Preaching to the Converted: Making Responsible Evangelical Subjects Through Media

By

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Abstract

This dissertation examines contemporary televangelist discourses in order to better articulate prevailing models of what constitutes ideal-type evangelical subjectivities and televangelist participation in an increasingly mediated religious landscape. My interest lies in apocalyptic belief systems that engage end time scenarios to inform understandings of salvation. Using a Foucauldian inspired theoretical-methodology shaped by discourse analysis, archaeology, and genealogy, I examine three popular American evangelists who represent a diverse array of programming content: Pat Robertson of *the 700 Club*, John Hagee of *John Hagee Today*, and Jack and Rexella Van Impe of *Jack Van Impe Presents*. I argue that contemporary evangelical *media packages* now cut across a variety of traditional and new technologies to create a seamless mediated empire of participatory salvation where believers have access to complementary evangelist products and messages twenty-four hours a day from a multitude of access points. For these reasons, I now refer to televangelism as *mediated evangelism* and televangelists as *mediated evangelists* while acknowledging that the televised programs still form the cornerstone of their mediated messages and engagement with believers.

The discursive formations that take shape through this landscape of mediated evangelism contribute to an apocalyptically informed religious-political subjectivity that identifies civic and political engagement as an expected active choice and responsibility for attaining salvation, in line with other more obviously evangelical religious practices, like prayer, repentance, and acceptance of Jesus Christ as savior. The discursive formation that surrounds what I term *responsible salvation* works to constitute the *responsible evangelical subject*; a subjectivity that epitomizes traditional evangelical tenets while using apocalyptic beliefs and salvation as a governing structure for everyday religious, mundane, and political decision-making. Throughout the dissertation, I examine the complexities of this evangelical subjectivity that constructs believers as active participants in both personal and national salvation. This work helps to articulate a more comprehensive understanding of how prevailing evangelical subjectivities can govern everyday decisions regarding health and financial lifestyles, charitable giving, and national and international political engagement with a range of values and foreign policy issues. In doing so, this dissertation attempts to better understand the increasingly complex relationship between religion, media, and politics in North America, and contributes to a growing literature concerning the role of mediated religion in public life by advancing a discussion of the complex intersections between apocalyptic discourse, salvation, and evangelical discursive governance.

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Chapter 1: Introduction to the Dissertation

The truth is, politics and morality are inseparable. And as morality's foundation is religion, religion and politics are necessarily related – Ronald Reagan¹

Introduction

This is ultimately a dissertation about the ways in which apocalyptic televangelist discourses shape evangelical subjectivities and articulate corresponding expectations for conduct through media. Throughout this document, I will explore the discursive formation that constitutes what I refer to as *responsible salvation*; an apocalyptically informed construction of salvation as an active and ongoing choice that must be taken up as part of one's religious duty as an evangelical believer². The subjectivity that emerges through this formation is that of *the responsible evangelical subject*; a true believer who embraces a personal relationship with Jesus Christ and prescribes to apocalyptically informed notions of salvation (as a choice) that imbue the subject with responsibility for both everyday and afterlife outcomes³. While salvation is divinely available to all true Christian subjects, the

¹ According to Hadden and Shupe (1988), Reagan spoke these words when addressing supporters at a prayer breakfast in Dallas, Texas, only hours before accepting the Republican Party's nomination for a second term on August 23rd, 1984.

² Foucauldian understandings of both *discourse* and *discursive formations* are discussed at length in Chapter 4: Theorizing Methodology. Broadly speaking, *discursive formations* contain intersecting and overlapping sets of discourses that create the boundaries for what can and cannot be said about an object (and by extension the related subjects that are produced by those discourses). These formations are expansive in nature and can traverse both history and space. Under these conditions, the discursive formation surrounding responsible salvation cannot be thought of as entirely new as it is informed through a history of broader salvation discourses (notably Protestant ideas about what constitutes salvation). While this history is certainly important, it is also beyond the scope of this project, which seeks to examine a small piece of an admittedly massive formation by exploring a snapshot of the present; the modern mediated discourses that make visible the connections between salvation and apocalypse in contemporary televangelism.

³ Subjectivities are discursively formed ideas about what a subject may look like, think about, or do through action. Therefore, this Foucauldian concept of subjectivity does not describe a category of people that necessarily exists in the broader population (i.e. a type of evangelical community), but rather the term is used to describe the ways in which discourses shape ideas about what a particular subject can and should look like, what they think about, how they see the world, and how they can or should act. This dissertation examines how contemporary televangelist discourses construct a specific form of *evangelical subjectivity*

responsible evangelical subject can only attain individual and national salvation by engaging with certain spiritual, personal, and political actions and beliefs. Under these discursive conditions, the prophecy interpretations and apocalyptic belief systems that inform this construction of salvation serve as a guide for everyday decision-making regarding health and financial lifestyles, charitable giving, and political engagement with various domestic and foreign policy issues. The chapters that follow explore the various ways in which this subjectivity is made evident through the televangelist discourses that emanate from three popular evangelical programs: Pat Robertson's *700 Club*, *John Hagee Today*, and *Jack Van Impe Presents*.

