohibiting the free exercise of religion. It grants individuals the right to adopt religious beliefs and engage in religious practices of their own choice and thus strives to provide equal treatment for everyone, regardless of their religious affiliation. Despite the absolute nature of the text in the clause, issues regarding free exercise often arise when citizens' obligation to comply with the law conflicts their religious beliefs or practices. This is especially problematic when a law is religiously neutral and generally applicable but nevertheless interferes with a religious practice or belief. In such cases, courts inevitably place some limitations on free exercise. For instance, it would not hold in court for the First Amendment to protect human sacrifice even if some religion required it (Mullally 2011). This, however, is just an extreme illustration of the problem. In reality, judges often have to make complex assessments to determine whether or not to grant particular exemptions in such cases. Accommodation of religious practices provided by the government either through free-exercise litigation or legislative action protects religious liberty for segments of the population that would otherwise have been denied to practice their faith.

However, the Free Exercise Clause is, like the Establishment Clause, often a subject of disputes and controversies, brought forward mainly by religious minorities, not mainstream Christian faiths (Boston 2003). An often debated issue is for instance the use of controlled

¹ The first of the three tests used to examine the relationship between religion and government in Supreme Court Cases is the *Lemon* test. It has been in use since the 1971 *Lemon v. Kurtzman* decision. Government conduct must comply with three criteria to withstand scrutiny; it must have a secular purpose, a primary effect that does not advance or inhibit religion and it cannot foster an excessive government entanglement with religion. Because some justices support more interaction between government and religion than the *Lemon* test allows, *coercion test* was added in the *Allegheny County v. ACLU* in 1992. It holds that the government is not in violation of the Establishment Clause as long as it does not either provide direct aid to religion in a way that would tend to establish a state church or coerce people to support religion against their will. In 1995 case of *Capitol Square Review and Advisory Board v. Pinette*, the *endorsement test* was applied by Justice Sandra Day O'Connor, emphasizing government neutrality toward religion (Cohn 2002).

substances. Religious claims for exemption of state-compelled vaccinations for children are a difficult challenge competing against the government interest in protecting public health. Nevertheless, exemptions are usually made if the parents are able to demonstrate that they are members of an organized religious group that opposes vaccinations. Sometimes, merely a signed statement is sufficient to be granted an exemption (McFall 2008). Even bigger controversies occur when parents are denying medical treatment for their children because it opposes their religious beliefs. At the same time, however, they might be infringing their child's right to live. Jehovah's Witnesses' opposition to blood transfusions is often in the limelight in this aspect (Boston 2003). Another issue related to the use of controlled substances is whether or not to provide exemptions for the usage of generally forbidden drugs in religious rituals (Greenawalt 2009). For instance, the use of peyote, a psychoactive hallucinogenic cactus used in religious ceremonies of the Native Americans, is legal for the members of the Native American Church, because it constitutes an essential element of their rituals. On the other hand, all claims made for the religious use of marijuana have thus far been rejected by the courts because exemptions would make the enforcement of anti-marijuana laws impossible (Greenawalt 2006). Historically speaking, the most famous case regarding the Free Exercise Clause was probably polygamy of the Mormons, outlawed by the Morrill Act in 1862. Refusal of reciting the Pledge of Allegiance and saluting the flag by the Jehovah's Witnesses and the opposition to compulsory education for their children by the Amish also drew much public attention (Boston 2003).

An interesting example in the free exercise discussion are the so called blue laws, also known as Sunday Statues, affecting a variety of activities on Sundays. Proponents of the blue laws argue that they serve a secular purpose of providing a uniform day of rest for all citizens while the critics contend that these laws violate the Free Exercise Clause by imposing disadvantages to members of religions that do not hold Sunday as the Sabbath, such as the Seventh-day Adventists. By some, declaring Sunday as the official free day is seen as an endorsement of Christianity and as such, a breach of the Establishment Clause (Hudson 2002).

This latter example brings forth another important issue regarding the two Religious Clauses. They are not only difficult to assess and accommodate in relation to other, generally applicable laws; the Establishment Clause and the Free Exercise Clause often inevitably contradict each other. Although disestablishment promotes religious freedom and thus the right of free exercise for everyone, it can also be argued that it prohibits precisely what the Free Exercise Clause requires, that is, special treatment for certain religious groups in order

for them to be able to legally perform their rituals. As soon as the government grants exemptions to a certain religious group under the Free Exercise Clause, claims can be made that a particular religion is receiving favorable governmental treatment in comparison to others, which violates the Establishment Clause.

The original intent of the drafters when including the Religion Clauses in the First Amendment was to ensure religious liberty; “to protect the conscience of the individual and to prevent the state from interfering with the autonomy of religion” (Maddigan 1993, 303). The clauses do not, however, in any way address potential religious interference with matters of the secular authority, which is understandable from the historical point of view. Nevertheless, when speaking about the separation of church and state today, these inverse situations must also be taken into account.

1.2 American Secularism and the Separation of Church and State

1.2.1 The Wall of Separation

By prohibiting endorsement of religion by the government, the Establishment Clause set ground for the “wall of separation between church and state”, a widely recognized metaphor first used by Thomas Jefferson in a letter he wrote to the Danbury Baptist Organization of Connecticut:

Believing with you that religion is a matter which lies solely between Man & his God, that he owes account to none other for his faith or his worship, that the legitimate powers of government reach actions only, & not opinions, I contemplate with sovereign reverence that act of the whole American people which declared that their legislature should make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof, thus building a wall of separation between Church & State (Jefferson 1802).

However, Jefferson was only the author of the famous metaphor, not of the idea itself. Several different understandings of separation of church and state could be found among the founders long before Jefferson wrote his letter, and each of them contributed to the protection of religion liberties in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries (Witte and Nichols 2011). The Founding Fathers had been influenced by various European philosophers, one of the most important ones being John Locke, an early advocate of religious liberty. He defended the

position that government and religion perform distinctly different functions in a society and should therefore be separated. The idea was adopted by the founders, including Jefferson and James Madison; together, they attempted to end the establishment of the Anglican Church in Virginia and, despite initial failures, advanced the idea of church-state separation (Boston 2003), later incorporated in the First Amendment to the Constitution. The so called American constitutional experiment of granting religious liberty to all by separating religion from the state defied Western European assumptions that one form of Christianity must be established and protected by the state against all other forms of faith (Witte and Nichols 2011).

In his written address to the Danbury Baptists, Jefferson used the “wall of separation” metaphor to describe the type of relationship between religion and civil government that the First Amendment was meant to ensure (Dreisbach 2002). Whether Jefferson believed that religion is a personal matter of every individual because he was himself deeply religious and felt that government has no business getting involved into, or because he was an irreligious atheist who scorned religion, is still a subject of many disputes (Sanford 1984). However, this letter shows that his understanding of the relationship between church and state went further than the establishment provision; the latter specifically prohibits only governmental interference with religious matters, while Jefferson’s wall of separation restricts actions of and interactions between both, the religion and the government. This bilateral barrier lies at the heart of all modern day debates on separation of church and state. As Dreisbach (2002) nicely summarizes it, “the separation principle, interpreted strictly, proscribes all admixtures of religion and politics, denies all governmental endorsement of and aid for institutional religion, and promotes a religion that is strictly voluntary and essentially private, personal and nonpolitical. It inhibits religious intrusions on public life and politics as much as political intrusions on religion and the rights of conscience” (2).

Nevertheless, not everyone is eager to accept Jefferson’s metaphor as a convenient shorthand meaning of the First Amendment. Americans are among the most religious people in the world; roughly ninety-five percent believe in God or a universal spirit (Morone 2009), Maddigan 1993). Despite great religious diversity in the U.S., a large majority of those belong to one of the three large Christian groups: mainline Protestants, Roman Catholics or evangelical Christians. The latter especially ascribe the supreme authority to God and consider government merely as an institution that is supposed to help God rule (Heitzig 2009). It is thus not entirely surprising that today, the American experiment is more often criticized than praised and that concept separation of church is frequently attacked, criticized and

actively opposed in public, especially by the Religious Right. Passionate believers and advocates of Christian faith accuse the separation policy of discriminating against religion and harming it, so they tend to publicly spread misinformation to discredit it; for instance, portraying it as an invention of nineteenth-century antireligious and anticlerical elites (Witte and Nichols 2011) or even as a communist invention of the Soviet Union (Boston 2003). Secularists are often accused of believing that government should be devoid of all spiritual influence and that religious people should keep away from it as though they had no rights or responsibilities (Heitzig 2009). In their opinion, the “wall of separation” only works one way and does not exclude governance by Christian principles (The Economist 2011). This position is usually justified with the fact that the First Amendment was not added to the Constitution to prohibit church interference with civil matters, but vice-versa, and believers often contend that the government should rule in accordance with religious values because Americans are, after all, a Christian nation.

1.2.2 The Christian nation myth

One of the strongest arguments religious conservatives bring up when trying to assert that the U.S. is a Christian Nation is the 1892 Supreme Court case of *Church of the Holy Trinity v. United States*. In the final decision, Justice David Josiah Brewer declared America a Christian Nation. The case itself, however, had nothing to do with religion or Christianity. It concerned the rights of immigrant workers and the controversial statement served merely to illustrate the common sense approach to determining congressional intent in the matter. In a book he published in 1905, Justice Brewer clarified his statement and stressed that it did not in any way intend to promote or endorse Christianity. Nevertheless, some religious circles today interpret this over a century old statement as an undisputable affirmation that America is indeed a Christian nation (Green 1999). Even if it were so, what exactly does that mean?

In the article titled *Is America a Christian nation?*, Hugh Heclo (2007) examined seven different contexts in which America could be considered a Christian nation in order to find clear answers to the question posed in the title. In only one of the seven domains he found that the answer would be a clear “yes” – if Christianity is considered as Americans’ self identification, the U.S. can rightly be called a Christian nation, since over than 80 percent of the population declares themselves as Christians (65). However, it appeared that the self-professed religiousness has weak impact in everyday life. Heclo found that American Christians have very little knowledge about the doctrines of Christianity, and though they

appear to be hyperactively religious in comparison to Europe, they are much more interested in a religious community that serves their personal needs than the theological truth. In this aspect, Hecla concludes that judging by the belief in the doctrines of Christianity, America is not a Christian nation. The same proved to be true when he considered Christianity as a source of moral guidance and Christianity expressed in Americans' behavior; the majority of Americans does not rely on Biblical or church teachings to provide moral guidance for their actions and decisions, and the general population of the U.S. exhibits behavior which is diametrically opposite to Christian ideals. American popular culture, focused primarily on violence, sexuality and foul language can serve as an illustration of general behavioral tendencies. Furthermore, and perhaps most importantly, from Christianity's perspective, America is not and cannot be a Christian nation. Only individuals can be Christian, not collective entities (86).

Two more domains remain that are of particular relevance in the debate of the role of religion in American politics and in which Hecla declared America to be "sort of" a Christian nation – Christianity in American political institutions and in Americans' political ethos. Those two in fact lie in the heart of the contemporary Christian nation dispute because they allow different interpretations and manipulations. Even Hecla, striving to provide clear answers, failed in those two domains; "sort of" does not seem to settle the matter once and for all. Even if it cannot be denied that the political thinking of the founding era was at that time necessarily entwined with Christian thinking, some religious and legal conservatives go much further and in claiming that the Founding Fathers were all devout Christians, whose actions were guided by divine principles, contesting the dominant historical interpretation that they intended to build a secular nation governed by the principle of separation of church and state (Green 2010). Stone (2008) defends the dominant interpretation by pointing out that the original U.S. Constitution made no reference whatsoever to God and that religion is only mentioned in the provision prohibiting the use of any kind of religious test as a prerequisite for public office. In fact, the idea of America being built on Christian principles has been officially denied as early as 1797 in the Treaty of Tripoli signed by the Washington administration. Article 11 of this peace agreement between the U.S and the Muslims in North Africa states that "the Government of the United States is not, in any way, founded on the Christian religion" (Treaty of Peace and Friendship between the United States of America and the Bey and Subjects of Tripoli of Barbary 1796). As it does not serve their purpose, this historical reference is of course ignored by the Christian conservatives.

The endless disputes about the religious views of the Founding Fathers, however, will most likely never be resolved for at least two reasons: first, people will always find excerpts of centuries old texts and documents that will support their arguments and stick to them, even if they are taken out of context; and second, there actually is no such thing as a general, universal viewpoint on religion that the Founding Fathers shared. In fact, they quarreled bitterly on the subject (The Economist 2011). Furthermore, their personal religious beliefs are not even particularly relevant for the contemporary separation debates. What seems rather clear in the founding texts, however, is the emphasis on religious freedom, not only as a philosophical ideal that should be pursued, but also as a pragmatic solution to the problem of unifying thirteen colonies with different populations and religious arrangements under a common authority. Regardless, next to European philosophers and theologians, the Christian Bible was the most widely used and most commonly cited text in the founding era (Witte and Nichols 2011). It would be wrong to claim that framers were anti-Christian. Most of the founding fathers attended service of one of the Christian denominations at least occasionally, but as broad-minded intellectuals inspired by Enlightenment ideas, they did not hesitate to challenge and question the dogmas of traditional Christianity such as the divinity of Jesus, his miracles, and the doctrines of original sin and predestination². However, they were not atheists, but rather deists; they only “challenged religious beliefs they could not reconcile with reason, but they accepted the idea of a Supreme Being” (Stone 2008, 6). However strong the impact of Christianity may have been on the founders, the legal and institutional structures they formed vigorously opposed its official endorsement. Americans’ political ethos, the last domain to be considered, is also “sort of” Christian, mostly due to the tradition of moralizing politics deriving from the tendency of aligning the American nation with some larger, God-given moral order (Heclo 2007); a tendency of Christian origin, further discussed in the chapter on civil religion.

Although there clearly seems to be no black or white in grasping the historical context of America as a Christian nation and the most sensible, reasonable attitude towards the controversial question seems to be accepting a certain amount of ambivalence, the common approach of religious conservatives to this matter is proof-texting; they extract particular statements from broader context and use them in a way that it seemingly affirms that America

² Jefferson, for instance, often spoke highly of the morals of Jesus as documented in the New Testament, but he rejected his divinity and even went as far as to rewrite it; Jefferson’s version of the New Testament is called *The Life and Morals and Jesus Christ*, or popularly, the “Jefferson Bible”. In it, he omitted all references to miracles as well as the claims of Jesus to be the Son of God (Boston 2003).

is and always has been a Christian nation (Green 2010). On the other hand, secular political activists strive to prove the diametrically opposite position: America is not and never has been a Christian nation. In a time when the nation's political and religious beginnings became the topic of heated debates there seems to be no room for the in-between. The ideological conflict between the conservative and the secular political activists is based on and arguable presupposition that America must necessarily be one or the other. Even though America's vibrant and diverse religious sphere still poses a constant challenge to the neat line of separation between the sacred and the secular, the issue in this debate is not merely the church-state divide. Religious influence on political sphere is often more subtle and pervasive than we realize. It takes a form of moral aspirations that inevitably "leak into every cranny of politics" (Morone 2009, 1200).

1.2.3 Defending American Secularism

The more religious conservatives contend that the founders were people of deep faith who would be appalled by, for instance, the idea of banning school prayer, the more liberals try to defend and "protect the American variety of secularism from what they see as a resurgence of zealotry" (The Economist 2011). Susan Jacoby (2004a), a passionate defender of American secularism³, argues that the tension between secularism and religion was present at America's creation. Nevertheless, the founders of various personal beliefs decided that a secular government, the first of its kind, would be best guardian of liberty of conscience. Separating civil and religious authorities made the United States a model for religious freedom and enabled America's vibrant and diverse religious society, greatly interested in religion in spiritual life (Boston 2003). Despite its positive results, however, it has continuously been publicly scorned and attacked by religious conservatives in the past few decades. Apparently history has taken a different turn than the upswing of American freethought in the nineteenth century implied; "the influence of religion in the highest levels of government has never been stronger and more public" (Jacoby 2004a, 7). Religious conservatives have been putting considerable effort in trying to influence public policies with their theological values. A clear

³ There is much debate around the idea of secularism as well. While some authors, concerned by the influence religion has in American politics, call for its defense, Rodney Stark, an acknowledged American sociologist of religion, argues that the secularization theory is indeed nothing more than just a theory. The main idea is that modernization should inevitably bring about the decline of religion. Despite the fact that western intellectuals have been promising the end of religion for the past three centuries, their promises never became empirical reality, and »the American case continues to offer a devastating challenge to the secularization doctrine« (Stark 1999, 254). Bottum (2008, 31) agrees that the "notion that modernity inevitably means the decline of religion" has now mostly been debunked. And there is hardly a phenomenon to be found which proves the secularization thesis wrong as clearly as the religious life in the United States does.

example can be found in numerous attempts and initiatives to Christianize public education by replacing evolutionism in school curriculums with creationism. Such attacks on science have a negative impact on scientific literacy which has been declining in the past few decades (Jacoby 2004b). Alternatively, tearing down the wall of separation could instigate more severe consequences. Historical evidence shows that unions of government and religion tend to foster oppression (Boston 2003), particularly when it comes to minorities. In this case, secularists fear, it could lead to the oppression of fundamental rights of the nonbelievers.

There are numerous organizations in the U.S. whose purpose is to prevent that from happening, most notably the Americans United for Separation of Church and State, the Secular Coalition for America, the American Atheists, the Freedom from Religion Foundation, the American Humanist Association, and, recently, the Secular Students Alliance. All these organizations are in their essence dedicated to preserving church-state separation and protecting religious freedom and defending the rights of secular, non-believing, religiously unaffiliated Americans. Although it may seem odd or unnecessary to award special attention to the rights of those who profess not to believe in God, especially from the European perspective, non-believers are in fact one of the most frowned-upon minorities in the U.S., particularly when the nomenclature used to describe their standing is “atheist”⁴. Opinion polls continuously show that the majority of religious Americans views atheists with suspicion or even disgust, as is the case with other minorities. In fact, the number of those who identify themselves as atheists is under two percent of the population, and most people questioned claim to have never had contact with an atheist (Fidalgo 2012). The numbers of those who define themselves as unaffiliated, however, ranks slightly above 16 percent according to the Pew Forum (Church Statistics and Religious Affiliations 2007). This shows that nonbelievers tend to use different names for their beliefs, secularists, humanists and freethinkers being among the most common ones. Agnostics, who do not deny the existence of God but also refuse to affirm his existence due to the lack of evidence, are also usually categorized in the unaffiliated group.

Even if other nomenclatures attract slightly less suspicion than “atheist”, it remains highly unlikely that somebody who does not publicly express deep religious faith would stand much

⁴ The position of atheists in American society is well illustrated by the statement of George H. W. Bush in 1987 during his presidential campaign. In an interview conducted by Robert Sherman, he stated that he does not know that atheists should be considered citizens, nor patriots, because this is one nation under God. Nonbelievers were appalled by the fact that a presidential candidate could get away with such an insulting statement. Nevertheless, he became president in 1989 (Fidalgo 2012).

chance at being elected for a public office (Greenawalt 2009). To take some responsibility for this fact off the electoral base, it needs to be said that nonbelievers show to be politically considerably less active than religious conservatives (Fidalgo 2012), though that could probably be at least partly attributed to some upfront resignation resulting from being familiar with the state of affairs. Furthermore, even though generally associated with the liberal political left, nonbelievers have started loosening or refusing their position within the Democratic Party, especially since the latter started attracting believers who were disillusioned by the Republicans and the Christian right. Nevertheless, the latest hope for the nonbelievers' political awakening has been the New Atheism, advocated in the writings of scientists Richard Dawkins, Sam Harris, Daniel Dennett and the late Christopher Hitchens (popularly referred to as "the Four Horsemen of Atheism"). They took it upon themselves to radically challenge religious beliefs held by the majority of the American population. At the same time, though, they also distanced themselves from their non-believing predecessors and many resented their aggressive, arrogant stance. Yet, they are exactly what Jacoby (2004b, 17) argued America was lacking: freethinkers that would dare speak publicly about the dangers of melding religion with political ideology and power which can enable fanatics to "pursue their particular religious/political vision with devastating consequences for those who do not share it".

1.2.4 Separation and Secularism: European Perspective

When speaking about the separation of church and state in the U.S. and the American secularism from a European perspective, one must take into account a fact that has already been implicitly mentioned: when it comes to religion, America is a unique case among Western democracies. On the one hand, the number of Americans who believe in God is considerably higher than in any other Western country (Morone 2009). On the other hand, by contrast, the commitment to maintaining an institutional church-state separation is much stronger than in Europe, where many countries still have established official religions. Nevertheless, when politics are considered, it can safely be argued that "religion, especially Christianity, plays a far more prominent role in American government than it does in northern continental Europe" (Whitman 2011, 234).