In this chapter, I will provide background information for the topic, trace the academic origins of the broader project and articulate my research questions, overview the theoretical and methodological frameworks for the study, and highlight the social significance of this ongoing exploration of prevailing evangelical subjectivities. This chapter concludes with a roadmap for the remainder of the dissertation and briefly summarizes what to expect from the chapters that follow.

Project Origins

I was always warned to never bring up religion or politics in a casual setting, but I inevitably had difficulty following these 'rules'. To this end, I have produced a dissertation dedicated to exploring the intersection of both religion and politics, through media. This project was born the moment I heard evangelical pastor John Hagee emphatically and

in full recognition that multiple evangelical subjectivities may too exist at the intersections of other related discursive formations. See Chapters 7 through 10 for a detailed analysis of the contours of this form of evangelical subjectivity, as expressed through my data.

resolutely declare this statement through my television, late one evening: “Israel is the sizzling fuse to World War III” (*John Hagee Today*, November 2006). That moment was the perfect intersection of religion, politics, and media, and it shifted the way I thought about religion, politics, identity, and conflict as a scholar. Though we likely had different reasons for being present, I am sure that Hagee’s congregation and I were both on the edge of our seats for the hour that followed, united across time and space through *the electronic church*. His message seemed to resonate with the audience in that instant and I wondered how these beliefs helped to shape their views on global conflict, politics, and the so-called culture wars. More importantly, I wondered if these ideas shaped the ways in which they engage in the practice of politics, and to what extent believers formed identities as a result. In the months that followed, I realized the discursive power that emanates through the electronic church and I settled into my puzzle. In the pages that follow, I explore the ways in which apocalyptic televangelist, political, and secular discourses coalesce to constitute evangelical subjectivities that, in turn, work to govern evangelical subjects.

Until the beginning of this project, religion had not been a major part of my adult or scholarly life. Suddenly, it was everywhere and nowhere helpful at the same time. Once I started paying attention, I felt its presence through all forms of media, in pop culture, and in the hallways of what I had previously thought to be a thoroughly secular university. I have since come to better understand how religion shapes our experiences, our identities, and our societies. More importantly, this occurs whether we adhere to one or not, and whether we know it and acknowledge it or not. For instance, a 2015 Gallup poll found that fifty-two percent of Americans believe that religion can answer all or most of today’s problems (Gallup 2016a). Religion does not just provide meaning and comfort for its

adherents, it exists as a set of social practices, as a governing system of beliefs, as forms of truth and knowledge, and as discourses that shape subjectivity. Religion's influence is undeniable and it has been persistent. In the face of modernization, the advent of new technologies, resistance, pluralization, and shifting authorities, religions have dynamically adapted to all of it, stubbornly resisting the predictions of post-enlightenment secularization proponents everywhere. In spite of my newfound awareness, I found surprisingly little recent scholarly attention to the televangelists I wished to know everything about. It felt as though we collectively lost interest when the scandals stopped being so prevalent and the internet started to replace television as the intriguing new technology of the moment. At the time, this research was meant to fill a serious void, but all these years later, it now contributes to a once again flourishing body of literature that takes seriously the role of mediated evangelism – not just in North America, but around the world.

Therefore, this thesis investigates the prevailing mediated, evangelical discourses that cut across mass media in the present day United States to examine the ways in which the intersection of religious, political, and secular discourses work together to constitute various forms of governable evangelical subjectivities. My analysis looks at the ways in which apocalyptic belief systems and prophecy interpretations inform evangelical constructions of salvation as an attainable choice, while also constituting a politically active and responsibilized evangelical subject. In doing so, I also examine the ways in which televangelists mobilize mediated techniques of governance that create expectations for subject conduct, how they construct truth, and how they discursively legitimate and construct authority for these rationales, strategies, messages, and knowledges. While this

dissertation is primarily concerned with the discursive constitution of religious-political subjectivities through mediated evangelism, it also investigates the concept of *mediated religion* more broadly and traces the social histories of both American evangelicalism and the multi-mediated evangelical empires that have come to dominate the religious-media landscape.