It has therefore become something of a cliché to claim that the United States is a religious society and Europe is a secularized one (Berger, Davie and Fokas 2008). This cliché is enforced by, for instance, the political rhetoric of American presidents that rarely fails to

mention God is hardly an evidence of effective church-state separation. Same goes for the prayer that regularly opens congressional sessions. It is difficult to imagine something like that would be tolerated on this side of the Atlantic. France, for instance, rejected this practice soon after the French Revolution. Conversely, though, Americans accustomed to the free exercise principle find incidence such as the French headscarf laws prohibiting religious expression in schools unacceptable (Whitman 2011). With regard to its religiosity, the U.S. is often characterized as exceptional, which might indeed be the case when compared to other Western democracies. However, when compared to the rest of the world, its exceptionality fades – it is, like most of the world, very religious. From this point of view, Europe is the one that is exceptional (Berger, Davie and Fokas 2008). In comparison with the past and with the rest of the world, church attendance in western and central Europe has declined substantially, as well as institutional attachment and adherence to traditional beliefs, especially among the younger population (Davie 2005). Europe has in fact secularized to a degree that makes it the most secularized area in the world (along with Australia) and the term “Eurosecularity” (Berger, Davie and Fokas 2008, 11) came to use among some prominent authors to describe this phenomenon. However, it would be exaggerated to argue, as the cliché states, that Europe is a secularized society; the fifth wave World Values Survey research conducted in 2005-2008 shows that over 55 percent of Europeans⁵ consider themselves to be a religious person. Of the non-religious, slightly over 10 percent claim to be convinced atheists (World Values Study 1981-2008 Official Aggregate v.20090901). With more than half of the population stating to be religious, it cannot be justifiably claimed that Europe is secular. Nevertheless, these numbers clearly demonstrate how different Europe and the U.S. are in terms of religiosity.

The before mentioned secularization theory which predicts an inevitable decrease in religiosity as the society modernizes (in terms of economical, scientific and social development) clearly fails to explain the situation in the United States. An alternative explanatory framework should thus be considered to account for a continued vitality of religion, the augmenting church adherence and the zealous pursue of political goals by various religious groups in America: the theory of religious economy. It presupposes that a multitude of religious groups results a competitive market in which these groups are free to

⁵ The European countries included in these results are: France, Great Britain, Italy, Netherlands, Spain, Norway, Sweden, Finland, Poland, Slovenia and Germany. Data for other European countries was not available at World Values Survey. Thus, the results are not entirely statistically accurate, but they serve as an illustration and as means of rough comparison between Europe and the United States. Significant differences occur among European countries as well; religiosity is highest in Poland with 94.6%, followed by Italy with 88%. Sweden with only 33.4% of population declaring themselves as religious is at the other side of the scale.

compete for members and pursue their interests. Many of them use innovative strategies of recruiting new believers, and these strategies normally require them to be constantly present, attractive and visible to the eye of the public (Lambert 2008).

However, the most important difference lies not in the presence of religion itself, but in the way that religion is perceived (Berger, Davie and Fokas 2008). Even though the U.S. is considered to be a modern secular country by many sociological standards, it differs from other modern secular countries significantly by way that “it has no strict separation of religion from politics and no strict separation of religion from law. /.../ Christianity is permitted to function as an ideological competitor in American politics, at times a very successful one, and the Bible is cited as a de facto source of law in litigation involving matters as important as the death penalty” (Whitman 2011, 236). In Europe, there is a tendency of perceiving religion as a problem, especially if it encroaches in public sphere⁶. In the United States, conversely, it is usually welcomed as a potential source of positive values, even in governmental affairs (Berger, Davie and Fokas 2008). From this aspect, separation between Christianity and the government in Europe is much stricter. This is at least part of the reason why European observers are often puzzled, if not deeply troubled, when it comes to the relationship between religion and government in the U.S. Another important aspect to consider when evaluating the situation is American civil religion, another phenomenon that may be difficult to grasp while examining it through European lenses.

1.3 Civil religion in the U.S.

The intertwining of religion and politics in the U.S. does not only derive from direct influence of religious groups and organizations. Bernstein and Jakobsen (2010) argue that religious influence also operates through »secular political and cultural institutions of American public life that developed historically out of Protestantism and which predominantly operate by presuming Protestant norms and values« (1023). Richard Olehla (2010) is hesitant in naming a specific god, but also argues that “it is impossible to say that America is, or ever was, a Godless country” (28). He claims that even though the founders did not all believe in the same god, they believed in a general religion and that the existence of hundreds of different faiths

⁶ It needs to be added, however, that regardless of the decades of secularization and declining church attendance, religion once again became a hotly disputed issue during the process of drafting the Lisbon Treaty. Some proposals were made, with a strong support of the Vatican, to include a reference to either the Judeo-Christian roots of Europe or to God in the preamble of the document. Countries with a strict separation of church and state, such as France, greeted these proposals with strong opposition. Later, the European Parliament rejected them and a more neutral reference to European diversity was chosen instead (Veld 2008).

built the ground for the emergence of all-encompassing civil religion. The latter, Maddigan (1993) argues, forms an integral part of American civil society and possesses certain values which, though they often overlap with those of traditional theistic religions, are essential to the American democracy.

The term “civil religion”, was first introduced by Jean-Jacques Rousseau in *The Social Contract*, where he outlined its four simple dogmas: existence of a Deity; afterlife; the reward of virtue and punishment of vice; and the exclusion of religious intolerance (Bellah 1967). He regarded those dogmas as moral and spiritual foundations of any modern society while all other forms of religiosity were considered to be outside the state’s domain and could be freely held by citizens. Indeed, when the United States were founded, they were to a large extent based on the principles set forth by Rousseau, though he is not considered to be one of the major influences on the Founding Fathers. However, the idea of civil religion in America manifested itself in a rather specific manner. Unlike in France, for instance, where it represented a secular antipode of Catholicism, the civil religion in the U.S. had to play the role of a common denominator of several different Protestant sects, Catholicism, the awakening deism and other forms of religious and secular beliefs. The Biblical God, interpreted differently by various religions, thus became simply a God as an undefined supreme being that everyone could share (Bahovec 2009). This needs to be understood in light of the zeitgeist of the era in which religion was an ubiquitous social fact – despite the fact that at the time, the civil and religious authorities in the U.S. have already been separated to the extent that was still entirely unthinkable in Europe (Debeljak 1991).

The first one to acknowledge that there is such a thing as “American civil religion” was Robert N. Bellah, an American sociologist who coined this notion in his 1967 essay titled *Civil Religion in America*. He argued that this specific religious dimension is a serious matter that requires understanding, just like any other religion does. At the beginning of the essay, he uses the example of John F. Kennedy’s inaugural address in 1961 to point out one of the main characteristics of American civil religion – the undefined, generic God that the Americans can relate to regardless of their faith and which so often finds place in American political rhetoric, an empty symbol that can be filled with any content. In the three mentions of God, Kennedy never referred to any religion in particular; his only reference was to the concept of God. In Bellah’s opinion, using the word “God” in a presidential speech is justified with the existence of “certain common elements of religious orientation that the great majority of Americans share. These have played a crucial role in the development of American institutions and still

provide a religious dimension for the whole fabric of American life, including the political sphere. This public religious dimension is expressed in a set of beliefs, symbols, and rituals that I am calling American civil religion" (1967, par. 12).

After providing this basic definition, Bellah goes on to point out another important thing concerning Kennedy's address; he not only pledged to uphold the Constitution to the people (with whom sovereignty lies in American political theory), but also to God. This indicates a common theme in American tradition, the collective and individual obligation to carry out God's will on earth. As Christian as this theme may seem, Bellah stresses several times that, despite the fact that much of it is selectively derived from Christianity, civil religion is not itself Christianity; the God of the civil religion is much more related to law and order than the Christian one. This point is nicely summed up by Bahovec (2009): civil religion does not, like Christianity, refer to the afterlife. It relates to the norms that are applicable in this, earthly life, and the state as the carrier of civil religion has the right and duty to punish those whose acts are inconsistent with the established social order (51). In other words, the state assumes the role of a judge which is in religion carried out by God. Thus the nation becomes in a way sacred and the national symbols as well as secular matters acquire the dimensions of religious motifs.

During the first few decades after the formation of the United States, the emerging civil religion found its symbols in the revolutionary era. The Declaration of Independence and the Constitution served as sacred scriptures and George Washington was appointed a status of a prophet that led his people out of slavery. The outburst of the Civil War was the second important event that substantially altered the symbols and motifs of American Civil religion. Being a young country, the U.S. had never truly been tried, and the loss of life in one of the bloodiest wars of the nineteenth century was far greater than anything Americans have previously experienced. It resulted in new themes, such as death, rebirth and sacrifice, entering the American civil religion (Bellah 1967). It also launched Abraham Lincoln as its new icon. Lincoln, a common man from a poor family, mostly self-educated, represented the American success story (Ziegler 2009). As the president who led his country through the Civil War, he also represented a new beginning; he himself understood and portrayed the conflict regarding the abolition of slavery as an opportunity to introduce a new order (Olehla 2010). In the address delivered at the dedication of the Soldiers' National Cemetery in Gettysburg, Pennsylvania, he urged the audience to "resolve that these dead shall not have died in vain,

that this nation, under God⁷, shall have a new birth of freedom, and that government of the people, by the people, for the people, shall not perish from the earth” (Lincoln 1863). With Gettysburg, American Civil religion acquired two new religious motifs; those who have not died in vain became martyrs whose life had been sacrificed for the greater good, and the cemetery itself (later overshadowed by the Arlington National Cemetery in Virginia) provided a place for prayer and worship that the civil religion was lacking (Olehlá 2010). Finally, Lincoln’s assassination in 1865 sealed his image of a Christ-like character that died for his nation (Ziegler 2009).

The new symbolism that the Civil War added to civil religion soon found ritualistic expression. The most important holiday that originated from the Civil War is Memorial Day, dedicated to the martyred dead. The calendar of civil religion holidays and celebrations also includes Thanksgiving, which was institutionalized during Lincoln’s presidency and, in Bellah’s (1967) words, integrates the family into civil religion; the 4th of July; Veterans’ Day, Presidents’ Day, Christmas and New Year’s Eve and Day festivities, Valentine’s Day, Halloween, Mardi Gras, Labor Day, Mother’s and Father’s day, the birthdays of Washington, Lincoln and Martin Luther King, etc. (Ziegler 2009). Presidential inaugurations are also very important ceremonial events in civil religion because they reaffirm the religious legitimacy of the highest political authority (Bellah 1967). Sports, which have throughout history often been associated with religion, are taking up an important position among various ritualistic expressions of American civil religion. Big events with large audiences, such as the Super Bowl, the All-Stars games or the World Series often serve as scenarios for massive civil religion festivals with American flags fluttering everywhere, U.S. force planes flying over them in formations, even public prayers. Some of these rituals and ceremonies of civil religion, like Christmas, are more overtly religious, but most of them are secular events that have no connection to any particular religion.

⁷ Lincoln's reference to the United States as a »nation under God« has been a subject of a few recent lawsuits filed by Michael Newdow, an attorney and a passionate atheist, on behalf of his daughter. The aim was to declare recitations of Pledge of Allegiance to the flag in public schools unconstitutional because it contains the words »under God« and therefore endorses religion. The contentious two words were in fact not in the original version of the pledge; the Congress borrowed them from Lincoln and added them during fervent anti-communist pursuits in the fifties with the objective of clearly differentiating the American version of secularism from the atheistic premises of the Soviet Union. However, Newdow's attempts have thus far been unsuccessful. The same two words have been involved in another scandal, when the American Constitution Society omitted them in their pamphlet of founding texts (George 2010). Perhaps Lincoln's words can be considered as a violation of the Religion Clause or at least a threat to American secularism. Nevertheless, simply omitting is not a solution, but rather an attempt to change American history.

Much has been written on the subject of American civil religion since Bellah first started the discussion in the sixties. He in fact played an instrumental role in the discourse, and a large portion the civil religion literature is composed of theoretical and empirical responses to Bellah's work. However, an adequate definition of what precisely civil religion is still lacking (Ziegler 2009). There seems to be a general consensus about the cohesive function of the civil religion, though. This was already pointed out by Bellah when he observed that it is, first, understandable that a society sacralizes its most important values and norms, and second, that to simply dismiss this civil religion as a form of nationalism, or "Americanism", like some critics did, would mean to ignore its indispensable role in maintaining social cohesion (Stauffer 1975). Glorifying the American way of life is actually the whole point of civil religion. By highlights typical American values, it reinforces the sense of uniqueness of the United States. It was established as a new world, different from all the rest, and the rhetoric of political leaders often puts America on a pedestal for the other nations to look up to it (Olehla 2010). This functions as a community builder; it makes people feel like they belong to the same entity, which is important in such a disparate nation. Everyone can practice civil religion, even if they belong to different religious groups, because it remains at a level diffuse and abstract enough to allow different interpretations (Stauffer 1975). Thus, Ziegler (2009) argues, additional affiliation is not an obstacle but rather provides some nourishment for the practice of civil religion.

As harmonious as it sounds, this can bring about some problems. Empty symbols of civil religion that allow different interpretations make it easy for other religions to fill them with the content that best serves their needs. For instance, it is very convenient when claims are made about the United States being a Christian nation; all it takes is replacing the undefined God of civil religion with a Christian one. Since civil religion is indeed linked to many Biblical archetypes such as "America as the new Israel", "Washington as Moses", "Lincoln as the suffering Christ figure" (Stauffer 1975, 390), and so forth, it gives Christians' claims even more legitimacy. However, if civil religion would indeed be Christianity (and Bellah as the author of the concept of American civil religion strongly opposes this idea), would that not be a very direct violation of the Establishment Clause?

The specific perception of civil religion in the U.S. and the role that it plays is what most likely decisively contributed to the historical development which eventually led to America becoming a complete opposite of the largely secularized European countries when it comes to the significance of religion in public life. Even both large political parties are well aware that

it is impossible to gather sufficient public support without involving religion in the race. Thus, God remains firmly rooted in political rhetoric of American presidents, regardless of their personal religious beliefs or party affiliation (Bahovec 2009). It seems that while most of the developed world is secularizing, America keeps experiencing new religious awakenings (Morone 2009).

1.4 A historical overview of Christianity's role in American public life

Despite the cultural differences between mostly European immigrants that inhabited the new world after its discovery and hundreds of different faiths that they brought with them, one thing needs to be kept in mind: a very large majority of all those religious beliefs pertained to Christianity. This is partly the reason this subchapter only revises the historical role of Christianity in American society, with a strong emphasis on Protestantism. More importantly, other faiths that once were or are present on American religious scene are of little relevance to the core issue of this thesis, that is, the significance of evangelical Christians in American public life.

Christianity found its way to the New World with the first European settlers arriving from England. Though many subsequent immigrants chose to move to America in search for a better life for reasons that had nothing to do with religion; some came to escape poverty or legal difficulties, seeking better opportunities and better quality of life, taking the opportunity to become land owners. Others simply decided to make a fresh start in the new land. But a considerable portion of the newcomers fled to America to avoid religious persecution in England that threatened them due to their unwillingness to subscribe to religious practices and beliefs they found were in contradiction with the scriptures (Lambert 2003). Puritans, as they were called, Calvinist dissenters from the Church of England, came to America and established the Massachusetts Bay Colony in 1630 (Boston 2003). They viewed American wilderness as a haven for religious freedom. However, their idea of the latter had little to do with the notion of religious liberty as it is used today. They did not strive for tolerance and religious liberty for everyone; their intention was to establish a model Christian state⁸

⁸ Centuries after the Puritans arrived to America, many scholars have contended that it is not possible to understand religion in the United States without recognizing that what has happened and is still happening is driven by the so-called Puritan Paradigm. Puritanism stood for a strictly enforced code of morality, it was committed to a highly conservative view of the Bible, and it concerned itself with social issues. Ellingsen (2007, 11) argues that »essentially, the Puritan Paradigm is the thesis that Puritanism has provided the primary categories for understanding American religiosity, that Americans tend to understand religion – even their own religious beliefs – in terms of these categories«. Still today, many parallels can be drawn between Puritanism and evangelical Christianity.

(Lambert 2003). In early Massachusetts, state and the church were melded into one. Only members of the Puritan church (later Congregationalists) could hold public office, a strict religious tax was imposed on all citizens and any kind of dissent or rebellion was quickly eliminated (Boston 2003).

Not all colonies followed the example of the Puritans. However, most of them did have more or less strictly established Protestant churches for at least another century after the Puritan settlement (Lambert 2003). The constitutions of the original U.S. states typically gave direct recognition to Christian religion in terms of funding public worship and Christian educational institutions, and laws were drawn to protect things held sacred by Christians, such as the Sunday Sabbath (Hecló 2007). The only notable exception was Rhode Island, where Roger Williams, an iconoclastic preacher driven out of Massachusetts by the Puritan zeal, founded the city of Providence. He advocated complete freedom of conscience and promised religious and political liberty to anyone who chose to live there, even if he found the religious views of some of the new inhabitants distasteful. For decades, Rhode Island was a lonely example of religious liberty in colonial America (Boston 2003).

At this point, it should be stressed that at that time, America was almost exclusively Christian, comprised mostly by a variety of Protestant sects; Methodists, Baptists, Quakers, Presbyterians, Episcopalians, Anabaptists, Calvinists and Pentecostals, to name just a few, were those who largely formed the New World (Bottum 2008). Jews and Catholics were tolerated to some extent, though the latter, albeit Christian, in the beginning had to resort to establishing their own colony, Maryland, and were persecuted on and off oven throughout the nineteenth century (Boston 2003). The religious liberty Williams established in Rhode Island thus extended mainly to Protestant sects, which tended not to get along very well. Hence, Bottum (2008, 23) argues, “America’s much vaunted religious liberty was essentially a Protestant idea. However deistical and enlightened some of the Founding Fathers may have been, Deism and the Enlightenment provided little of the religious liberty they put in the Bill of Rights”. What established the need for its implementation was rivalry between the many Protestant churches. Hecló (2007, 78) supports this view by stating that “Insofar as institutional separation of church and state in America was based on principle (and not just a practical necessity in the religiously pluralistic colonies), it was more a product of Christian thinking than of any secular or deist Enlightenment philosophy”. Namely, Protestant faith not only provided the moral foundation of the society, it also promoted religious freedom (Lambert 2008).

However, as mentioned, religious liberty did not come into force in America until the power of church-states unions began to fade at the end of the eighteenth century. The beginnings of separation can be traced back to Jefferson's and Madison's efforts to disestablish the Church of England in Virginia. Their success was followed by the implementation of both principles, the freedom of religion, and disestablishment, into the First Amendment to the Constitution, as already discussed in the subchapter on separation of church and state. The First Amendment also resulted in an increase of church membership, because people were suddenly no longer limited to the established church of their home state and could no longer be persecuted for having beliefs the state previously considered heretic (Boston 2003). The Revolutionary War era brought the end of establishment and enabled the development of a vibrant mixture of people's religious views (Hecllo 2007). Furthermore, beyond denominational differences, Protestants were deeply divided over the question of religious authority, which was exposed by the Great Awakening, one of the most important religious movements in American history. Beginning in the 1740s in the Middle Colonies and New England, it gradually spread throughout the country by the 1760s. The revivalists advocated individual experience as the only relevant religious authority and called for a spiritual transformation or "New Birth" that would bring salvation. This only required God's grace; in their opinion, no churches or doctrines were needed (Lambert 2003). It resulted in further divisions within already numerous and difficult-to-quantify Protestant sects, a trend that continued through the nineteenth century (Bottum 2008).

Generally speaking, the nineteenth century, was a gloomy period for religious liberty and the separation of church and state. The United States was an overwhelmingly Protestant country at that time, which enabled mainstream Protestantism to become a de facto established religion and resulted in a mild form of Protestant theocracy (Boston 2003). At the same time, the country's economy began to be transformed by liberal capitalism which sparked greater interest in material gratification among people. To some religious leaders as well as European observers found the behavior related to increased consumption manifested an alarming decline in morality. Evangelicalism with its inclination towards social and political activism became popular at that time. It was evangelical Protestant revivalists that started the so-called Second Great Awakening, the goal of which was to morally reform of the society (Lambert 2008). In the political field, they pushed for some kind of endorsement of Christianity to be added to the constitution. Even though these attempts failed, the de facto establishment of Protestantism was quite strong, partly due to the fact that federal courts rarely interfered with

church-state matters. They were left in the hands of state legislators which enabled lawmakers to pass and enforce laws with religious inclination, and whatever disputes there might have been were resolved by state courts. Most of these rulings disregarded the principles of religious freedom and separation, promoting intolerance and religious persecution. Even new Protestant groups that sprung in that era were often denied their religious freedom, and the situation with Jews and Catholics was even worse (Boston 2003). The anti-Catholic foundation of Protestantism (in terms that the latter originated out of protest against Rome) caused Protestant to view Catholics with a fair amount of suspicion (Bottum 2008) which escalated to a significant degree of Protestant-Catholic tension. The main reason for this was increased immigration from European Catholic Countries, mostly Ireland. In the 1850s, more than a million Catholic immigrants arrived, and though this number only accounted for about five percent of the American population, it represented the first serious threat to Protestant unity and influence and sparked strong anti-Catholic sentiments. The second threat was the internal disagreement among Protestants over the issue of slavery. The debate shattered the consensus among Protestants and escalated into Christians killing Christians during the Civil War. As the nineteenth century came to an end, the United States started to turn back towards the principle of separation (Boston 2003).

United States entered the twentieth century with a booming economy which transformed it into the world's leading industrial power by the time of World War I. Millions of immigrants from Southern and Eastern Europe as well as East Asia arrived to fill the labor needs of the country's industry, representing a challenge to dominant Anglo-Saxon, Protestant culture (Lambert 2008). The Protestant churches initiated a great missionary movement which facilitated the trend towards consolidation of the fragmented Protestant sects and denominations (Bottum 2008). At the same time, scientific and social developments such as Darwin's denial of the Biblical account of creation, Marx's idea of economic conflict as the driving force of change and Freud's questioning of the concept of sin greatly challenged the Biblical interpretation of reality and divided the Protestant society. Some rejected the notions of modernity with hostility and became known as fundamentalists, while others embraced it and became labeled as modernists (Lambert 2008). The dispute resulted in a horizontal unity of modernists that cut across denominational divides and "made liberal Baptists, for instance, think themselves closer to liberal Congregationalists than to the fundamentalists of their own denomination (Bottum 2008, 25). The "Great Protestant Schism", as Lambert (2008, 106) calls it, developed into a nationwide debate over the inerrancy of the Bible which initiated

among believing Christians, but eventually also spread into political and cultural arenas with questions such as, for instance, the role of the Bible in public education (Lambert 2008). In the 1930s, liberal churches such as the Northern Baptists, the Congregationalists, the Episcopalians, the Methodists and the Presbyterians started to establish themselves as the Protestant mainline, and Riverside Church, an interdenominational church that became the flagship of mainline Protestantism in America opened in New York in 1930 (Bottum 2008). Their liberal theology made it possible to accommodate new ideas brought by the mid-twentieth century, which was probably the most secular and socially turbulent period in American history (Lambert 2008). By 1965, more than half of the American population belonged to one of mainline Protestant denominations (Bottum 2008, 25). In the meantime, the fundamentalists were laying low in a political sense and did little to expose themselves publicly. However, in the early 1970s they started organizing themselves again in the response of the moral decay of the sixties (Lambert 2008). Incidentally, it was around the same time that the mainline Protestantism started rapidly declining and was pretty much dead by 1975 in terms of membership and influence. This gave way to a fast increase of membership in evangelical Christian churches (Maddigan 1993) and resulted in a fast rise of the conservative Religious Right, not only as a religious but also as a political force.

2 DEFINING EVANGELICALISM

2.1 Origin and usage of the term "evangelical"

Evangelicalism is a complex term without a universally valid definition and its meaning can vary depending on historical and geographical contexts. However, its origins lie in the New Testament Greek word εὐαγγέλιον, or in Latin, evangelium, which stands for the “good news” of the Christian proclamation (Raschke 2009). In English, the archaic form of the term is evangel, which can mean either “gospel” or it can be used as another expression for evangelist. In the Biblical context, evangelists were Matthew, Luke, Mark and John, the writers of the four Gospels. However, evangelist can also stand for a person that is dedicated to missionary work and converting others into Christianity, or simply someone who is a zealous advocate of something (New Oxford American Dictionary, Second Edition 2005). Historically, it acquired a new meaning in the sixteenth century during the Reformation, when evangelical came to signify Protestants in general, due to the fact that the core of the dispute was religious authority; the Protestants under Martin Luther sought to establish the New Testament as the basis of faith rather than keep on letting the corrupt Roman Catholic Church keep hold of the interpretation of the sacred texts. In Germanic countries, the term evangelical is still used to denote Protestants in general. However, “the word as regularly used today derives from its original application to the revivalists and luminaries of the ‘renewal’ movements” (Raschke 2009, 148), namely, the evangelical Christians that led the two Great Awakenings, advocating the necessity of a “New Birth” for personal salvation. In modern American English, the term evangelical has several different meanings. As an adjective, it principally something is of or according to the teaching of the gospel or the Christian religion. In special usage, however, it denotes “a tradition within Protestant Christianity emphasizing the authority of the Bible, personal conversion, and the doctrine of salvation by faith in the Atonement” or “a member of the evangelical tradition in the Christian Church” (New Oxford American Dictionary, Second Edition 2005, 120). The term evangelicalism, denoting the doctrine of evangelical Christianity, is a derivative of the term evangelical.

2.1.1 Evangelical Christianity or Christian fundamentalism?

The term evangelical is often replaced with “fundamentalist”, especially in non-evangelical discourse. This analogy is not drawn only from the fact that some evangelical beliefs seem so radical that even evangelicals themselves would readily dismiss them as fundamentalist had

the faith in question been Islam and not Christianity, but rather from historical connection between the two. While wondering where they came from and where they have been all that time before they suddenly entered the religious and political arena in the late 1970s, Susan Harding (2009) came to the conclusion that the evangelical Christians are direct descendants of the fundamentalists from the first decades of the twentieth century. As previously mentioned, the fundamentalists were a tradition within Protestant Christianity, close to the traditions of American revivalists of the nineteenth century, who militantly opposed modernism both in theology as well as the cultural changes that modernism endorsed (Marsden 2006). According to Debeljak (1995, 22), fundamentalism encompasses those religious movements whose programs reflect a direct and systematic way of responding to the challenges of modernity by methodically referring to the infallible and absolute authority of the scriptures which are interpreted in an exclusive manner of literal reading. In fact, the gravest controversy between the fundamentalists and the modernists of the 1920s was the debate concerning the inerrancy of the Bible and Biblical literalism; while the latter came to regard the Bible as an ordinary book, written by mortals and filled with some relevant historical accounts and semi-true stories. Therefore, they concluded, it should not be taken literally but rather (re)interpreted in the light of modern knowledge. Fundamentalists, on the other hand, insisted that the Bible is the inspired word of God and viewed the liberal approach as an attack on faith itself (Lambert 2008). The conflict escalated and entered the political arena in the form of public debates concerning the teaching of Darwin's evolution theory in public schools (Harding 2009). Eventually, the dispute ended up in court in 1925. After the state of Tennessee passed a law banning the teaching of Darwinism, John Scopes, a biology teacher at a public school in Dayton, refused to abide by the law commanding obligatory teaching of creationism, that is, the Biblical account of how the universe was created (Debeljak 1995). Scopes was brought to court in July. The jury found him guilty of violating the Tennessee state law and he had to pay a rather symbolic one-hundred-dollar fine. Nevertheless, the trial was a public relations debacle for the fundamentalists. The widespread derision they had to face after the trial had severe negative impact on the reputation and the influence they once had in public life. The fundamentalist factions began to "withdraw from their denominations, formed their own networks and denominations, and further elaborated a powerful 'separatist' polemic against worldly engagement of any kind, including politics and social reform. By 'separating from the world' and loudly claiming to abstain from public activism, fundamentalists /.../ disappeared from public view between 1930 and 1980" (Harding 2009, 1279). According to some definitions, this type of separatism is actually what

differentiates fundamentalists from evangelical Christians; the latter are usually encouraged by their denominations to participate and engage fully in a larger society while the former tend to focus on in-group solidarity and oppose the society (Brint and Abrutyn 2010, 333). The separation was not complete, though. In 1942, the fundamentalist movement formed its first Washington based lobby group to protect their interests in the time of rapid government expansion. It was called the National Association of Evangelicals (NAE). Some authors, like Williams (2010, 4) and Ellingsen (2007, 45) argue they deliberately “abandoned the pejorative name ‘fundamentalist’ in favor of the more optimistic-sounding ‘evangelical’”, which would explain why the names are often interchanged. NAE made fighting communism its priority and had some short-lived success, but never significant influence on politics. Broader evangelical population insisted in its separatist stance until the late seventies, when the fundamentalists, as Harding (2009) claims, returned into the public square, led by Reverend Jerry Falwell and his Moral Majority (see chapter 3.1).

Even though the terms fundamentalism and evangelicalism are often interchangeable from the historical as well as doctrinal perspective, it needs to be added that evangelicals nowadays generally reject the fundamentalist tag and do not identify with it (Lambert 2008). Carl Raschke, himself a declared evangelical, calls it a “regrettable misuse” (2009, 148). The rejection of the fundamentalist tag is not surprising given the negative connotations this term acquired through its association with Islamic fundamentalism and terrorism, especially in the aftermath of 9/11. Nevertheless, it is often used particularly by the secular critics of evangelicalism such as for instance the New Atheists. Some other expressions may occasionally be found in literature, most common one being Christian/religious conservatives. In a more derogative context, the name Christian fanatics is also used. Born-again Christians can be found as a reference to their emphasis on the conversion experience, although the born-again are a larger group than evangelicals (Harnett 2007), and when speaking in terms of political activity, Religious/Christian Right is often used. However, they all mean what is here mostly referred to as evangelical Christians or, in short, evangelicals.

2.2 Doctrinal Characteristics of Evangelical Christianity

When seeking to define evangelicalism, the most commonly used reference is David Bebbington, a British historian whose definition of evangelicalism, now referred to as “the Bebbington quadrilateral” (B. Harris 2008, 201) was first published in 1989, in a classic study titled *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain: A History from the 1730s to the 1980s*. Even though

Bebbington primarily studied evangelicals in Great Britain, his findings remain relevant and useful for the contemporary American context. He wrote: “There are four qualities that have been the special marks of Evangelical religion: *conversionism*, the belief that lives need to be changed; *activism*, the expression of the gospel in effort; *biblicism*, a particular regard for the Bible; and what may be termed *crucicentrism*, a stress on the sacrifice of Christ on the cross. Together they form a quadrilateral of priorities that is the basis of Evangelicalism” (Bebbington 1989, 2-3).

Biblicism, to develop this notion further, is a conviction about inerrancy of the Bible; the latter is considered to be the inspired word of God and the primary, absolute source of spiritual truth. As such should be understood literally, which is often referred to as Biblical literalism. Accordingly, evangelicals believe in the Second Coming of Jesus, when the souls of all those who follow him will be redeemed and non-believers will be doomed forever. This idea of salvation is closely related to conversionism. According to Brian Harris, the “classical evangelical view of conversion has stressed conversion as a crisis event in which the individual accepts Jesus as persona Savior and Lord, an experience through which they are justified in a moment” (2008, 203). The moment of conversion is usually referred to as New Birth (a concept traceable back to the first Great Awakening), that is why some evangelicals identify themselves as born-again Christians. Activism as the third characteristic, albeit more a sociological one, is derived from theological beliefs related to the idea of salvation and the necessity of conversion. After their own salvation had been assured, evangelicals often resort to active sharing of faith, preaching of the gospel and missionary activities in order to assure salvation for other people as well. Also, activism is of special importance when attempting to separate evangelicalism from earlier forms of Protestant Orthodoxy (Bebbington 1989). Crucicentrism, as the last element of Bebbington’s quadrilateral, refers to stressing Jesus’ suffering on the cross in order to redeem for the sins of humanity. In the context of evangelical piety, it has a function of bringing the community of God into existence and holding it together in a sense that it integrates a group of people who would forsake all to follow Jesus because he loved them enough to die for them (B. Harris 2008).

Carl Trueman, himself an evangelical (and a Council member of the Alliance of Confessing Evangelicals), points out several issues regarding Bebbington’s definition. First, the lack of any institutional or ecclesiastical dimension, which, in his opinion, shows that evangelicalism is and always has been trans-denominational. Thus, he argues, it is difficult to determine its boundaries. The second issue is the emphasis on experience which further enforces the

definitional problem as it pushes evangelicalism towards subjectivity and the third issue is the lack of doctrinal criteria for the movement (2011). Christian Smith (2000) agrees and stresses the fact that there is no single definition of evangelicalism, yet it exists as a useful religious category for researchers and journalists. Furthermore, evangelicalism is a diverse phenomenon and should not be treated as a monolithic block. There are many different kinds of evangelicals; conservative evangelicals, post-evangelicals and younger evangelicals, to name just a few. Therefore, Brian Harris argues, “current evangelicalism is best described as a movement of passionate piety” (2008, 201).

2.3 Evangelicalism: A Working Definition

Given the difficulties presented regarding a generally applicable definition of evangelicalism, it is necessary to establish a proper working definition of the term used for the purposes of this thesis before proceeding to some pressing social issues that largely form the evangelical political agenda and lie at the heart of the so called Culture War.

Three main measures are typically used by social scientists in determining who can be considered an evangelical: denominational affiliation, theological belief and self-identification (C. Smith 2000, 16). As it has been argued that evangelicalism is trans-denominational, the National Association of Evangelicals (NAE) seems to be a good place to start when attempting to at least roughly rounding up the denominations the term encompasses. Since its formation in the forties, NAE transcended its initial lobbying function and grew into an organization uniting various evangelical denominations, organizations, churches and individuals. The introductory text on the NAE website reads: “The National Association of Evangelicals has spoken as a united voice for millions of American evangelicals since 1942. But, the voice of NAE is clearer, stronger and more broadly heard now than ever before. The Association represents more than 45,000 local churches from over 40 different denominations and serves a constituency of millions” (National Association of Evangelicals). The numbers seem impressive, yet they require some clarification. The denominations mentioned include, among others, Calvinist, Arminian, Wesleyan, Anabaptist, Reformed, Holiness, Anabaptist, Pentecostal and Charismatic traditions. Despite denominational differences they are brought together by certain common beliefs, largely corresponding to the Bebbington quadrilateral (which is also stated on the website as a “helpful summary of evangelical distinctives”) and further specified in the Statement of Faith that can be found on the NAE website (Statement of Faith 2009). As far as the “constituency of millions” goes, NAE does not offer any specific

numbers. However, according to the Pew Forum on Religion and Public life, over 26 percent of the population self-identified themselves as members of evangelical Protestant Churches (Church Statistics and Religious Affiliations 2007). This corresponds to roughly 80 million people and makes evangelicals the largest religious group in the United States (followed by Catholics with almost 24 percent and Mainline Protestant with slightly over 18 percent of the population).

To summarize, this thesis considers as evangelical Christians those who a) belong to one of the many member denominations of NAE, b) possess theological beliefs that correspond to the Bebbington's quadrilateral and/or c) identify themselves as evangelicals. Of course, these three criteria may or may not overlap in all the cases; some people may not entirely comply with Bebbington's quadrilateral and nevertheless identify themselves as evangelicals, or may not consider themselves to be evangelicals even though they belong to a denomination that is a member of NAE, and so on. There are always exceptions, and evangelicals can differ substantially one from another. However, this working definition sheds some light on what is meant with the term evangelical (or evangelicalism when referring to a religious movement).

2.4 The Culture War: A Clash of Values

The expression "culture war" is often used by various authors to describe the clash of conflicting ideas and beliefs about the moral codes of a society. It originated as an American phenomenon in the 1920s with the conflict between modernists and fundamentalists then lost its relevance for a few decades before resurfacing in the early nineties as an indispensable element of public discourse with the publication of *Culture Wars: The Struggle to Define America* by sociologist James Davison Hunter. In it, he argued that "America is in the midst of a culture war that has had and will continue to have reverberations not only within public policy but within the lives of ordinary Americans everywhere" (Hunter 1992, 34). That same year, Pat Buchanan, a conservative political commentator and author challenged the incumbent George H.W. Bush as a candidate for the Republican nomination with a platform opposing a more liberal direction Bush was leaning towards. He later changed his mind, decided to nevertheless support Bush as the Republican candidate and delivered a speech at the GOP National Convention, claiming: "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. For this war is for the soul of America" (Buchanan 1992). The issues he considered most burdening to

the soul of America were equal rights for homosexuals, the right to an abortion, and discrimination against religious schools.

Twenty years later, his words still seem to echo somewhat in the American political discourse. It should be mentioned, however, that some authors reject the notion of a culture war as a label created by conservative elites in order to mobilize the public (Sharlet 2008) or as scholarly construct that is in fact of little interest for ordinary evangelicals (C. Smith 2000). Nevertheless, “the culture war thesis is extremely popular among political pundits because it parsimoniously explains the deep societal divisions around culture that exist in American society today” (Wald and Calhoun-Brown 2011, 121). Issues associated with culture war remain relevant in American public life whether or not the expression itself is accepted as an umbrella term for these issues. In an attempt to organize them in a systematic fashion, they could roughly be categorized in three groups: issues concerning the so-called family values, issues concerning the sanctity of human life and issues concerning the evangelicals’ attitudes towards modern science.

2.4.1 Same-Sex Marriage, Gender Equality and Family Values

The rights of homosexuals became an important social and political issue in the 1970s after the wave of social reform movements in the sixties inspired the gay community to demand more rights and recognition. Previously, homosexuality was considered as an aberration, and abnormality that rarely gained any acknowledgment provided that gays kept their attitudes and inclinations in the closet. However, as the gay community began to speak up, the public attitude started to change. The American Psychiatric Association removed homosexuality from its manual of mental disorders in 1973 and sixteen states repealed sodomy statutes outlawing sexual intercourse between same-sex partners between 1971 and 1976. This frightened evangelicals who saw the admissibility of homosexuality as a clear sign of moral decay. Jerry Falwell, an ultra-conservative evangelical leader declared that if homosexuality was to be deemed normal, it was only a matter of time before rape, adultery, alcoholism, drug addiction and incest were considered normal as well (Dowland 2009). In the eighties, James Dobson, a founder of an evangelical organization Focus on the Family and an influential preacher even went as far as to comparing the threat of homosexuality to Hitler’s invasion of Europe, claiming the very existence of society was at stake and stated that the evil master plan of the homosexual activist movement was utter destruction of family (Harnett 2007). Of course, such extremist positions should not be attributed to evangelicals as a whole. The views of

many on this issue are far more moderate, especially as opposing homosexuality is becoming less and less socially acceptable over time (Trueman 2011). Nevertheless, the evangelicals draw their understanding of homosexuality (and virtually everything else) from the Bible which establishes a sexual union exclusively within the context of male-female relationship which is formalized in the institution of marriage. Homosexuality, in comparison, is described as an unnatural and degrading passion⁹. On this issue, the NAE website states: “Homosexual activity, like adulterous relationships, is clearly condemned in the Scriptures” and further:

We believe that homosexuality is not an inherited condition in the same category as race, gender, or national origin, all of which are free from moral implication. We believe that homosexuality is a deviation from the Creator’s plan for human sexuality. While homosexuals as individuals are entitled to civil rights, including equal protection of the law, the NAE opposes legislation which would extend special consideration to such individuals based on their “sexual orientation” (Homosexuality 2004).

In other words, NAE, representing eighty million Americans, believes that homosexuals consciously decided not to follow God’s plan¹⁰. Therefore, they deserve no rights other than those which are entirely inalienable. Same-sex marriage is course entirely out of question, and so is adoption for same-sex couples. A concern often expressed, though not in such extreme terms as in the case of James Dobson, is that it poses a threat to traditional family.

The notion of traditional family should be examined closer to clarify the evangelical position. Family is considered to be the fundamental institution of society. However, to function as such, according to evangelical leaders, it must be a traditional nuclear family with “two heterosexual parents with the husband as the head, and, preferably the breadwinner” (Dowland 2009, 607). His primary responsibilities should be supporting and protecting the family as well as defining the rules for the behavior of children. Taking care of the household,

⁹ Regarding NAE’s position on homosexuality, the story of Ted Haggard, the leader of NAE between 2003 and 2006 should perhaps be mentioned as an interesting fact. In 2006, Haggard’s campaign against gay marriage provoked Mike Jones, a male prostitute, to disclose that Haggard had been paying him for regular sex sessions for three years, during which time they also used methamphetamines. After initial denial, Haggard admitted sexual immorality as well as buying drugs (but denied ever using them) and submitted himself to intensive therapy to resolve his issues (Banerjee and Goodstein 2006).

¹⁰ In this respect, evangelicals believe that homosexuality is preventable and reorientation of same-sex attractions possible (Harnett 2007). In 1976, an umbrella organization called Exodus International was founded with the intention to “minister grace and truth to a world impacted by homosexuality”. It has grown to include over 260 Member Ministries, Churches and Professional Counselors in North America, all dedicated to helping people overcome their homosexual impulses and behaviors (Exodus International 2012).

raising children and upholding father's authority are the responsibilities of the mother, while the children are accepted to obey and respect their parents and thus "build the capacity for self-discipline and self-reliance" (Brint and Abrutyn 2010, 331). Even though it has been argued that this type of nuclear family has been rather an exception than a rule in the United States, the image of a working father, a stay-at-home mother and obeying children seemed appealing to the evangelicals around the middle of the twentieth century (Dowland 2009). Moreover, the appeal seems to be rather persistent; in 1998, the Southern Baptist Convention¹¹ decided to amend its essential statement of faith with a declaration that "a wife is to submit herself graciously to the servant leadership of her husband" (The Baptist Faith and Message Statement 2000). The supporting argument was that the submission of wives to their husbands is clearly commanded by the Scriptures. The decision to formalize hierarchical relationships between husbands and wives further substantiated the already enduring criticism of evangelical stands on gender equality (C. Smith 2000). A related criticism-provoking polemic is the women's right to manage their own bodies, which forms the basis of perhaps the most hotly disputed culture war issue – abortion.

2.4.2 The Right to an Abortion and the Sanctity of Human Life

Abortion, like homosexuality, did not become an important issue for evangelical Christians until the late seventies when Francis Schaeffer emerged as the prime evangelical opponent of abortion, labeling it the keystone of erosion of the sanctity of human life. Prior to Schaeffer, even after the *Roe v. Wade* which legalized the right to abortion in 1973, the pro-life movement was almost exclusively within the domain of Catholic religious groups. Taking into account the historical hostility between Protestants and Catholics, the reluctance of the former to join forces for a common cause is hardly surprising (Dowland 2009). Furthermore, evangelicals genuinely did not seem to have a problem with abortion; in 1971, the Southern Baptist Convention passed a resolution on which they called for a legislation that would allow abortion in cases when the pregnancy is a result of rape or incest, when there is clear evidence of severe fetal deformity or when it would likely damage mental or physical health of the mother. After the *Roe* decision, the former president of the Convention expressed his satisfaction with the ruling, and the Convention reaffirmed their position on abortion in 1976 (Balmer 2008). However, Schaeffer gradually managed to popularize the perception that abortion is a murder of an innocent being and mobilize evangelicals to cooperate with non-

¹¹ The Southern Baptist Convention is the largest evangelical Protestant denomination in the United States with a membership of over sixteen million, which also makes it the second largest Christian body, after the Catholic Church (C. Smith 2000).

evangelicals in order to assure political success (Dowland 2009). Up to this day, abortion remains one of the most successful means of mobilizing evangelical Christians to engage in electoral politics and appears as one of the most divisive issues in American public discourse.

What makes abortion different from other issues is that such fierce opposition is difficult to justify it with referring to the Scriptures. The Bible does not in any way condemn it. Although it is mentioned that anyone that injures a woman and causes her to miscarry should pay a fine, there is not a word written that would specifically forbid abortion¹² (Harnett 2007). Instead, evangelicals justify their position with the concept of sanctity of human life. Reasoning goes: “Because God created human beings in his image, all people share in the divine dignity¹³. And because the Bible reveals God’s calling and care of persons before they are born, the preborn share in this dignity” (Sanctity of Life 2009). In their opinion, the God-given dignity is also violated by euthanasia and “unethical human experimentation”, which brings us to another issue evangelicals passionately oppose; embryonic stem-cell research. The arguments against it are essentially the same as the arguments against abortion. They derive from an inherently Christian presumption that human life begins at the moment of conception (whereas other major religions tend to understand life either as starting at birth or as an endless recycling process) (Harnett 2007), usually leading up to claims that embryos suffer when aborted or that a collection of 150 cells required for stem-cell research already has a soul (S. Harris 2007). Of course, abortion and genetic research are morally sensitive questions where many things should be considered. However, these claims have been tested over and over again, and so far no scientific proof has been produced to support them. This already implicates the next culture war issue to be considered; the evangelical relationship with modern science.

¹² Same goes for contraception which is also largely opposed, at least as far as it is meant to be used by two unmarried partners. Of course, this does make sense from the biblical perspective, since premarital sexual intercourse is considered to be a sin. Nevertheless, if the goal is to reduce abortion rate, prohibiting the use of contraception among young unmarried couples where unwanted pregnancy is most likely to occur, seems a bit ironic.

¹³ Despite the claim that all people share the divine dignity, the sanctity of life is completely obliterated when it comes to the question of capital punishment. NAE strongly supports “death penalty for such horrendous crimes as premeditated murder, the killing of a police officer or guard, murder in connection with any other crime, hijacking, skyjacking, or kidnapping where persons are physically harmed in the process (Capital Punishment 1973). Regardless of the position one might hold on this issue, death seems a rather harsh punishment for skyjacking, for instance - especially taking into account that the resolution on capital punishment was accepted almost thirty years before 9/11. Furthermore, although only theoretically speaking, the implications of evangelical position on death penalty get even scarier; if capital punishment is required for any murder, and abortion is considered to be a murder of an innocent human being, how come death penalty is not required for women who decide to have an abortion? The deaths of enemy soldiers and civilians in America’s wars also seem to be of no concern to the “pro-life” advocates (Williams 2010).

2.4.3 Darwinism, Creationism and Modern Science

It has already been argued that evangelical Christians largely reject modernity and the above described social changes it brought. However, they also reject one of the core values of modernity, that is, the superiority of the human mind (Debeljak 1995). Naturally, accepting the premises of modern science would inevitably mean dismissing the Bible as the absolute truth, which, with biblicism being one of evangelicalism's most important features, seems highly unlikely. Therefore, the evolution-creation controversy, which was the bone of contention between the fundamentalists and the modernists a century ago, still constitutes one of the most debated culture war issues. It was as late as in 1987 that the Supreme Court barred teaching creationism in public schools on the basis that it endorses religion, striking down a state law that prohibited teaching evolution unless creation was also taught (Harnett 2007). Yet, the proponents of creationism continue to advocate what they call intelligent design to be taught instead of Darwin's theory of evolution. The argument behind it is that the very existence of the universe proves the existence of God; some supreme power must have been needed to create the universe. The question remains, as Sam Harris (2007) argues, what then created God? However, scientific or just plain common sense arguments speaking against creationism and intelligent design have so far proved to be futile in persuading evangelicals. They continue to believe the world was created only a few thousand years ago and that dinosaurs died out in the great flood because Noah apparently refused to take them on his arc (Baigent 2010). Perceiving the evolution as an attack on Christian theology is a reason big enough to reject it (Harnett 2007), and the opposition is further fueled by moral outrage, manifested in the form of naive statements such as, for example, that the children, if they are taught that human beings were created from apes, will actually start behaving like monkeys (Dawkins 2007).

Dissatisfaction with the curriculum and the lack of trust in the public education system often encourage evangelical parents to opt for homeschooling of their children. Although assessments are difficult to make due to the fact that homeschooling is a rather unregulated area, "most observers acknowledge that conservative Christians constitute the largest subset of homeschoolers in the United States" (Kunzman 2009, 2). Perhaps this view is supported by the fact that the Home School Legal Defense Association (HSLDA), a non-profit organization established to advance homeschooling, tends to support various conservative political and religious causes. Its most famous civic education curriculum, called Generation Joshua, aims to "assist parents to raise up the next generation of Christian leaders and citizens, equipped to

positively influence the political processes of today and tomorrow” (What We Stand For). This focus on political engagement and the disproportionate influence on public life is what makes evangelical homeschoolers different and more exposed to public scrutiny, despite of what share of total homeschoolers they actually represent (Kunzman 2009).

Regardless of how evangelicals might feel about advancements in modern science and their children learning about them in public schools, they have been much less hesitant to adopt the technological developments. Unlike for instance the radically traditional Amish who reject modernity completely, along with the amenities of technology, evangelicals are determined to resist modernity on its own field, with its own resources (Debeljak 1995, 24). The most evident example of what Debeljak is talking about is the so-called televangelism. Using the media in order to spread religious messages has its origins in the 1940s, when first radio sermons began to appear. The subsequent boom of television also brought an expansion of televangelism, which, as the name itself implies, is characteristic for evangelical Christianity. In fact, the heavy reliance on modern means of communication in spreading the faith and ideas is one of the things that make evangelicalism fundamentally different from other contemporary cults and religious groups (Debeljak 1991). Religious broadcast was essential to the politicization of evangelicalism in the 1980s (Wald and Calhoun-Brown 2011). The great success of television preachers who penetrated the majority of American households through privately owned and abundantly funded television networks can to a large extent be attributed to the fact that believers were no longer required to leave their homes in order to participate in religious activities. In an era when daily routines depend gravely on time constraints, less time-consuming forms of worship are warmly welcomed. This is best proved by another modern evangelical invention; the drive-through churches, particularly in the Midwest, which function on the principle of drive-through fast-food restaurants, except that instead of serving hamburgers, they provide a few fast evangelical lessons. Nowadays, however, the most powerful weapon in spreading the word is internet. There is practically no evangelical church or organization that would not have a neatly organized website, providing believers and potential members with whatever information they might seek. Indeed, modern means of communication make evangelical religious and political activism so much easier it would make no sense to reject it only in the name of defying modernity. As Ellingsen (2007) puts it, the formula evangelical leaders used in pursuing their social and political ambitions is “control the media, get significant audiences, and you can win not just elections, but also the heart and minds of the public” (53).

2.5 Some Problematic Implications of Evangelical Beliefs and Practices

The above described beliefs and certain practices make “many non-evangelicals view evangelical Christianity with deep suspicion, as enemies of freedom and liberal democracy” (C. Smith 2000, 4). Evangelicals are often opposed by secularists and religionists alike. “Some oppose the exclusivism of any group that purports to speak for all Americans on moral issues” (Williams 2010, 209) because morality and virtue are matters that are a concern and responsibility of all citizens, not only Christians. There are extensive critiques written about Christian morality and its incapacity of the Bible to serve as a feasible moral compass (Dawkins 2007; S. Harris 2007; Hitchens 2010). These critiques do not only come from the »Four Horsemen of Atheism«; more than two centuries ago, D’Holbach (2011) took for granted that morality had existed long before Jesus, otherwise the nations would not have survived, and argued that Christian morality is vague and precarious because it originates from a whimsey and moody God. Some opponenets also object to the evangelical claim of religious correctness, that is, the claim that they represent the one true faith, under which they enter the political arena and represent themselves as victims while seeking governmental support of their causes. Some people contest the evangelical specific list of moral issues because many of them, like for instance the inconsitencies when it comes to sanctity of life, are indeed false. Some resent the sanctimonious behavior of evangelicals towards those the y consider sinners, like homosexuals (Williams 2010). Others, however, are simply deeply troubled by the thought of what would happen to the American society if evangelicals got their way. Some problematic issues are highlighted here simply as an illustration of the kind of negative consequences evangelical beliefs can produce.

To begin with, some of their positions are problematic from the human rights perspective. As argued above, evangelical Christians clearly deny equal rights for homosexuals when it comes to the question of same-sex marriage. Gender equality is also under attack, not only when it comes to social equality issues as presented in the case of the Southern Baptist Convention. Through opposing abortion, evangelicals deny women the right to dispose of their own bodies as they see fit (Bernstein and Jakobsen 2010). A related issue, opposition to contraception, also has many negative implications, not only when missionaries pursuing the principle of spreading faith travel to sub-Saharan Africa and preach about the sinfulness of condoms; Sam Harris (2007, 38) labels this kind of piety “genocidal”. In fact, the efforts to eradicate premarital sex, such as sex-education programs that teach abstinence only or even opposing vaccinations against sexually transmitted diseases in order to deter young people from sexual

intercourse, seem to be giving results diametrically opposite to the desired ones. Young Americans, as Harris reports, are far more likely to experience an unwanted pregnancy, get an abortion or get infected with a sexually transmitted disease; the rate of gonorrhea is seventy times higher among American teens than among their peers in the Netherlands (28). Doubtlessly, this is at least partly a result of lack of knowledge about sexuality. Another area where young Americans seem to increasingly lack knowledge is science (Jacoby 2004b), still often challenged by religious dogmas in public education. As a result, American high school students “test below those of every European and Asian nation in their understanding of science and math” (S. Harris 2007, 70). Due to their ignorance in issues such as those above, the evangelicals are often criticized for being too preoccupied with “doing good for God”, not realizing that what they think God wants might not be good for the society they live in.

The real problem, however, is not simply that people who do not share evangelical beliefs find them disturbing, misguided or simply plain wrong. Rather, what is of serious concern is the social and political significance of American evangelicals (C. Smith 2000). Their self-proclaimed duty to spread their faith and, above all, the level of political activity they willingly and massively engage in order to pursue their goals and impose their beliefs to the rest of the American population make them one of the most powerful political forces in the U.S.

3 EVANGELICAL CHRISTIANS IN AMERICAN POLITICS

As already argued in the chapter on civil religion, the intertwining of religion and politics comes from two sources. First, from secular political and cultural institutions, which, due to historical reasons already examined, operate largely by presuming Protestant norms and values; and second, from the direct influence of religious groups and organizations on American politics. Particularly in the past quarter-century, most lobby groups and political action committees participating in shaping public policy have been identified with conservative evangelical Christianity, and at least since the 1980s on, the American politics have been dominated by a political coalition in which evangelicals played a major role (Bernstein and Jakobsen 2010, 1023).

3.1 Evangelical Political Institutions

Evangelicalism as it is today began its political rise in the late 1970s. The turbulent sixties with its civil rights movement, resulting in a sex revolution, race riots, the counterculture, increased drug abuse and the feminist movement, along with the Supreme Court's decisions on school prayer, pornography and abortion, encouraged them to reenter the public square after decades of social and political isolation which succeeded the Scopes Trial. The nation, in their opinion, has lost its Christian identity, the family was under attack, and evangelicals were no longer content with expressing their political will merely by voting for conservative candidates. They have become larger and more influential than most mainline Protestant denominations, they started building the so-called megachurches attended by thousands of people every day, they operated large television networks, publishing companies and educational programs, and they were beginning to gain access to prominent political actors. Forming a comprehensive political movement which could influence the U.S. government was becoming an attainable reality (Williams 2010). "The 'New Right'¹⁴, as it was initially called, was characterized by the emergence of culturally and politically powerful organizations" (Bernstein and Jakobsen 2010) led by influential evangelical leaders.

¹⁴ The whole name of the New Right was really "New Christian Right". Lately it became known simply as "Christian Right", encompassing not only evangelicals, but also all other born-again, Orthodox Catholics, Mormons and some mainline Protestants. Although the term "Religious Right" is often used as though it was interchangeable with "Christian Right", there actually is a distinction in meaning; the Religious Right also includes Orthodox Jews (Harnett 2007). What the adherents of the Christian/Religious Right have in common and what they built their political cooperation on is their conservative approach to the culture war issues.

3.1.1 Jerry Falwell and the Moral Majority

Although not chronologically the first in the long line of evangelical organizations to follow, the Moral Majority was the first one to draw nationwide attention. Its formation was publicly announced in 1979 by Reverend Jerry Falwell, a Baptist pastor and a popular televangelist of impressive rhetorical skills and extremist convictions, or, from secularist perspective, “the dreaded fundamentalist preacher” (Harding 2009, 1277). However, Falwell was just the face and the mouth of Moral Majority, whereas the idea itself was handed to him by Robert Billings, who later served as Reagan’s political liaison to the religious community, in 1977 (Ellingsen 2007). It became a reality two years later, after joining forces with the conservative New Right Republican political strategists Paul Weyrich, who also came up with the name and was otherwise a Catholic, the fund-raiser and otherwise a closeted homosexual Terry Dolan, political direct mail pioneer Richard Vigeurie, and Howard Phillips, who had served in the Nixon administration and was a Jew (Boston 2003). The Moral Majority quickly became the leading organization in the larger movement of Christian conservatives, lobbying to enforce traditional family values by opposing abortion, gay rights, pornography, sex education and even the Equal Rights amendment. To attain those goals, Falwell, still considering himself a fundamentalist, even accepted likeminded non-evangelicals into the organization after Francis Schaeffer had convinced him that the fight against immorality and secular humanism was more important than sustaining a separatist stance (Williams 2010). Nevertheless, the Moral Majority also promoted school prayer and targeted non-Christians for conversion into evangelical Christianity (M. A. Smith 2010). During the 1980 election, the heavy evangelical support mobilized by Falwell’s organization helped Ronald Reagan defeat the incumbent Jimmy Carter (Boston 2003); they even recruited pastors to launch voter registration drives in their churches to promote Reagan’s candidacy (Williams 2010). Despite its swift growth and significant influence which “stemmed from its ability to frame family values as a matter crucial to the survival of the country” (Dowland 2009, 628), Falwell’s star started fading in the 1980s (Boston 2003). He represented an extreme wing of evangelicalism, manifested by his often more than inappropriate, offensive public statements. Moderate evangelicals refused to follow his lead, and religious leaders to the right of Falwell resented his political activities as a breach of fundamentalist separation (Dowland 2009). In 1989, the organization was disbanded due to a sharp decline in public support and resulting financial problems. Nevertheless, during the time of its existence, the Moral Majority did more than any other organization to launch the New Religious Right (Williams 2010).

3.1.2 Pat Robertson and the Christian Coalition

The dissolution of the Moral Majority did not leave an empty spot for long; its place in American Politics and the Religious Right was soon taken over by the Christian Coalition. It was founded in 1989 by Pat Robertson, also a television preacher, following his failed attempt for the Republican Party presidential nomination. During his campaign, Roberson garnered more than three million volunteers and a considerable amount of funds; a level of support Richard Dawkins (2007, 303) finds “disquieting” given Robertson’s extreme positions on culture war issues such as gay rights and gender equality¹⁵. Despite his failure, Robertson knew how to use this support to build a group with a real grassroots presence, as opposed to the Moral Majority which was always more focused directly on Washington (Boston 2003). He hired Ralph Reed, a veteran of conservative campaigns, as his executive director. Under his leadership, the organization claimed almost two million members by mid-nineties and became indispensable for candidates seeking Republican presidential nomination (Wald and Calhoun-Brown 2011). The Christian Coalition largely pursued the same issues as the Moral Majority, adding some new ones such as protection of religious displays on public property, opposing Darwinism and evolution theory, resisting media messages that defame God and American support of Israel to the list (M. A. Smith 2010). Robertson also proclaimed that he wanted to have the Congress controlled by politicians who shared his views and a conservative Republican in the White House (Boston 2003), which was achieved with the George W. Bush administration (Wald and Calhoun-Brown 2011). Throughout the nineties, the Coalition dominated the Religious Right, exerted considerable influence over the Republican Party and had a strong impact on state and local politics by electing its supporters to local offices and thus influencing policymaking from the bottom up. In 2001, Robertson withdrew from the Coalition, but the organization still exists under new leadership. It is now called the Christian Coalition for America and it often works alongside other evangelical organizations such as Focus on the Family and the Family Research Council (Boston 2003).

3.1.3 James Dobson and Focus on the Family

Both, Focus on the Family and Family Research Center were founded by James Dobson. Unlike Falwell and Robertson, he is not a minister, but a psychologist; he built his reputation

¹⁵ Robertson is famous, among other things, for stating that homosexuals »want to come into churches and disrupt church services and throw blood all around and try to give people AIDS and spit in the faces of ministers” and that he knows “this is painful for the ladies to hear, but if you get married, you have accepted the headship of a man, your husband. Christ is the head of the household and the husband is the head of the wife, and that’s the way it is, period” (adapted after Dawkins 2007, 303).

through a radio broadcast he started in 1977, called Focus on the Family, where he gave out partly clinical, partly Biblical advice on matters such as marriage and child-rearing (Harnett 2007). When the broadcast became increasingly popular, the ministry began publishing a number of magazines and Dobson's books, and started television broadcasts; all of it combined "reached approximately 28 million Americans every week" (Utter and Storey 2007, 20). A radio show grew into a tax-exempt non-profit organization dedicated to promoting traditional family values. In 1983, Dobson founded the Family Research Council which was initially incorporated into Focus on the Family as a research and lobbying organization but has been functioning independently since the early nineties (Wald and Calhoun-Brown 2011). Unsurprisingly, both organizations have virtually the same agenda, very similar to all other evangelical agendas; emphasizing the importance of traditional family, they strongly oppose divorce, LGBT rights and transgenderism (but offer counseling to those homosexuals who wish to convert), the right to an abortion, euthanasia, embryonic stem-cell research, premarital sex, substance abuse, gambling, lotteries, pornography, sex trafficking, and of course, the separation of church and state, whereas they endorse strong gender roles, adoption (not for gay couples, naturally), corporal punishment for children, prayer and creationism in public schools and abstinence-only sex education (Social Issues). Dobson temporarily replaced Falwell and Robertson as the unofficial Christian Right leader. After resigning as President of Focus on the Family in 2003, Dobson remained politically active. He publically endorsed George W. Bush as a presidential candidate in both campaigns and founded a new group, Focus on the Family Action, which was solely to concentrate on politics (Harnett 2007). His wife, Shirley, is the chairwoman of the National Day of Prayer Task Force (Wald and Calhoun-Brown 2011), organizing the evangelical religious observances held on the first Thursday of every May. Though perhaps most often mentioned, Focus on the Family and the Family Research Council are far from being lonely in their mission. There are numerous evangelical organizations devoted to protection of family values. Concerned Women for America mostly opposes abortion, gay rights and, perhaps unexpectedly, gender equality. American Family Association deals with inappropriate and immoral broadcasting content. The Eagle Forum and the Citizens for Excellence in Education focus on influencing school policies and curriculums. There is also the National Right to Life Committee, Operation Save America¹⁶, Center for Reclaiming America, Christian Family Renewal, Council on Biblical Manhood and Womanhood, etc.; the list is almost endless (Utter and Storey 2007).

¹⁶ Operation Save America was originally founded as Operation Rescue in 1987 by Randall Terry as an anti-

Besides organizations that are mostly dedicated to promoting the same social issues over and over again, there are also some that are more politically oriented and focus almost exclusively on mobilizing evangelicals to participate in politics. The Heritage Foundation, for instance, is a conservative think tank based in Washington, D.C., “whose mission is to formulate and promote conservative public policies based on the principles of free enterprise, limited government, individual freedom, traditional American values, and a strong national defense” (About Heritage). It was founded in 1973 by Paul Weyrich, who was also “responsible” for the Moral Majority (Williams 2010). The Center of Christian Statesmanship is even more specifically political; it “focuses on assisting the Christian Right supporters in the U.S. Congress” (Wald and Calhoun-Brown 2011, 213). It concludes Bible studies on Capitol Hill and organizes luncheons at which Congressmen present their views about the relationship between their personal faith and public service. Every year, the Center gives out an award to the most distinguished Christian Statesman (Utter and Storey 2007).

The most notable achievement of the evangelical organizations that originated in the 1980s was that they launched certain prominent evangelical leaders into the political arena. They instructed their followers on pressing social issues, mobilized millions of Americans to vote, also by conducting voter-registration drives in local churches, engaged actively in legislative lobbying and targeted unfavorable politicians so they would lose. With a strong electoral block supporting the conservative evangelical leaders and their initiatives, Christian Right became a viable force in American politics.

3.2 The Christian Right and the GOP: How Evangelicals became Republicans

Today, the link between white evangelical Protestants, conservative views on social issues and affiliation with the GOP seems to be well established, and evangelicals are often described as the base of the Republican Party (Brint and Abrutyn 2010; Wald and Calhoun-Brown 2011). However, this was not always the case; evangelicals “had long been Democrats, or had opted out of politics altogether” (Williams 2010, 1). After the divide in the

abortion organization. Its combat strategy was blocking the entrances of abortion clinics with protest and sit-ins in order to prevent women from entering (Utter and Storey 2007). At times, protests escalated into threats and physical assaults on women and the staff. The organization dedicated most of its attention to Dr. George Tiller, a physician from Kansas who performed late-term abortions. He was shot in both arms in 1993 by an anti-abortion activist. In 2009, he was murdered in his church by another one, Scott Roeder. The killer was not officially a member of Operation Save America or its Kansas branch and Terry condemned the murder. However, the Army of God, also an anti-abortion organization bordering a terrorist one, proclaimed Roeder an America hero (Army of God).

evangelical movement in the beginning of the twentieth century, the northern denominations largely embraced modernity, while the southern conservative evangelicals rejected it and, with the exception of some fringe movements in which the southern evangelicals were overrepresented, like the Ku Klux Klan, mostly withdrew from the political arena. Those who did participate in national politics placed their sympathies with the Democratic Party. The Southern Baptist Convention, the largest evangelical denomination, was traditionally firmly attached to the party, and the popularity of the Democratic Party's New Deal, which addressed the unfavorable economic situation in the region, further strengthened this attachment (Wald and Calhoun-Brown 2011). Even though evangelicals briefly found common ground with the GOP on the subject of anti-communism in the 1940s and 1950s when the National Association of Evangelicals was active as a lobby group in Washington, the signs of the party realignment that was about to happen did not begin to show until the presidential elections in 1960. When the Democratic Party nominated John F. Kennedy as their candidate, the Southern Baptists, northern evangelicals, and independent fundamentalists joined forces in supporting the Republican candidate in order to prevent a Catholic from being elected to the office. After failing, they redefined their vision of the Christian Nation. Rather than striving for an explicitly Protestant society, they decided secularism posed a much greater danger than Catholicism and started to focus on culture wars (Williams 2010). By the end of the decade, evangelical attachment to the Democratic Party eroded considerably (Wald and Calhoun-Brown 2011).

In the 1976 elections, evangelicals strongly supported Jimmy Carter, a Democratic candidate and a devout Southern Baptist who openly advocated his "born-again" experience during the campaign. They understood his religious convictions as a guarantee that he would pursue the culture war issues evangelicals stood for. However, disappointment followed soon after the election when Carter started implementing unexpectedly liberal policies. It started with the establishment of the Department of Education as a cabinet position. Federal involvement in education angered the white southerners in particular, because local school boards played an essential role in keeping the schools de facto segregated even twenty years after the Supreme Court had outlawed the practice in *Brown v. Board of Education* (Lambert 2008). Segregation was also an issue which kept the evangelicals divided; northern evangelicals and the Southern Baptists were embarrassed by their southern fundamentalist counterparts who were fiercely defending it. However, after the Civil Rights Act passed in 1964 and the IRS helped enforce it by denying tax-exempt status to all institutions engaged in racial discrimination (Balmer

2008), the reality of racial integration could no longer be denied. Incidentally, even though it was a lost battle for some conservatives, the end of segregation eliminated one of the main obstacles to forming an evangelical political coalition. The end of segregation also enabled fundamentalists like Jerry Falwell to begin forging alliances with mainstream Republicans who would have also been embarrassed to be associated with fundamentalist segregation efforts. Another factor favorable to the emergence of a new religious coalition was the changing demographics. As already mentioned, membership in mainline Protestant churches was declining sharply in the seventies while evangelical congregations enjoyed rapid growth. By the end of the decade, it became clear that evangelicals had sufficient voting power and financial resources to influence American politics (Williams 2010).

This did not go unnoticed by the “secular” conservative activists seeking to restore the strength of the Republican Party after two consecutive electoral defeats in 1974 and 1976 (Wald and Calhoun-Brown 2011). In order to do that, they had to convey the votes from the Democrats, and as the latter were growing increasingly liberal, a significant shift to the right seemed like the best way to attract the attention of evangelicals (Williams 2010). Paul Weyrich, who also came up with the idea of Moral Majority, played a crucial role in mobilizing evangelicals for the GOP, after realizing how numerous and yet unorganized they were (Lambert 2003). Thus, despite the fact that the Christian Right originated from conservative grassroots activism, the Republican leaders played an important role in organizing the evangelicals and supporting the new coalition. Even though the purpose was merely to increase its voting power, “what began as a temporary political ploy quickly became irreversible and the party found itself increasingly controlled by the Christian Right” (Williams 2010, 7). The political power of the New Christian Right was demonstrated by the 1980 election in which Ronald Reagan, a Republican candidate whom evangelicals heavily supported because he pledged to work for the enactment of their agenda (Wald and Calhoun-Brown 2011), defeated the born-again Carter. The Christian Right gained prominence in this election because it became evident that they were taking over the Republican Party. The last thing missing for the complete success of the Christian Right was the mobilization of the Southern Baptist Convention. The latter finally changed sides in the early eighties and became an important force in Republican politics, turning the Christian Right into a united coalition with considerable political power (Williams 2010). This happening, the Republican Party merged largely secular laissez-faire fiscal conservatives, supportive of tax cuts, deregulated

economy, and free trade, but moderate on social issues, who represented the base¹⁷ of the party until then, with religious social conservatives. They soon began to emerge as the new base, pulling the party further right and changing it fundamentally in the process (Hacker and Pierson 2005). As the Republican Party grew increasingly dependent on the evangelical votes, it continued to shift to the right on social issues, which made mainline, non-evangelical Republicans, feel uncomfortable in their own party. Consequently, their support declined, and the GOP became even more reliant on the conservative vote (Williams 2010).

Despite two consecutive electoral defeats of the GOP, the evangelical influence in the GOP was growing stronger throughout the nineties. By 1994, they managed to gain control of the party leadership in Texas, Virginia, Oregon, Washington, Iowa, South Carolina, and Minnesota, and they represented substantial voting blocs in all the southern states as well as in New York and California (Utter and Storey 2007, 15). The Republican Party continued to represent itself as “the party of traditional values against a Democratic Party that has forgotten God, family and decency” (Wald and Calhoun-Brown 2011, 121). By the beginning of the twenty-first century, the Religious Right was undisputedly the strongest interest group within the GOP, which became evident with the election of George W. Bush, when evangelicals accounted for one third of the Republican vote. During his two terms in the office, this figure continued to grow and reached 40 percent by the end of his presidency, which made it impossible for Republican candidates to attempt to disregard the Religious Right social agenda. However, even though conservative evangelicals managed to capture the party and win the elections, they failed to reclaim the nation for God and change the general culture which continued to exhibit signs of moral decay. Pundits assumed the Religious Right was on the verge of collapsing, but in the 2008 election, though the Republicans lost, evangelicals accounted for an even higher percentage of the Republican vote than four years earlier (Williams 2010). Today, the Religious Right continues to receive a large share of popular attention nationally, and “there is a widely held perception that religion and politics is about the activity of the Religious Right” (Wald and Calhoun-Brown 2011, 166), even if non-evangelical Republican leaders oppose its attempts of imposing their religious agenda through the party system (C. Smith 2000).

¹⁷ Hacker and Pierson (2005, 9) define the base as the “party’s most committed, mobilized, and deep-pocketed supporters: big donors, ideological activist groups, grassroots conservative organizations, and, increasingly, party leaders themselves”. They also note that the Republican base, now comprised of evangelical Christians, has more power than ever.

3.3 Evangelicalism and the Presidency

Throughout the history, politics and religion have been deeply intertwined, and numerous American presidents regarded the latter not merely as a matter of personal faith, but also as a principal foundation of morality, which is indivisible from politics. When such claims are made publicly, they inevitably provoke a certain amount of objections from the defenders of the separation of church and state, be they secularists, pundits, politicians, or even religious leaders. Although any kind of religious test for presidency is prohibited by the Constitution, Americans generally expect their presidents to pose and display religious faith, and presidents tend to abide by their wishes. Religious rhetoric is virtually indispensable in public addresses; so far, every inaugural speech (except Washington's very brief second one) acknowledged God, and it has become somewhat a tradition to end the oath of office with "so help me God"¹⁸, even though it is neither required nor mentioned in the Constitution. However, the implications of the presidents' personal faith may influence more than just their rhetoric; Gary Scott Smith (2006) argues that many have been guided by their personal religious commitment in performing their duties and that they often commingled their private and public faiths. He questions the appropriateness of a president letting his religious convictions direct him in devising and implementing policies and wonders if presidents should strive to operate from a secular perspective in fulfilling their responsibilities. He also notes that at least until the second term of George W. Bush, scholars never paid much attention to religious matters when researching American presidency; personal religious faith and the style of leadership represented a gap in presidential studies (Berggren and Rae 2006). The Bush administration, with his strong support for faith-based initiatives, opposition to gay marriage, abortion, and stem-cell research, and the Iraq invasion which many of his political opponents saw more as a consequence of his Christian faith than a matter of national security, encouraged political scientists to begin considering the relationship between religion and the presidency, examining how his personal beliefs might have impacted his political decisions and what kind of specific consequences that might have produced (G. S. Smith 2006).

¹⁸ The "so help me God" phrase at the end of the oath disturbs many non-believers and adherents of non-Christian faiths. As long as the phrase is regarded as a personal statement of faith, however, there is no legal problem; according to the Constitution, the President is allowed to include a personal codicil to the oath. The Chief Justice who administers the oath, on the other hand, has to stick literally to what is written in the Constitution. But when Chief Justice John Roberts administered the oath to President Obama, he ended it with a question: "So help you God?", which should be unconstitutional. Moreover, he did in both oaths he administered to President Obama who swore twice due to an error made by Roberts the first time around (Mankiewicz 2009).

Although George W. Bush makes a perfect case study, there are at least two more presidents worth considering when speaking about the relationship between the evangelicals and the presidency: James Earl Carter and Ronald Wilson Reagan. During the 1960 election, John F. Kennedy argued religion was not a legitimate criterion on which to base voting decisions, and his argument endured throughout Lyndon Johnson's presidency, through Richard Nixon's resignation following the Watergate affair fourteen years later and through the presidency of Gerald Ford, who believed faith was a personal matter. But with the born-again Jimmy Carter, matters of faith were reintroduced into the public arena and remained there throughout the presidency of Ronald Reagan, who also presented himself as an evangelical Christian and who had been elected by the same evangelical voters that elected Carter four years earlier, and George W. H. Bush who replaced Reagan after his double term in the office. Bill Clinton's presidency represented an aberration in the already established pattern of evangelical faith-professing, Religious Right-supported candidates occupying the Oval Office. However, many pundits found the explanation of this aberration in Clinton's "ability to speak the evangelical language of sin and redemption" (Balmer 2008, 3), despite the fact he was a Democrat and the Religious Right utterly despised him, doing everything in their power to discredit him. After Clinton managed to discredit himself, many saw George W. Bush's narrow victory in 2000 as the voters' attempt to cleanse the White House of Clinton's personal transgressions. By the time Bush was elected for the second time, religion had more than restored to the place it occupied in the public square before the Clinton aberration, and religion-based moral values became a crucial criterion in candidate selection. Unlike in 1960, when voters seemed content to discard religion as a political factor, the candidates in the 2004 election were expected to disclose their religious views and publicly explicate their relationship with God in order to stand a chance at winning.

3.3.1 Jimmy Carter and the Rise of the Christian Right

The examination of the relationship between evangelicalism and the presidency begins with Jimmy Carter for several different reasons. First, he was himself a devout evangelical, a Southern Baptist who was proud to publicly announce his deep faith and the born-again experience, thus bringing evangelicalism back into the public arena. Second, his religious faith had an important impact on his policy in that his decisions were guided by the precepts of his faith. Third, his pre-election campaign attracted the attention of the evangelical community which was at that time mostly politically passive; his open religiousness with which they could relate inspired many evangelicals to start voting again. And fourth, his

presidency served as a catalyst for the emergence of the Religious Right as a political force (Flint and Porter 2005).

According to Berggern and Rae (2006), those who knew Carter and have worked with him say that his religious belief lies at the core of his existence. Unlike for many evangelicals, being born again for him was not a one-time event, but rather a lifelong process of renewing his faith. He readily admitted in his post-presidential works that his religion was an indispensable guide for his presidential behavior, and since he also readily admitted that he actually disliked politics as such, he built his entire political philosophy on his personal religiosity (Flint and Porter 2005). Initially, the majority of the population regarded him as at least slightly strange due to his evangelical religion which was at that time rarely exposed publicly. On the other hand, though perhaps it was not obvious, his beliefs were shared by roughly a quarter of the population, and he indeed was far more virtuous than the other presidential contenders (Ribuffo 2006). The evangelicals found his candidacy inspiring; trusting that his presidential politics would be profoundly influenced by the religious beliefs they seemed to share and recognizing the opportunity to finally realize their social agenda, many of them either deserted their support for the Republican Party or voted for the first time and thus helped secure his election (Flint and Porter 2005). However, those evangelicals who voted for Carter were by no means members of an organized political movement, but rather individuals persuaded by Carter's personality (Balmer 2008). After the election, it turned out that Carter was less conservative in practice than he appeared to be, and evangelicals soon became disillusioned with his presidency (Flint and Porter 2005). The biggest problem seemed to be the fact that, in accordance with traditional Southern Baptists' beliefs, he was a strong supporter of the separation between church and state and saw violation of this principle as an attack to the freedom of conscience. Furthermore, after being warned that his endorsement of a missionary program sponsored by the Southern Baptist Convention could raise some serious church-state problems and consequently criticism (Moore 2011), he "became progressively more uncomfortable with being perceived as allowing his religion to influence his actions as president" (Flint and Porter 2005, 36). He not only refused to reach out to religious communities, but also surrounded himself with people whose views on social issues differed dramatically from evangelicals' and was unwilling to use the executive power to influence policies on evangelical pressing social issues.

When the Religious Right began to coalesce into an organized political movement, its leaders claimed they started to turn against Carter because he was unwilling to outlaw abortion

(Balmer 2008), which is ironic for two reasons. First, it was Carter's candidacy that politicized the abortion issue for the evangelicals to begin with (Flint and Porter 2005), and second, Carter was personally opposed to abortion, but yet unwilling to support any attempt of overturning *Roe v. Wade* because he believed the state should remain morally neutral. At the same time, he sought to end the use of Medicare funds to pay for abortions, which would put abortion out of reach for the poor and provide an unfair advantage to the rich (Moore 2011), and thus succeeded in angering two camps at once; evangelicals for being too liberal, and his pro-abortion supporters for being too conservative and discriminative. Towards the end of his presidency it became obvious that he was losing evangelical support. By 1979, preachers like Jerry Falwell were publicly voicing the disappointment of the evangelical community and the New Religious Right was actively campaigning for his removal from office (Flint and Porter 2005). That same year, Carter's Southern Baptist Convention, which was the only religious group he maintained contact with, was taken over by conservatives who were far more concerned with sexual politics and whose views on religious liberty differed substantially from Carter's, making abortion one of the Convention's priority issues (Moore 2011). The growing discontent of evangelicals did not escape the attention of conservatives like Weyrich, seeking potential new electorate for the Republican Party. They used the White House Conference on Families, which Carter promised to convene during his campaign and which took place at the end of his presidency, to mobilize grassroots activists who Weyrich seemed to have convinced that Carter and the IRS were determined to disable Christian schools by denying them tax-exempt status on the basis of de facto segregation (Ribuffo 2006). The truth is Carter had nothing to do with the IRS scandal, but the deliberate undermining of conservative religious leaders, along with the energy crisis, the record-high interest rates and the Iranian hostage situation, made his popularity dwindle (Balmer 2008). In the 1980, the same conservative evangelical community that helped to secure his election in 1976 turned its back on Carter. By then already organized and politically activated as the New Christian Right, they massively supported his Republican opponent, Ronald Reagan.

3.3.2 How Ronald Reagan Won the Hearts of Evangelicals

Reagan's religious credentials were incomparable with Carter's. He did not regularly attend religious services, he was associated with the liberal and morally questionable Hollywood, he was a divorcee, like his second wife, and he had no record of political commitment to social issues of evangelical concern; conversely, when he was serving as a governor of California, he had "signed into law the nation's most liberal abortion bill" (Flint and Porter 2005, 46) and

“opposed the legislation which would have barred homosexuals from teaching jobs” (Martin 2004, 48). Nevertheless, he managed to carefully articulate a political vision that appealed to the discontent evangelicals (Moore 2011). While openly courting the religious vote, he declared his support for school prayer and private Christian schools, attacked abortion as well as homosexuality, and publicly questioned the evolution theory, asserting the necessity of teaching creationism in public schools (Flint and Porter 2005). He also welcomed the New Christian Right as a partner in his coalition, which brought the movement national recognition and notoriety, and he was in return provided with a sufficient amount of voters to defeat Carter (Ribuffo 2006).

The 1980 presidential election was even more significant by evangelical standards than the previous one. All three candidates – Republican Reagan, Democrat Carter, and independent John B. Anderson – claimed to be evangelical Christians. However, Carter had already lost the evangelical support during his mandate, and Anderson was arguably even more liberal on social issues than Carter, so even though Reagan’s claim to evangelical faith seemed the weakest on the face of it, he nevertheless succeeded in harvesting a majority of evangelical votes (Balmer 2008). Clearly, the evangelicals were not the only ones supporting Reagan; he also garnered disproportionately high support among fiscal conservatives who, under the economic difficulties the U.S. was facing at that time and which Carter seemed unable to tackle, considered controlling inflation as the most important issue. This disproportionate support led some researchers examining the 1980 election at that time, including Johnson and Tamney (1982), to believe the role of evangelicals and the Christian Right in Reagan’s victory was indeed negligible. On the other hand, it is of course hardly surprising that fiscal conservatives, who traditionally formed the base of the Republican Party, opted disproportionately for the Republican candidate. Furthermore, the importance of the Christian Right was only beginning to show in 1980 and became much more evident in the years to follow, but it by no means went unnoticed by the media and the pundits even if they were unable to agree on its significance.

However, Reagan’s campaign team noticed the rise of the Christian Right and the electorate potential of the evangelicals expressed to an extent during the previous presidential elections even before it caught the public’s attention. Given that Reagan was not an ideal evangelical candidate, it appeared crucial to make some changes in order to win the vote of white born-again Christians. Robert Billings, the conceptual leader of the Moral Majority, was hired as the religious liaison, and when Reagan was nominated at the Republican National Convention

in Detroit, the GOP adopted a platform in which it stressed its antiabortion stance, refused to endorse the Equal Rights Amendment (ERA) in order to curb federal interference with family values and called for the protection of private Christian schools against the IRS (Williams 2010). The Republican platform was celebrated by Moral Majority's leader Jerry Falwell, and the other Christian Right leaders were won over shortly after at the National Affairs Briefing, a meeting organized by an organization called the Religious Roundtable three months prior presidential elections. More than ten thousand evangelicals attended the meeting, including some prominent preachers like Pat Robertson. Carter and Anderson were both invited as well, but declined the invitation (Balmer 2008). Reagan, on the contrary, gave a speech at the meeting in which he courted the evangelicals not only by speaking out against abortion, the moral decay brought about by the sexual revolution and communism, but also by stating that he endorses the evangelicals in what they are doing and that he believes they have the power to restore American traditional values. The passionate endorsement of evangelical causes he delivered convinced the Christian Right leaders that electing him was the key to accomplishing their goals. Moreover, they did not have much choice other than to forgive Reagan for his divorce and abortion bill lapses and throw their support behind him. Although research showed that most voters who cast their ballots in 1980 had little regard for the Christian Right, and the latter could thus not take credit for putting Reagan in the office, it did play a part in turning the evangelicals into a Republican voting bloc (Williams 2010).

Shortly after Reagan's election, it became clear that the Religious Right agenda was not one of his political priorities. He announced that serious consideration of conservative social issues would have to be postponed to give the administration time to focus on economic recovery and the conflict with the Soviet Union. Evangelicals, already bitterly disappointed by Reagan's failure to appoint evangelical Christians to important posts in his administration, were further angered by his nomination of Sandra Day O'Connor, a proponent of the right to abortion and ERA, to Supreme Court (Martin 2004). In 1981, he also refused to push the Human Life Statute and the Family Protection Act, both of which would have outlawed abortion (Balmer 2008). With the midterm elections approaching, however, he could no longer afford discontent evangelicals, so he announced his support for two constitutional amendment proposals; one would prohibit abortion and the other one would reinstate prayer in public schools. The latter died in Senate, and the former did not even make it that far, but Reagan's efforts nevertheless won him long-lasting gratitude of the evangelical community. In return, the Religious Right strongly supported his program of nuclear arms buildup against

the communist Soviet Union – a support that was much needed, since liberal religious leaders and secularists were all calling for a nuclear freeze, which Falwell announced to the most prominent issue of the upcoming election. In 1984, the evangelical support of Reagan and the GOP was even stronger than in 1980. The Moral Majority alone registered 2.5 million new voters, and evangelical minister and famous author Tim LaHaye launched a new organization, American Coalition for Traditional Values, which enlisted thirty-five thousand churches that passed out voter registration forms during religious services, mobilizing another million voters. Eighty percent of evangelicals voted Republican in 1984 (Williams 2010, 206). Reagan's second term also brought disappointment to the Religious Right in terms that it failed to realize any of its major objectives. But despite the fact that evangelicals were shocked when Reagan engaged in nuclear reduction plans and additionally upset when it turned out that his wife, Nancy, tended to rely on astrology, which was viewed as a pagan practice, their support did not decline. He failed to deliver on his central promises about abortion and school prayer, but he did give evangelicals symbolic affirmation and the confidence to continue pursuing their political objectives (Martin 2004). By the time he left office, "Ronald Reagan had achieved almost iconic status among many American evangelicals" (Balmer 2008, 124).

3.3.3 The Disillusionment of George Bush Senior and Bill Clinton

With Ronald Reagan absent from the ticket, the 1988 election arose many speculations about the level of political activism and participation among evangelicals. The little success of the Religious Right during the 1986 congressional campaigns suggested its power might be waning, and some sexual scandals that erupted soon after undermined the credibility as well as financial stability of some prominent televangelists. On the other hand, developments such as Pat Robertson's bid for the Republican nomination suggested that evangelical involvement in politics might be even greater than in the previous decade (Smidt and Kellstedt 1992). Robertson's bid shocked the GOP establishment and was at first not taken very seriously, but when he tied Vice President George H. W. Bush in one of the early contests, it became clear that the Religious Right might indeed be a much more viable force than some had imagined. However, when the Republican primaries started, it became evident that Robertson was far from gathering sufficient support, not even among evangelicals, let alone GOP as a whole. Bush, who engaged in intensive effort to woo evangelical votes while Robertson still seemed to be a viable threat, completely withdrew from discussing religious issues after the disappointed Robertson dropped out of the race and set off to launch the Christian Coalition.

Confident that the Religious Right would never support his liberal democratic opponent, he did not fear he might lose their vote. Indeed, when the Election Day came, the evangelicals supported Bush just as strongly as they had supported Reagan in the previous election; he won eighty-one percent of their votes (Williams 2010, 221). However, the evangelicals were far less enthusiastic about Bush than they were about Reagan, and the “relationship between Bush and the Religious Right was never characterized by genuine ardor” (Balmer 2008, 127) – they simply had no other choice, even if many were skeptical. Bush came from an established Republican family, and though he was fiscally conservative, he was moderate on social issues and did not share the evangelical fervor for culture wars. The beginning, the Bush administration turned out to be even worse than the evangelicals had expected. Bush relied on them for support of the Iraq invasion during the run-up to the Persian Gulf War, and his handling of the situation awarded him with a very high approval rating (Balmer 2008). He also maintained warm and friendly relations with Billy Graham, a Southern Baptist minister whose broadcasted sermons turned him to a celebrity in the 1950, and who had served as a spiritual advisor for Eisenhower and Nixon, but other than that, he “governed mostly as a moderate Republican and relegated Christian conservatives to the margins” (Preston 2010, 231). Nevertheless, he had no choice but to play the religious card again and make issues such as abortion and school prayer central to his 1992 reelection campaign. He also, surprisingly, gained support of Robertson Christian Coalition which sought to solidify its control of the Republican Party. Conservative positions were even more crucial for evangelical support given the fact that the Democrats have, for the first time in history, presented a ticket that featured two Southern Baptists, Bill Clinton and Al Gore. Nevertheless, Bush received only 38 percent of the popular vote. The majority of evangelicals did vote for him, but the percentage was almost twenty points lower than in the previous election (Williams 2010, 232). Clinton’s eloquence in evangelical language apparently helped him gain sympathies of individual evangelical voters, but the Religious Right despised him partly because of his liberal stand on homosexual rights, and mostly because he interrupted their hegemonic access to the White House (Balmer 2008). Though pundits understood Clinton’s victory as a sign of Religious Right’s ineffectiveness, the Christian Coalition realized it presented a great fund-raising potential. The money that Robertson and organization’s executive director Ralph Reed accumulated helped the Christian Right affirm its position within the Republican Party, but money was not all the Coalition was after; they also wanted evangelicals on important political positions. In the 1994 midterm election, the GOP took the House and the Senate for the first time in decades, and by 1997, Republicans won nearly three quarters of senatorial

racism in the South. Reed also engaged on a mission to attract other social conservatives into their cause, and his success made him national sensation. Nevertheless, the Christian Right leaders failed to prevent Clinton's reelection in 1996. Even though they resorted to public attacks of his personal morality – Falwell went so far as to make a movie that accused him of money laundering, drug dealing and murder – Clinton “carried 36 percent of the churchgoing, born-again vote, a surprisingly high percentage for someone who was so unpopular with the Christian Right leaders” (Williams 2010, 241). What was even more frustrating, though, was that Christian conservatives were unable to defeat Clinton even with the impeachment process they propelled against him following the Lewinsky scandal during his second term (Coe and Domke 2006). However, Balmer (2008) argues, even if the Christian Right leaders “failed to dislodge Clinton from office, they probably played at least some role in deciding his successor” (143).

3.3.4 George W. Bush: the Answer to Evangelical Prayers

By the time the younger George Bush began signaling his interest in running for the Republican Presidential nomination, the Christian Right had already established its position within the GOP as a force that no candidate could ignore. He realized that soon enough and built his campaign mostly on direct appeal to the Christian Right which could supply him with crucial support in winning the nomination. For instance, when he announced his candidacy, he assured a group of prominent evangelical pastors that he had heard God's call to run for presidency, and at a meeting of Republican candidates in Iowa, he proclaimed Jesus Christ his favorite political philosopher (Williams 2010). Although such declarations of faith drew a certain amount of ridicule from non-evangelical circles, they appealed to evangelicals. In addition, Bush had what appeared to be an authentic born-again experience. Most of his youth, he had been an irresponsible underachiever with a serious drinking problem, but in the mid-eighties, after a life-changing walk on the beach with Billy Graham, who was summoned by his concerned parents, he discovered Jesus and quit drinking. During his campaign, Bush often referred to his adult religious awakening and presented himself with this “evangelical narrative of personal dissolution and dramatic redemption” (Balmer 2008, 146), and some of the partisan conservatives found it appealing to project his personal story to the nation; if he could rescue himself with the help of Jesus, perhaps he could rescue America as well. Furthermore, the Christian Right supported Bush not only because of his personal religious faith, but also because they feared that if his Republican opponent, John McCain, would win, evangelicals would have very little influence in his administration. With the strong support of

figures like Falwell and Robertson, and with Christian Coalition's own Ralph Reed as his political advisor, Bush won the Republican nomination (Williams 2010). To beat his Democratic opponent, Al Gore, he sought to benefit from Clinton's behavior; he pledged to "cleanse the temple of the Oval Office" and "to restore decency and honor to the White House" (Balmer 2008, 143), which was a direct reference to Clinton's lapses. However, Gore, too, distanced himself from Clinton and came up with his own evangelical strategy. As a church-going Southern Baptist, he earned the fondness of many evangelicals, and his Jewish running mate Joseph Lieberman received plaudits from Falwell and Robertson themselves, but all that could not change the fact that evangelicals believed the Democratic Party to be standing on the wrong side of culture wars. On Election Day, Bush won 74 percent of the evangelical vote, and 84 percent counting only white evangelicals who regularly attended church, but he lost the popular vote and won the Electoral College one, both by a narrow margin, and his victory was not confirmed until the Supreme Court reached its 5-to-4 *Bush v. Gore* decision. Notwithstanding, taking into account that Bush lost 96 percent of the African American and 65 percent of the secular vote to Gore, the strong appeal he had with the Christian Right proved to be crucial for his success (Williams 2010).

3.3.4.1 First Term and the War on Terror

"The George W. Bush presidency, like many new administrations, foundered in the first few months" (Balmer 2008, 147). Pushing the Christian Right agenda has proven to be much more challenging than Bush had anticipated, partly because he did not want to alienate the moderate Republicans, and partly because it was difficult for conservative policies to pass the Senate, which was dominated by Democrats during the first half of his term. He managed to increase funding for abstinence-only sex education and reduce it for stem-cell research, and he issued an executive order that prohibited discrimination against religious organizations applying for federal funding, but those were all only limited measures in pursuing the culture war issues. Although the Christian Right was less than pleased with his performance, they were reluctant to criticize him, mostly because they were facing many problems of their own. The influence of icons such as Robertson and Falwell was in decline, Christian Coalition's membership dropped considerably, and without Clinton to demonize, they found it increasingly difficult to secure funding, so they kept quiet (Williams 2010).

These initial difficulties were abruptly brought to an end by the terrorist attacks of September 11th, 2001. In the struggle to absorb the tragedy, evangelicals turned to Bush for leadership, particularly after Falwell and Robertson went on television two days later and publicly

blamed what has happened on abortionists, feminists, gays, lesbians. Although this attack only made them fall further out of favor, it did in a way reflect the eagerness of evangelicals to locate a new enemy (Balmer 2008); they considered the attacks as an evil assault that should be avenged, and Islam took the place that the Soviet Union held during the Cold War. When Bush proclaimed that America would wage a war on terror, evangelicals welcomed the idea with enthusiasm, and Bush suddenly transformed into a wartime leader. His public approval ratings catapulted. Furthermore, the war on terrorism helped to unify the disintegrated Christian Right and cemented the movement ties to the president in a manner that after 9/11, Bush himself became the de facto leader of the Christian Right (Williams 2010). Taking into account that Bush saw politics largely “as a religious vocation, a calling, and a sacred duty to be performed for God and humankind” (Berggren and Rae 2006, 615) it is hardly surprising that he portrayed the war with Afghanistan as a spiritual battle of good against evil, and justified it abundantly with Bible quotes that were meant to serve as a proof of divine approval of the nation’s course of action. Evangelicals gladly accepted his perceptions, and in led them to support not only the war in Afghanistan, but also the invasion of Iraq in 2003, when “prominent evangelicals argued that the Iraqi dictator was an agent of spiritual darkness” (Williams 2010, 255). When Bush ordered the invasion despite the fact that the United Nations and the international community opposed it, he backed it up with arguments which turned out to be false, claiming that Iraq possessed an enormous supply of weapons of mass destruction, and that Saddam Hussein had close ties to Osama bin Laden. Although his Iraq policies continued to enjoy an unwavering support of evangelicals, the nation’s disillusionment with the war and particularly his deceitful ways of justifying the invasion, put him in a highly vulnerable position before the upcoming elections (Balmer 2008).

3.3.4.2 The 2004 Election and the Emergence of the Values Voters

This made the support of the Christian Right even more imperative than during the 2000 election. However, by the end of 2003, the evangelical activists decided to make same-sex marriage the major issue in 2004, and Bush, who had previously opposed it, but yet endorsed civil unions and even appointed some homosexuals to high office, found himself in front of an ultimatum: he would either endorse the Federal Marriage Amendment (FMA) which would make same-sex marriage unconstitutional, or he could not count on strong support from the Christian Right. Though initially reluctant to do so, Bush eventually had no choice but to comply. The White House endorsement buoyed the evangelical leaders to nevertheless engage

into Bush's reelection campaign (Williams 2010). Karl Rove, his Senior Advisor, was well aware that evangelicals were crucial to Bush's victory in 2000 and that the fact that four millions of them decided to stay home on Election Day had almost cost him the election (Layman and Hussey 2004). Determined not to risk them not showing up again, he joined forces with the evangelical leaders, and an intensive voter mobilization campaign started. He asked evangelical congregations for copies of church directories so they could target individual members, organized a campaign called "I Vote Values" to register the Southern Baptists, the first of its kind in Southern Baptist Convention's 139-year history of advocating the separation of church and state. The Bush campaign even paid for a seminar in which Ralph Reed educated the ministers of the SBC how to register their congregants to vote¹⁹. James Dobson, the founder of Focus on the Family, who had never endorsed a presidential candidate before, endorsed Bush in 2004 (Williams 2010). As Rove hoped, the campaign paid off; evangelical Christians gave Bush an overwhelming majority of their votes. More than three quarter of those who cast their ballots voted for him and also supported Republican congressional candidates, making segments of the county with the largest evangelical populations entirely out of reach for John Kerry, who had made very little effort to reach out for the evangelical votes during his campaign (Smidt, Green, et al. 2007).

The total number of evangelicals who cast their ballots on Election Day increased by 3.5 million between 2000 and 2004 (Williams 2010, 261), which has proven to be crucial for Bush's victory. However, what surprised, even shocked political observers was that "a plurality of respondents to election-day exit polls chose 'moral values' as the most important factor in their voting decision", and this "led many to herald the arrival of the 'values voter' as a new force in American politics" (Layman and Hussey 2004, 2). Of course, so called values voters were not really a new phenomenon; a large majority of them were evangelicals, mobilized by the Christian Right which has since its beginning placed crucial importance in their political activity on moral issues. Nevertheless, the 2004 results sparked many debates

¹⁹ From the perspective of separation of church and state, voter mobilization in churches is of course highly problematic, but the 2004 election has also proven it to be highly effective. Nevertheless, the idea that pastors should engage in political activity, was not new. In 1994, Baptist pastor Rick Scarborough founded an organization called Vision America in order to encourage and mobilize pastors to be politically active. When the 2008 election was approaching, Vision America posted »Guidelines for Political Activities by Churches and Pastors« (Bopp 2007) on its website. The document is basically a summary of parts of the Federal Election Campaign Act and the Internal Revenue Code that apply to churches and pastors. In other words, it offers legal advice on how to perform political activities such as voter registration in a way that makes it impossible for the IRS to accuse them of inappropriate actions and take their tax-exempt status away. Even though Scarborough and other religious leaders claim that their activities are merely educational, the fact alone that they feel the need to publish such a document proves they are aware that what they are doing is in fact forbidden.

whether this massive participation of evangelical values voters to support Bush was to be understood as a result of a long-term party realignment which transformed evangelicals into faithful supporters of the GOP and its Christian Right dominated policies, or was their passionate affiliation with Bush a unique case because it was based on group identification. Whatever the case may be, the fact remains that in 2004, the effective mobilization of evangelical voters resulted not only in Bush's reelection, but also in Republican control of both houses of the Congress. They were already looking forward to potential vacancies on the Supreme Court, and even their position within the nation's popular culture seemed promising after Tim LaHaye's bestselling apocalyptic novel series titled *Left Behind* and the success of Mel Gibson's *Passion of the Christ* in Hollywood (Williams 2010). Indeed, to the Christian Right leaders it looked like Bush's second term could be the beginning of their long-term plan to morally transform America.

Once again, not everything went as planned, and the Christian Right ended up disappointed with Bush's Supreme Court nominations, the FMA died in Senate in 2006, and ultimately, the fact that he had not manage to pass a single socially conservative bill during his second term. Regardless, Bush Junior was an asset to the Christian Right; unlike his father, he never seemed uncomfortable with the fervor of the religious conservatives and was "much more a part of the culture that generated the Christian Right" (Wald and Calhoun-Brown 2011, 224). In fact, as already argued, he became the de facto leader of the movement. In the White House, he surrounded himself with evangelical policy advisors, but "everyone knew that the top evangelical in the White House was the president himself" (Williams 2010, 252). During his time in office, the White House became a place of faith; every cabinet meeting was opened with prayer, and he insisted on a high moral note (Berggren and Rae 2006). Almost half of his staff regularly participated in weekly Bible studies or prayer meetings, organized in the White House (Williams 2010). Evangelical domination in Washington was reflected in policy initiatives "as diverse as the expansion of faith-based government services and the campaign to remove Terri Schiavo's feeding tube" (Wald and Calhoun-Brown 2011, 224). Bush pushed for conservative legislation on culture was issues (albeit not always successful and sometimes against his own will, to abide by the rules of the Christian Right), appointed more evangelicals to the cabinet than any of his predecessors and extended regular access to the White House to evangelical leaders, he limited funds for stem-cell research and publically advocated teaching intelligent design in biology classes, and led a righteous war against an evil enemy (Williams 2010). All this, and more, made Bush's administration the most overtly

religious one the U.S. had ever seen, or, in words of Susan Jacoby (2004b, 14), his administration “engaged in the most assault on the separation of church and state in American history”.

3.4 Evangelical Influence on American Domestic and Foreign Policy

Certain policy consequences of evangelical political influence have already been implicitly mentioned before, but this short chapter highlights a few specific and often debated examples of religiously guided domestic and foreign policy decisions that scholars tend to attribute to the power of the Christian Right and find particularly troubling, either from the perspective of the church-state separation principle or the actual, real life effects these policies produce and the social regress they promote.

3.4.1 Domestic Policy: Reversing Social Progress

From the perspective of the Christian Right, the attempts to change public policy at a national level resulted in failure. Despite their notable political success when it comes to their position within the Republican Party and their electoral power, neither Regan’s nor Bush’s administration brought more than partial results, and none of the major programs advocated by the Christian Right were enacted into law. Considering that what prompted evangelical political activity in the 1970s after decades in isolation was the social progress which stemmed from the civil rights movement, or in evangelical terms, the moral decay of the sixties which needed to be stopped, it is inevitable that political lobbying of the Christian Right resulted in measures that were regressive compared to what had already been accomplished in fields of equality and human rights. As mentioned many times, evangelical political engagement is built around the culture war issues which are all in some way related to rights of certain social groups, be it women homosexuals, or other religious communities. Despite the fact that the Christian Right never saw their positions on these issues become federal law, it nevertheless accomplished a number of smaller victories over the decades of its political rise, all of them reversing the social progress that the sixties had brought.

The Equal Rights Amendment (ERA) that was intended to guarantee equal rights for women and was first introduced in the 1920s, remained one of the central issues that the Christian Right opposed until as late as the beginning of the 1980s, when it failed to receive a sufficient number of ratifications and was thus never adopted. Although the Supreme Court never reversed the *Roe v. Wade* decision, it did accept some narrowing down of reproductive rights,

such as the Partial-Birth Abortion Act in 2003, the first federal measure to prohibit abortion procedure. A step towards generalizing the evangelical understanding of fetuses as human beings with legal rights was made by the Unborn Victims of Violence acts of 2004, and Bush's administration provided additional funds for abstinence-only sex education, which, as already argued, produces results quite opposite to the desired ones, while cutting federal funding clinics offering abortion and the access to legal abortion was discouraged. Funding for stem-cell research was also restricted, despite its great potential for treating many incurable diseases, stating that the government would not support research that destroys human embryos (Williams 2010). Another debate, related to the sanctity of human life, arose when Bush intervened, with the help of his brother Jeb, the governor of Florida, in the euthanasia case of Terri Schiavo, who had been in a vegetative state for fifteen years. Eventually, the Supreme Court upheld the decision of the court in Florida and allowed her husband to remove the feeding tube. The public expressed considerably strong support for the right to die, and the case ended as a political embarrassment for the Bush brothers²⁰ (Jelen 2007). The Federal Marriage Amendment that was to outlaw same-sex marriage died in Senate, but on the other hand, the various attempts to sexual orientation and gender identity to nation anti-discrimination policy all failed as well. In 2007, Bush threatened to veto such a measure had it passed, but it was not necessary because it died in Senate (Wald and Calhoun-Brown 2011). Currently, the decision of whether to allow same-sex marriage remains within the jurisdiction of individual states, and most states do not allow it. This brief set of examples shows how evangelical political activity produces regressive results in the field of equality and human rights.

Another important principle which is under constant attack of the Christian Right is the separation of church and state. A very important related controversy is the question of the role of religion in public education. In the 1960s, two Supreme Court's rulings prohibited the public school officials to force children to participate in organized religious activities such as praying and Bible reading (Boston 2003). The decisions caused a stir among evangelicals, and restoring school prayer has become another of the hot-button issues for the Christian Right, especially during the Reagan presidency. The decisions were never repudiated, but the Congress did give support to religious observance in public schools by passing the 1984

²⁰ Dawkins (2007) points out a paradox about Bush's attitude towards the sanctity of human life. As characteristic for evangelicals, Bush, too, is a strong supporter of capital punishment. When he served as the governor of Texas, of the state which is responsible for more than one third of all death penalties in the United States, he personally approved more executions than any other governor in the history; on average, one man was executed every nine days while Bush was in charge.

Equal Access Act, which compelled high schools to allow extracurricular student groups and clubs to meet on campus property even if they want to form religious associations. In its core, the act was a concession to the school prayer advocates, who again, though not in full measure, got what they wanted (Wald and Calhoun-Brown 2011). Bush generally did not support teacher-led school prayer, but he did, however, strongly support funding for faith-based initiatives. When the bill to provide them with federal financial aid failed to pass in the Senate, he issued an executive order which established the White House Office of Faith-Based and Community Initiatives (Williams 2010). With a second executive order, he created faith-based centers in five cabinet-level departments, and they all worked to remove the obstacles preventing faith-based organizations and houses of worship from performing social services which were eligible for federal funding, such as alcohol abuse counseling or job-training programs. The problem is that all these church-ran programs inevitably contain a fair amount of religion and should therefore not be funded governmental funds (Boston 2003). The issues over the role of religion in public schools and the funding of faith-based organizations feature a series of federal court cases dealing with the interpretation of the First Amendment and the principle of separation of church and state. And even though the Christian Right leaders do not usually get what they want in terms of domestic policy, they do exercise a considerable influence which can be seen in the regressive half-way measure they do accomplish²¹.

3.4.2 Foreign Policy: Fighting Evil and Globalizing Family Values

Among all the religious groups in the United States, except for Jews, evangelicals are the least likely to think that when it comes to global politics, America should mind its own business; around two thirds of them are convinced that it should in fact play a special role in the world. According to George W. Bush's reckoning, "the extension and expansion of compassionate conservatism, liberty, and democracy are not American gifts to the world, they are God's" (Berggren and Rae 2006, 620), so spreading some Christian faith in the process should only be regarded as a benefit. This belief can be explained in the light of the already mentioned special evangelical regard of politics, which is not an end to itself, but a calling, and the

²¹ Aside from political policy lobbying, there are other means through which individual religious extremists attempt to achieve their goals. Although religious violence is typically associated mostly with Islam, the U.S. has seen its share of it. "Since the 1990s alone, the abortion issue alone has produced twenty-five murders and attempted murders of abortion providers, over two hundred bomb and arson attacks, and more than two thousand other acts of violence against medical facilities offering reproductive healthcare" (Wald and Calhoun-Brown 2011, 349). This is not to say that these examples are illustrative for a religious group as a whole. But it does serve as an illustration how religious zeal mixed with high political motivation produces violent outbursts, indifferent of whether the perpetrators are the "evil Muslims" or the God-loving Christians.

means through which to take the country, or in this case, the world, back for God by imposing Christian values on godless people. It can thus be argued that evangelicals do pursue what can be called a faith-based foreign policy agenda, in the same way as their domestic agenda is derived from religious moral values. They have long been concerned with human rights abroad and the global population issues like the HIV, abortion and the use of contraception. Specifically, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict has been one of their most prominent concerns, but the most debated of the relatively recent ones is of course the war on terror (den Dulk 2007).

After the invasion of Iraq, many saw the strong evangelical support of the war as something more than merely a consequence of Bush's claims that Saddam Hussein possessed weapons of mass destructions, especially after it became clear that those claims were completely unfounded. It also seems unlikely that the evangelicals were after the Iraqi oil supplies. However, the unwavering support of American military presence in the Middle East can be explained with a combination of two basic beliefs of evangelical faith. One is the literal understanding of the Bible, and the other one is that Jesus will soon return to Earth. According to the scriptures, Babylon, which lied on what is today the territory of Iraq, is the source of all evil and therefore eventually destroyed. In his *Left Behind* series, which, among other thing, prepares the reader for the apocalypse, Tim LaHaye proclaimed Iraq as the focus point of events preceding the second coming of Jesus (Hitchens 2010). Thus, for the evangelicals, the military intervention in Iraq represented an opportunity to reclaim the Muslim world back for their Christian God²². The implications of such beliefs, especially when they are held by a mad who has the power and the resources to invade virtually any country in the world in the name of fighting the evil forces, are clearly highly problematic. The implications can be equally problematic when those beliefs are held by people on important military positions, like for instance in the case of now retired Lieutenant General William Boykin who is currently the executive vice president of the Family Research Council. Under the administration of George W. Bush, Boykin was first put in charge of hunting down Osama bin Laden and later transferred to Iraq in order to participate in the

²² The belief that Christians have an obligation to establish a moral government on earth before the second coming of Jesus is normally associated with Christian Reconstructionism, a theological movement within evangelical Christianity. It advocates measures as extreme as abolition of democracy and re-imposition of slavery, defines religious pluralism as a heresy punishable by death and also predicts severe punishments for "deviants" such as homosexual, adulterers, blasphemers, astrologers and even incorrigible children. Although this was a fringe movement particularly active through the 1980s and 90s when it engaged in terrorizing abortion clinics, the principles on which it was based did exert some influence on the leaders of the Religious Right (Wald and Calhoun-Brown 2011, 349).

reform of the Abu Ghraib prison in Baghdad. It has been rumored that what he was really in charge of was implementing violent interrogation techniques developed in Guantanamo. However, a controversy erupted after he held a series of speeches in different evangelical churches, calling upon the members to become the warriors of God's kingdom, stating that the Christian Right is an integral part of the world on terror and that the U.S. military is actually nothing but a spiritual armed force that will overcome all enemies with God's help. During the Iraq invasion he organized a special two-day training for priests of the Baptist Church, called FAITH Force Multiplier, designed to improve combat readiness through strengthening of faith among soldiers. Given that the idea came from the U.S. Department of Defense itself, it is not surprising that protests against such imposition of religion in the army fell on deaf ears. Baigent (2010) sees all this as a gradual indoctrination of the armed forces who mostly fight in the Muslim Middle East into a very narrow religious view and warns that this will certainly trigger some serious problems. Considering the lately increasing amount of reports about U.S. soldiers' brutal treatment of the Muslims, it seems that the problems Baigent was talking about had perhaps already started.

Aside from war situations, evangelical approach to foreign policy is largely derived from the domestic one. Buus and Herman (2003) called it »globalizing family values«. Generally, that means that issues that the Christian Right pursues in the U.S. – opposing abortion, reproductive freedom, contraception and women's rights, for example – have also been integrated into the evangelical foreign policy agenda (den Dulk 2007). But these so called moral issues have quite a different effect if enacted in societies battling with the ill effects of exaggerated population growth and HIV epidemic. In fact, they are outright deadly and far from moral. Admittedly, some of the examples presented in this section are rather extreme and should not be generalized on the entire evangelical community, but the purpose of it is to illustrate the type of devastating consequences that a combination of great political power and strong evangelical beliefs can produce.

3.5 Evangelicals after Bush: New Developments and Future Perspectives

During the last two years of the George W. Bush presidency, the coalition that the Christian Right formed with the Republican Party began threatening to fall apart. The war in Iraq turned out sour, Bush failed to enact the evangelical agenda on social issues and to boot, a series of scandals shook the GOP and the Christian Right, including Ted Haggard's homosexual affair with a male prostitute and alleged drug abuse. Evangelicals began to distance themselves

from the president, especially after his bad handling of the hurricane Katrina, and the young evangelicals under the age of thirty were the first ones to leave his coalition (Williams 2010). A growing division within American evangelicalism could be traced between the traditional conservative Christian Right leaders and the new generation whose interests in social justice, environment and international development placed it neither right nor left on the political spectrum (Malloy 2009). This diversification within the evangelical movement before the 2008 presidential election resulted in a fractured Republican religious coalition and “opened the door to a new alliance between the Democratic Party and the ‘new evangelical’ Christians who identify as politically moderate or progressive” (Bernstein and Jakobsen 2010, 1024). This younger generation, born after the Cold War, had little regard for figures like Falwell and Robertson and even some traditional culture war issues. While attention was given to preventing abortion and limiting certain homosexual rights, for instance, they generally had no problems with the religious and cultural pluralism of their generation and mostly concerned themselves with service to the poor in the U.S. as well as abroad and the issues of climate change and global warming. The “old guard” of evangelical leaders turned a deaf ear to these emerging issues. Falwell, just a few months before he died in 2007, admonished the evangelicals concerned with environmentalism, calling it the “Satan’s attempt to redirect the church’s primary focus” (Williams 2010, 271). However, concern with these issues brought the new evangelicals closer to the political left, forming in a way a part of what some authors, including Lambert (2003), call the Religious Left. Although complete party realignment was unlikely due to the still persistent distrust for the Democratic Party as such, the enthusiasm with the GOP was at one of the lowest points ever, which gave Senator Barack Obama the perfect opportunity to try and siphon some of the evangelical votes for the upcoming election. He seemed to have a gift in framing liberal policies in the language of faith, he publicly told a story of his adult conversion to Christianity, although he was not an evangelical, but a member of the African American Liberal Church in Chicago. He believed that the Democratic Party only stood a chance in competing against the Christian Right if it found a way to welcome religion in political life. He began, as did Hillary Clinton, travelling to evangelical venues and churches that the Democrats had previously ignored, and even encouraged a Democratic platform that would strive to reduce the need for abortions. Although this was new for Democratic presidential candidates, Bernstein and Jakobsen (2010) argue that these shifts have never challenged the dominant position of Christianity in U.S. politics; for instance, Obama's supporters passionately denied rumors he was a Muslim, not even asking themselves why that should pose a problem in the first place.

The Christian Right on the other hand was dealing with its own problems. Divisions within the movement made it difficult to agree on a presidential candidate. John McCain, who voted against the FMA when he was a Senator and even publicly insulted the Religious Right in 2000, consequently had difficulties winning their support. He was eventually nominated after choosing Sarah Palin, a passionate pro-life evangelical governor from Alaska, as his running mate. As questionable as Palin's political skills may have been, she did appeal to the conservative evangelical community (Williams 2010). Although, as Malloy (2009, 357) argues, the "2008 presidential race reversed the usual polarizations, with John McCain, a non-evangelical Republican with a history of criticizing the Christian Right, and Barack Obama, a Democrat who referred regularly to religious and spiritual imagery", the election results brought little changes in terms of evangelical voting behavior. McCain won 73 percent of the evangelical vote, and 80 percent of those white evangelicals that attend church regularly. The younger evangelicals, too, strongly supported him, with only 32 of them voting for Obama. Despite all the speculations that after Bush, the political power of the Christian Right would come to an end, it has once again proven that its importance to the republican party might even be increasing; more evangelicals voted for McCain, in spite of everything, as they did for Bush in 2004 (Williams 2010).

Another development that cannot be overlooked when speaking of the evangelical influence on American politics is the emergence of the Tea Party movement in 2009, soon after Obama took office. The Tea Party emerged in a void caused by the 2008 election when the Religious Right seemed to lack some general direction. Some conservatives were still resentful because of the McCain nomination and the GOP as a whole was lamenting its electoral defeat (Zernike 2010). Although the movement was in its essence based on the opposition to the tax policy and largely all legislative proposals of Barack Obama rather than on their positions on specific social issues, it nevertheless unites those who generally believe not even the Republican Party is conservative enough. Even though the analysts have tended to explain "this movement's endurance as largely a secular phenomenon driven by economic angst with only haphazard tie-ins to the church /.../ the truth is that evangelical impulses inspire the Tea Party" (Dochuk 2012). Demographically, the members of the movement are almost uniformly white and generally better educated, economically better off and older than the average population (Zernike 2010). Aside from their hostility to Obama's economic reforms, Tea Partiers' unity is defined by their shared concern over the direction in which America is headed. Their general complaints are that the government is too strong, the taxes too high and the level of American

patriotism way to low, but they do not offer very elaborate solutions to these problems. They are Republicans, they want religion to play a prominent role in U.S. politics, and they have reinserted the born-again politics into the electoral process, in an effort to fight against liberalism. Though not so focused on social issues, their conservatism is compatible with the principles of the Christian Right to an extent that it can be argued that the Tea Party is more or less just a different name for the same cause, though with minor modifications. The emergence of the movement further polarized the GOP between the right wing conservative unified in the tea party and more moderate Republicans, including the new evangelicals mentioned above. This was manifested during the latest Republican primaries, when Tea Party's strong support for ultra-conservative candidate Rick Perry made the process of nomination very difficult. The rest of the Republicans considered him too conservative, and the Tea Partiers would not support Mitt Romney because he was not conservative enough (and a Mormon to boot), so for a long while it seemed that the real presidential race before the 2012 election was the one within the GOP, and not between the Republicans and the Democrats. How the election turns out in terms of evangelical participation remains to be seen, but what the Tea Party has already made evident is that evangelical conservatives will apparently continue to find ways to influence American Politics, leaving pundits "wondering aloud just how it is that born-again politics continue to be the rule, rather than the exception, in modern American society" (Dochuk 2012, 21).

CONCLUSION

The rise of political activism in the United States, beginning in the 1970s with the emergence of the Christian Right, has been a source of apprehension and concern for many pundits, scholars and political observers, mostly because of the destructive potential that religion can have for a democracy. Mixing religious zeal into governmental matters tends to produce polarization and political extremism, infecting politics with fanaticism, weakening the stability of the government, and ultimately undermining the democracy. This destructive potential of religion stems from its emphasis on fundamental social and moral values, issues that tend to defy objective reasoning and are not easily subjected to compromise solutions. Furthermore, religious values, when used as criteria for politicians and activists in determining public policy, can result in rigidity, insistence on dogmatism and utter contempt for everyone not willing to accept, or better yet, adopt their view. Those who not only disregard, but oppose their positions, are often regarded at least as misguided, if not plain evil. Religious groups are prone to claims of possessing the ultimate truth and have little regard for alternatives. In its mildest form, this shows as individual intolerance and outbursts of uncivil behavior, but it can escalate to acts of violence like physical assaults and attacks on people or property, and in extreme situations, to systematic violence against social groups or entire nations.

To a certain extent, these negative consequences of religious meddling with politics can be traced in the case of American evangelical Christians. However, the research question of whether their political activism represents a violation of church-state separation principle remains to be answered, and several things need to be taken into account.

First, religion has always played a special role in American society. Since its founding, the religious pluralism in United States, albeit initially mostly relating to various Protestant sects, inspired the principle of freedom of religion. Freedom itself was in fact the basis on which America, the world's first democracy, was built. Evangelical claims that it was established as a Christian nation seem entirely unfounded after examining the historical and legal documents of the founding era, even if the majority of the population was and remains not merely Christian, but also overwhelmingly religious. Had the founding fathers really intended to build a kingdom for God, as the evangelicals now claim and wish to accomplish, the founding documents and the principles they contain would have been considerably different.

Second, the specific form of American civil religion in which references to a ubiquitous, unidentified God are commonplace, offered an excellent starting point for the successful infiltration of evangelical Christianity into political discourse. It was relatively simple to replace the God of civil religion with an evangelical Christian God who demands to reclaim the increasingly morally depraved nation. This way, religious affairs easily became involved with political developments, and the political activism of evangelicals oriented towards the fulfillment of God's supposed will.

Third, evangelical attempts at political action encountered little legal restrictions, since the First Amendment to the United States Constitution explicitly protects religion from governmental interference, while the non-interference of religious interests in secular matters is, if anything, merely implicitly assumed, but nowhere explicitly mentioned. Thus, facing a potential attempt of limiting their political activities, it is much easier for evangelicals (and other religious groups as well) to refer to their rights deriving from the principle of religious freedom, to which the Supreme Court occasionally grants legal exemptions, as it is for secularists or pundits to argue that religious activists are violating the principle of separation of church and state.

Fourth, even in specific cases when violation can be argued incontrovertibly, such as voter registration in churches, it often seems like the authorities simply do not care. The government has some power to discourage political activities in churches by, for example, tightening the tax-exempt status regulations and thus making it more difficult for the clergy to engage in such activities. However, due to the voting power of the evangelical community, this is often not in the best interest of politicians. On the contrary, many of them try very hard to mobilize the evangelical voters in order to obtain a sufficient number of votes for their victory, often regardless of the measures that have to be taken, the promises that need to be made, and the principles they violate. Although the various tactics to attract evangelical voters are, as seen, way more elaborated on the Republican side, certain Democrats like Obama also attempt to appeal to them. And the evangelicals, on the other side, are willing to do whatever it takes to get the candidate that promises to enact their conservative agenda elected.

To conclude, evangelical political activity does in many aspects violate the principle of separation of church and state. This is even more evident when the situation is evaluated from the European perspective because government endorsement of religion such as can be found in the United States is unimaginable; even though many countries still have officially

established on this side of the Atlantic, such encroachment of religion on public sphere tends to be regarded as problematic, whereas most Americans welcome it as a source of moral values. Whatever the perception may be, the mere violation of one of the core principles of the American democracy is problematic, yet abstract. What is truly troubling, however, are the specific negative consequences that such violation produces. Some have been highlighted in this thesis, and many more could be found. Evangelical conservative, regressive social agenda that they often manage to at least partly enact due to their considerable political power has a strong inhibitory effect on the development of human rights. This is not only true in the case of American homosexuals, women, and in some cases, everyone who does not share evangelicals values. Through their involvement in foreign policy, the negative impact of their beliefs is spreading throughout the world.

There has been a considerable amount of talk recently about the new generation of evangelicals which assumes more moderate views of the world and current social issues. Although this is generally to be considered a positive shift within the evangelical movement, the actual effects of the changes should not be overstated, because they could be merely the result of extensive media coverage of the issue after Bush's re-election. If nothing else, the Tea Party movement has shown that at least in most evangelicals are still extremely conservative, as well as strong politically active, which remains a problem that America seems unable or perhaps unwilling to tackle.

Summary in Slovene Language

Pričujoče magistrsko delo preučuje vlogo evangelijskih kristjanov v ameriški politiki. Sledi argumentu, da se je evangelicizem v zadnjih nekaj desetletjih preobrazil iz pasivne religijske skupnosti v mogočno politično silo, ki ima precejšen vpliv znotraj republikanske stranke, s tem pa bistveno vpliva tudi na ameriško politiko kot celoto. Konservativni nazori evangelijskih kristjanov, utemeljeni na dobesednem razumevanju Biblije in prepričanju o njeni nezmotljivosti, imajo pomemben vpliv na njihov odnos do družbenih vprašanj kot sta denimo legalnost istospolnih porok in splava. V primerjavi z ostalimi religijskimi skupinami so precej bolj politično angažirani, saj stremijo k temu da bi tradicionalne religijske vrednote razširili v širšo družbo. Zahvaljujoč svoji številčnosti trenutno predstavljajo eno najmočnejših volilnih skupin in nemalo je argumentov, ki podpirajo domnevo, da so ravno oni odločilno pripomogli k dvakratni izvolitvi Georga W. Busha za predsednika. Dejstvo, da ima neka skrajno konservativna religijska skupina tako močan vpliv na politiko v državi, ki velja za zibelko demokracije in sekularizma, je zaskrbljujoče, prihajajoče predsedniške volitve pa so vprašanje ločitve cerkve od države ponovno postavile v središče pozornosti.

Ker gre za aktualno temo, si magistrsko delo prizadeva predstaviti čim bolj celosten pregled odnosa med religijo in vlado v Združenih državah, poleg tega pa izpostavi nekaj konkretnih posledic vdiranja religije v politično sfero. Raziskovalno vprašanje, ki je vodilo nastajanje magistrskega dela, je, ali je mogoče trditi, da politični aktivizem ameriških evangelijskih kristjanov predstavlja kršitev načela ločitve cerkve od države. Slednje namreč predstavlja eno osnovnih načel Ameriške demokracije, vendar mu evangelijski kristjani odločno nasprotujejo. Pri iskanju odgovora je potrebno upoštevati nekatere posebnosti ameriškega religijskega življenja, kot je denimo civilna religija – še toliko bolj, če je vprašanje obravnavano z evropskega vidika.

Prvi večji vsebinski sklop v magistrskem delu je posvečen institucionalnemu okviru odnosa med religijo in državo in se začne s pregledom obravnave religije v ameriški ustavi. Prvi amandma navaja, da kongres ne sme sprejeti nobenega zakona, ki bi se nanašal na ustanovitev religije ali prepovedoval svobodno izpovedovanje vere. Določilo, ki se deli na klavzulo o ustanovitvi religije in klavzulo o svobodnem izpovedovanju vere, je še vedno vir številnih razhajanj, in mnogi strokovnjaki za ameriško ustavno pravo opozarjajo, da si dve religijski klavzuli pravzaprav nasprotujeta. V skladu s klavzulo o svobodnem izpovedovanju vere je vrhovno sodišče pogosto primorano odobriti izjeme za določene religijske prakse, kar je

mogoče razumeti tudi kot kršitev načela nevtralnosti med javno in religijsko sfero, ki jo določa klavzula o ustanovitvi religije. Povedano drugače, slednja pravzaprav prepoveduje, kar prva zahteva, iz česar izhajajo številni pravni spori. Problematično je predvsem to, da je bil osnovni namen prvega amandmaja preprečiti vmešavanje države v avtonomijo religije, kar je ob upoštevanju zgodovinskega konteksta sicer razumljivo, vendar pa dejstvo, da eksplicitno ne prepoveduje tudi vmešavanja religije v državne zadeve, danes evangelijskim kristjanom bistveno olajša upravičevanje njihovega političnega aktivizma. V skladu z njihovo interpretacijo Jeffersonove prispodoba zidu, ki ločuje cerkev od države, deluje le v eni smeri in nikakor ne izključuje vladanja v skladu s krščanskimi načeli, saj naj bi bile Združene države ustanovljene kot krščanski narod. Evangelijskim kristjanom pri uveljavljanju religijskih vrednot v politiki pomaga tudi ameriška civilna religija, ki se pogosto sklicuje na vseprisotnega, neimenovanega boga. Ta je v retoriki ameriških politikov tako rekoč nepogrešljiv, hkrati pa izjemno priročen pri utemeljevanju popularne trditve, da je bila Amerika ustanovljena kot krščanski narod. Čeprav je res, da je protestantizem vedno bil (in še vedno je) prevladujoča religija v Združenih državah, in da so temu primerno nekatera krščanska načela neizogibno zaznamovala tudi sekularne politične in kulturne institucije (Bernstein in Jakobsen 2010), pa ne gre zanemariti dejstva, da je Amerika vendarle bila ustanovljena na načelu religijske svobode.

Preden se je mogoče posvetiti obravnavi politične aktivnosti evangelijskih kristjanov, ki je predmet zanimanja magistrskega dela, je potrebno natančneje opredeliti pojem evangelicizma ter izpostaviti nekatera pomembna družbena vprašanja, ki jih evangelijski kristjani postavljajo v osrčje svojih političnih prizadevanj. Evangelicizem je kompleksen fenomen, za katerega v znanstveni literaturi ni mogoče najti splošno veljavne definicije. Sam izraz izhaja iz grške besede *evangelion*, ki pomeni dobro novico v krščanskem izročilu. V času reformacije se je pridevnik "evangelijski" nanašal na vse protestante, saj je bila osnovna polemika in gonilna sila reformacije vprašanje, ali bi bilo potrebno najvišjo religijsko avtoriteto iskati neposredno v tekstih evangelija, ali interpretacijo le-tega še naprej prepuščati skorumpirani Rimskokatoliški cerkvi. Danes se raba izraza, predvsem angleško govorečih deželah, večinoma nanaša na religijska gibanja, ki so v obliki različnih verskih prepородov te dežele zajela v osemnajstem in devetnajstem stoletju (Raschke 2009). Ameriški evangelijski kristjani pravzaprav po mnenju mnogih strokovnjakov izhajajo iz skupine fundamentalističnih protestantov, ki se je v začetku dvajsetega stoletja izoblikovala v sporu med različnimi protestantskimi denominacijami glede nezmotljivosti Biblije. Tabor, ki se je zavzemal za

obravnavo biblijske vsebine kot absolutne, dobesedne resnice, se je kmalu sam oklical za fundamentaliste, in se tako ločil od svojih nasprotnikov, ki so v Bibliji videli predvsem zgodovinski vir ali zbirko polresničnih zgodb, nikakor pa ne absolutne resnice. Konflikt je dobil javen značaj s polemiko o poučevanju evolucijske teorije v javnih šolah in se za fundamentaliste končal kot politični polom, zato so se za nekaj dolgih desetletjih skoraj popolnoma umaknili iz javnega življenja. V sredini dvajsetega stoletja so namenoma opustili oznako »fundamentalisti«, ki je po blamaži dobila slabšalni prizvok, in prevzeli ime »evangeljski« (Williams 2010; Ellingsen 2007), v strokovni literaturi pa sta oba izraza še vedno pogosto zamenljiva.

V pričujočem delu se raba izraza evangeljski kristjani oz. evangeličani nanaša na skupino več kot štiridesetih različnih protestantskih denominacij oziroma 45.000 cerkva, ki so združene pod okriljem ameriške Nacionalne zveze evangeljskih kristjanov (*National association of Evangelicals* ali NAE). Povezujejo jih štiri osnovne skupne značilnosti ki so, poleg že omenjenega prepričanja o nezmotljivosti Biblije in njenega dobesednega branja, še poudarjanje konverzije oziroma ponovnega rojstva s sprejetjem Jezusa kot osebnega odrešenika (zaradi česar se mnogi evangeljski kristjani po tem, ko sprejmejo Jezusa, okličejo za »born-again« oziroma ponovno rojene evangeličane); aktivizem in misijonarske dejavnosti skozi katere želijo svoja prepričanja razširiti na širšo družbo; ter krucicentriem ali poudarjanje Jezusovega trpljenja na križu ter njegovega žrtvovanja za človeštvo (Harris 2007). Navedene značilnosti močno zaznamujejo njihov pogled na svet in se odražajo pri družbenih vprašanjih, ki jih evangeličani postavljajo v središče t.i. kulturne vojne, s katero označujejo spopad nasprotujočih si predstav o moralnih temeljih družbe. Večina jih izhaja iz t.i. tradicionalnih družinskih vrednot. Evangeličani smatrajo družino za najpomembnejšo družbeno institucijo, ampak samo pod pogojem, da jo je mogoče po njihovih lastnih kriterijih označiti za tradicionalno; sestavljati jo morata heteroseksualna starša, pri čemer je mož glava družine in po možnosti njen materialni oskrbovalec ter prevzema nalogo oblikovanja in uveljavljanja pravil vedenja za otroke, mati pa je medtem tista, ki skrbi za gospodinjstvo in njihovo vzgojo (Dowland 2009). V skladu s tem odločno nasprotujejo pravicam istospolno usmerjenih, saj naj bi ti predstavljali neposredno grožnjo družini, pa tudi ženski enakopravnosti. Njihova stališča so podkrepjena z dobesednim branjem Biblije, ki homoseksualnost po njihovih trditvah obsoja kot ponižujočo in nenaravno strast, ženskam pa zapoveduje vlogo ponižne moške služabnice. Na področje pravic žensk posegajo tudi z nasprotovanjem pravici do splava, ki ga dojemajo kot umor nedolžnega človeškega bitja, saj

se po njihovem mnenju življenje začne že ob spočetju. V imenu t.i. svetosti človeškega življenja nasprotujejo še evtanaziji in raziskavam izvornih celic, sicer pa tudi ko ne gre za pravice zarodkov načeloma nasprotujejo odkritjem moderne znanosti. Odločno zavračajo Darwinovo evolucijsko teorijo ter si prizadevajo na njeno mesto v učnem načrtu uvrstiti kreacionizem in molitev, medtem pa nimajo nikakršnih zadržkov do moderne znanosti ko gre za uporabo tehnologije. Najboljši primer tega je ameriški televangelizem, katerega glavni cilj je seveda širjenje njihovih konzervativnih stališč v družbo in s tem mobilizacija čimvečjega števila potencialnih somišljenjakov k politični aktivnosti.

Politični vzpon evangelijskih kristjanov se je začel v poznih sedemdesetih letih dvajsetega stoletja, predvsem kot odziv na družbene spremembe, ki jih je prineslo gibanje za državljanske pravice desetletje pred tem. Konzervativni evangličani so dogodke v šestdesetih razmeli kot jasen znak ameriškega moralnega propada, ki ga je bilo potrebno na vsak način ustaviti. Pojavljati so se začele številne evangeličanske politične organizacije, ki so si za osnovni cilj zadale ponovno uveljavitev krščanskih vrednot v družbi, ki je več kot očitno izgubila svoj moralni kompas. Ena prvih je bila t.i. Moralna večina, katere nastanek je javno razglasil častiti Jerry Falwell leta 1979 (Harding 2009). Falwell, ki je preminil leta 2007, je bil baptistični pastor in priljubljen televizijski evangelist navdušujočih retoričnih sposobnosti in skrajnih nazorov. Pod njegovim vodstvom je Moralna večina hitro postala vodilna organizacija v okviru širšega gibanja krščanskih konservativcev. Poleg zavzemanja za ukinjanje pravic istospolno usmerjenih in pravice do splava ter za ponovno uvedbo molitve v javnih šolah in prepoved spolne vzgoje, so pomembno vplivali tudi na predsedniške volitve leta 1980, ko so javno podporo in s pomočjo registracije volivcev v cerkvah bistveno pripomogli k izvolitvi Ronalda Reagana (Smith 2010, 74). Vendar pa je Falwell kljub vsemu predstavljal ekstremno vejo evangelijskega krščanstva, s katere nazori in predvsem metodami se številni niso strinjali (Dowland 2009, 628). Po desetletju obstoja je bila organizacija razpuščena zaradi velikega padca javne podpore in posledičnih finančnih težav, vendar so na njeno mesto kmalu stopile nove evangeličanske organizacije in interesne skupine, med katerimi je vsaj še desetletje najpomembnejšo vlogo igrala Krščanska koalicija (*Christian Coalition*), ki jo je leta 1989 po svojem spodletelem poskusu nominacije za republikanskega predsedniškega kandidata ustanovil Pat Robertson. Z denarjem, ki ga je zbral med kampanjo, je za izvršnega direktorja svoje organizacije najel Ralpa Reeda, pod čigar vodstvom je organizacija do sredine devetdesetih nanovačila skoraj dva milijona članov in postala nepogrešljiva za kandidate, ki so si želeli republikanske nominacije (Wald in Calhoun-Brown

2011). Krščanska koalicija si je v veliki meri prizadevala za enake cilje kot Moralna večina, na seznam pa dodala še nekaj novih, kot je denimo ohranjanje verskih simbolov na javnih mestih, izpodbijanje evolucijske teorije ter ameriško pomoč Izraelu. V devetdesetih je igrala ključno vlogo znotraj krščanske desnice in pomembno vplivala na politične odločitve republikanske stranke tako na lokalni kot tudi na državni ravni. Ko je leta 2001 Robertson zapustil stranko je sicer izgubila precej tega vpliva, vendar še naprej deluje pod novim vodstvom in pogosto sodeluje s številnimi drugimi evangeličanskimi organizacijami (Boston 2003). Večina jih je nastala že v osemdesetih, in prav te so odločilno pripomogle k preboju nekaterih pomembnih evangelijskih verskih voditeljev v politično areno, posledično pa tudi k vzponu krščanske desnice kot politične sile.

Čeprav je danes povezava med konservativnimi načeli evangelijskih kristjanov, krščansko desnico in republikansko stranko že dodobra uveljavljena, pa temu ni bilo vedno tako. Večina evangeličanov je namreč imela dolgo tradicijo pripadnosti demokratski stranki (Williams 2010). Prvi znaki prihajajoče strankarske prerazporeditve so se začeli kazati leta 1960, ko je demokratska stranka za predsedniško kandidato nominirala Johna F. Kennedyja. Evangelijski kristjani so prvič združili moči v podporo republikanskemu kandidatu, da bi na ta način preprečili izvolitev katoliškega predsednika, in ko jim je spodletelo, so se postopoma začeli osredotočati na zgoraj omenjena družbena vprašanja. Republikanska stranka, ki se je v tistem času soočala s precejšnjim upadom v volilni bazi in številnimi porazi, je v novo prebujajoči se konservativni koaliciji videla potencialno rešitev svojih problemov, zato so se njeni politični strategji aktivno lotili mobilizacije evangelijskih kristjanov, katerih število je hitro in strmo naraščalo. Ker je demokratska stranka postajala vse bolj liberalna, je hitro postalo jasno, da je najboljši način za pridobitev evangelijskih kristjanov močan premik v desno; s tem so se v stranki združili večinoma sekularni fiskalni konservativci, ki so predstavljali staro volilno bazo, in predani kristjani izrazito konservativnih družbenih stališč, ki so postopoma začeli prevzemati nadzor (Hacker and Pierson 2005). Čeprav se je vse skupaj začelo kot strategija za pridobitev dodatnih glasov na volitvah, je republikanska stranka kmalu postala v veliki meri odvisna od podpore evangeličanov, kar ji je onemogočilo da bi se distancirala od njihov zahtev, zaradi katerih so se njeni stari volivci v svoji stranki vedno slabše počutili; njihova podpora je upadla, in odvisnost stranke od krščanske desnice se je še povečala. Za republikanske predsedniške kandidate je od sredine osemdesetih dalje postalo nemogoče, da bi poskušali prezreti politične zahteve evangelijskih kristjanov.

Kljub temu pa prvi izrazito evangelijski predsednik ni bil republikanec, ampak demokrat Jimmy Carter, ki je na volitvah leta 1976 zmagal prav zaradi močne podpore evangelijskih kristjanov. Tudi sam se je namreč prišteval med »ponovno rojene« in je o tem v času kampanje pogosto javno spregovoril. Ker je zavzemal enaka stališča kot evangelijski kristjani, so ti domnevali, da jim bo njegova izvolitev prinesla uresničitev njihovih prizadevanj, vendar se je kmalu po volitvah izkazalo da je Carter kljub vsemu trdno verjel v načelo ločitve cerkve od države, zato političnih odločitev ni želel sprejemati na podlagi svojih religijskih prepričanj. Čeprav niso dosegli zelenega, je bil predsedniški mandat Jimmyja Carterja za evangelijske kristjane vseeno nekakšna prelomna točka, saj je služil kot katalizator za prodor krščanske desnice na politično prizorišče (Flint and Porter 2005). Njeni razočarani voditelji so pred volitvami leta 1980 napeli vse sile, da bi Carterja spravili z oblasti in pri tem podprli republikanskega kandidata Ronalda Reagana. Njegove verske kvalifikacije sicer niso bile niti približno primerljive s Carterjevimi; ni se redno udeleževal verskih obredov, tako on kot njegova žena sta bila ločenca, kratek čas je bil igralec v moralno sprijenem Hollywoodu in njegova politična zgodovina ni kazala nikakšnih znakov zavezanosti socialnim vprašanjem, ki so evangelijske kristjane tako skrbela - prej nasprotno. Kljub temu pa je znal zelo lepo artikulirati politično vizijo ki jih je privlačila, in medtem ko jim je odkrito dvoril, je izrazil podporo molitvi v javnih šolah, obsojal tako splav kot homoseksualnost ter javno podvomil v teorijo evolucije in se zavzel za uvrstitev kreacionizma v učni načrt. Prav tako je pozdravil novo krščansko desnico kot partnerja v svoji koaliciji, kar je gibanju prineslo razpoznavnost, njemu pa dovoljšnje število glasov da je na volitvah porazil Carterja (Ribuffo 2006). Vendar je tudi v tem primeru kmalu postalo jasno, da uresničevanje političnega programa evangeličanov ni bila ena njegovih prednostnih nalog, saj je oznanil, da se bo najprej posvetil šepajočemu gospodarstvu in konfliktu s Sovjetsko zvezo. Ko si zaradi prihajajočih vmesnih volitev le ni smel privoščiti nezadovoljstva evangeličanov, je napovedal svojo podporo dvema predlaganima ustavnima spremembama; ena naj bi prepovedala splav, druga pa bi ponovno uvedla molitev v javnih šolah. Kongres je sicer obe zavrnil, vendar si je Reagan zaradi svojih prizadevanj vendarle pridobil dolgotrajno hvaležnost evangeličanske skupnosti. Leta 1984 je bila njihova podpora Reaganu še močnejša kot na prejšnjih volitvah, vendar je tudi drugi mandat prinesel razočaranje za evangeličane, saj niso uspeli uresničiti nobenega od svojih glavnih ciljev. Je pa Reagan dal evangeličanom simbolično potrditev in samozavest za nadaljnje uresničevanje svojih političnih ciljev (Martin 2004). Še preden je zapustil Belo hišo, je znotraj evangeličanske skupnosti dosegel skoraj status nekakšne ikone (Balmer 2008, 124).

Sledila so leta razočaranj. Pat Robertson, ki ga je podpirala večina evangelijskih kristjanov, ni uspel dobiti republikanske predsedniške nominacije, in George H. W. Bush, ki je v času Reaganovega mandata opravljal podpredsedniško funkcijo in naposled leta 1988 zmagal, ni imel veliko posluha za njihove zahteve. Kljub temu so ga na volitvah podprli, ker pač niso imeli druge izbire, a je bilo že od začetka jasno, da Bush starejši nikakor ne deli njihove vneme za uresničevanje konservativnih politik. Pred naslednjimi volitvami je bil sicer primoran pokazati nekaj zanimanja za vprašanja splava in molitve v šolah, a je kljub načelni evangelijski podpori vseeno prepričljivo izgubil (Williams 2010). Na predsedniški stolček se je za dolgih osem let povzpel Bill Clinton, ki ga je krščanska desnica naravnost prezirala in se ga na vse pretege trudila očrniti, vendar jim ga ni uspelo spraviti iz Bele hiše niti po škandalu z Monico Lewinsky; je pa krščanska desnica nedvomno odigrala vlogo pri določanju njegovega naslednika (Balmer 2008).

George W. Bush je bil v mnogih pogledih uresničitev upanj evangelijskih kristjanov. Pogosto je javno poudarjal svojo globoko vero in izkušnjo ponovnega rojstva, ko je sprejel Jezusa za odrešenika in se z njegovo pomočjo izvil iz krempljev alkoholne odvisnosti. V svoji izrazito religijski retoriki je šel nekoč celo tako daleč, da je Jezusa imenoval za svojega najljubšega političnega filozofa (Layman and Hussey 2004). Čeprav je predsednik po tesnem izidu volitev postal šele z razsodbo vrhovnega sodišča, je bilo očitno, da brez podpore evangelijskih kristjanov ne bi imel možnosti za zmago. V prvih mesecih sta se tako Bush kot krščanska desnica spopadala s precejšnjimi problemi, vendar se je po terorističnih napadih 11. septembra situacija povsem spremenila. Bush je oznanil vojno proti terorizmu, ki so jo evangeličani sprejeli z velikim navdušenjem, in postal *de facto* vodja krščanske koalicije. Slednja ga je od takrat dalje podpirala pri vseh odločitvah, tudi pri invaziji na Irak, in Bush jim je hvaležnost vračal z zavzemanjem za njihova, in konec koncev lastna, prepričanja. Proti koncu prvega mandata preostanek Američanov ni niti približno delil navdušenja nad dvema vojnama, in Karl Rove, vodja Busheve kampanje, se je dobro zavedal da bodo evangelijski kristjani na prihajajočih volitvah odigrali ključno vlogo. Ker ni hotel tvegati, da bi nekateri, kot leta 2000, spet ostali doma, je organiziral nadvse učinkovito kampanjo ki je potekala v evangelijskih cerkvah, duhovniki pa so med verskimi obredi opravljali registracijo volivcev. Taktika se je izkazala za nadvse uspešno, saj je politične opazovalce po volitvah naravnost šokiralo število volivcev, ki so moralne vrednote kandidatov navedli kot najpomembnejši dejavnik, ki je vplival na njihovo odločitev o tem, koga voliti – in volili so v veliki večini Busha. Čeprav evangelijski kristjani tudi v drugem mandatu niso dočakali uresničitve svojih

pričakovanj v celoti, se je Busheva administracija vseeno zapisala v zgodovino kot najbolj radikalen napad na ločitev med cerkvijo in državo (Jacoby 2004b).

Vendarle pa so evangelijski kristjani v desetletjih prizadevan dosegli nekaj delnih ciljev, tako notranje- kot zunanjepolitičnih. Uspeli so denimo preprečiti sprejem amandmaja o enakih pravicah za ženske, splavu in raziskavam izvornih celic je Bush mlajši ukinil finančno podporo, medtem ko je precej državnega denarja namenil različnim religijskim ustanovam in promociji spolne vzgoje, ki zapoveduje izključno abstinenco. Poskus sprejetja amandmaja, ki bi prepovedal istospolne poroke, je sicer spodletel, jih je pa kmalu po tem večina zveznih držav prepovedala z referendumi. Tudi na področju zunanje politike se evangelijski kristjani zavzemajo za cilje povezane s kulturno vojno, med drugim za prepoved splava in kontracepcije, kar ima seveda v družbah, ki se popadajo s pretirano rastjo populacije in epidemijami AIDSa, naravnost smrtonosne posledice. Ekstremen primer tega, kako negativne posledice lahko ima vmešavanje religije v politiko, pa je denimo vojna v Iraku, ki po mnenju mnogih opazovalcev bila deležna tako močne podpore evangelijskih kristjanov zato, ker so ti v vojaški prisotnosti Združenih držav na Bližnjem vzhodu videli možnost za ponovno zavzetje muslimanskega sveta, kar bi v skladu z biblijskim izročilom pomenilo da se Jezusov ponovni prihod bliža (Hitchens 2010).

Vmešavanje religije v politiko skoraj vedno neizbežno privede do določene stopnje nasilja, in po pregledu situacije je mogoče upravičeno trditi, da politični aktivizem ameriških evangelijskih kristjanov dejansko predstavlja kršitev načela ločitve cerkve od države. To ni problematično le zato, ker gre za enega osnovnih principov, na katerih je bila zgrajena ameriška demokracija, ampak predvsem zaradi tega, ker ima izrazito negativen vpliv na zagotavljanje človekovih pravic, ne le v Združenih državah, ampak širom po svetu. V zadnjem času se sicer pojavljajo ugibanja o pojemanju politične moči krščanske desnice in premiku k zmernejšim družbeno-političnim ciljem določenih segmentov znotraj evangelicizma, vendar nedavni dogodki, kot so denimo pojav gibanja čajank in težave, ki so jih imeli republikanci pri iskanju kandidata za prihajajoče volitve, kažejo, da gre morda vseeno za problem s katerim se Amerika še ne zna, ali pa morda niti noče spoprijeti.

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