Background

Intersections of religion and politics are easily observable in the United States and have heavily informed analysis of the so-called ‘culture wars’ (Hunter 1989). Prominent liberal and conservative politicians, religious leaders, and media analysts have all suggested that contemporary America is amidst a cultural battle to define what constitutes American values, morality, culture, and the very heart of what it means to be an American citizen. Here we see a sometimes poorly defined collective of liberals, secular humanists, atheists, and the political left pitted against a more narrowly defined ‘religious right’ who are most often exemplified by politically active conservative evangelical Christians (see Hunter 1991, Halton 2007, Hedges 2007). Evangelicals have been accused of being ‘Christian fascists’ (Hedges 2007) for lamenting the absence of Christian values in government, while liberals have been accused of destroying the moral fabric of the United States by cherishing the separation of church and state, and fighting to keep religion out of public institutions (Ewing and Grady 2006). Moderate views suggest that the power of the religious right has peaked and they have become more of a political liability for the Republican Party. In contrast, others argue that Christian fundamentalists are eager to take

over American legal and political institutions, fulfilling a branch of theology known as Dominionism⁴ (Hedges 2007).

Religious leaders, media pundits, and politicians are not the only ones invested in debates over the role of religion in American public life. Almost half of American adults feel that religious institutions should engage with social and political questions, while a solid majority (72%) feel “that religion is losing influence in American life” (Lipka 2014a). It should also be noted that most of those surveyed were not pleased about this perceived declining influence of religion in society. Culture war assessments often imply that a total separation of church and state may be an American constitutional mythology in practice. No matter which engagement of culture war and secularization analyses one finds sympathy with, it is clear that politicians, media analysts, and scholars are now paying close attention to these debates in an effort to better understand the religious-political influence that takes shape throughout the American political sphere and mass media environments. Contemporary evangelical groups are often at the centre of these discussions.

Broadly speaking, the term evangelicalism in America often refers to a diverse array of mostly Protestant groups who tend to espouse conservative Christian (and now often political) beliefs⁵. Contemporary usage of the term is far from consistent and will be explored throughout this dissertation. However, for now, I contend that the term typically

⁴ Dominionism refers to a branch of theology that envisions a preordained plan of God in which Christians are expected to take control of legal, political, and economic systems.

⁵ That said, liberal evangelicals do exist and the ‘evangelical identity’ is far from unified. While characteristics of the broader population of American evangelicals are certainly relevant to this research, the televangelists under study here all reflect a predominantly conservative perspective – in terms of both religion and politics. See Warner (1988), Ammerman (2006), Smith & Johnson (2010), Farrell (2011), and Danielsen (2013) for discussions of liberal evangelicals and other potentially shifting beliefs and values in broader evangelical populations.

refers to ‘born-again’ Christian groups with similar doctrinal beliefs regarding salvation, conversion, proselytization, and inerrant biblical literalism, particularly in regard to apocalyptic end time prophecy⁶. There is also an increasingly popular, but contested, conflation between evangelicalism and fundamentalism in mainstream and some scholarly discourses. The evangelicals who inform this doctoral research express common American tenets of evangelicalism and enthusiastically endorse apocalyptic belief systems, end time prophecy interpretation, and the role of active individual acceptance of Jesus Christ as the only path to salvation. These foundational beliefs underscore the discursive formations that will be assessed throughout this dissertation.

Understanding the centrality of apocalyptic end time prophecy belief is critical to understanding evangelical belief systems and identities (Boyer 1992), particularly those aligned with the televangelists under study here. While many people are content to dismiss prophecy belief as a quirky, marginalized subset of religious belief, there has been a resurgence of this kind of faith in contemporary American culture (Boyer 1992:5). Reputable studies and polls suggest that up to forty percent of Americans self-identify as an evangelical or “born-again” Christian⁷ (Boyer 2005, Gallup 2016a, Newport and Carroll 2005, Pew Research Center 2014) and twenty-eight percent of Americans believe that “the Bible is the actual word of God and is to be taken literally, word for word” (Saad 2014). Apocalyptic belief systems and prophecy interpretation also remain significantly

⁶ It should be noted that the ways in which evangelicals engage apocalyptic narratives vary. While belief in the second coming of Jesus Christ is prevalent, the extent to which evangelicals fully accept literal interpretations of end time prophecy (as contextualized by contemporary events as notable indicators) is debated. The televangelists considered in this study fall firmly into the latter category and envision biblical prophecy as a foreordained plan for humanity. See Chapter 6: Situating Contemporary Televangelists for further discussion of variations in end time prophecy belief and premillennialism.

⁷ See Chapter 5: Deconstructing Evangelicalism in America and Chapter 7: Apocalyptic Prophecy and the Responsibilization of Salvation for more detailed discussions of these assessments of evangelical populations.

embedded in the American evangelical experience. For instance, fifty-eight percent of white evangelicals believe that Jesus Christ will definitely or probably return to earth⁸ by 2050 (Pew Research Center 2010b). Moreover, prophecy related literature, film, radio and television programming, and internet content have become a pronounced feature of the pop cultural landscape. As Boyer argues, the genre of prophecy interpretation is now a prominent form of collective discourse (Boyer 1992). While those who espouse similar views to Robertson, Hagee, and Van Impe may not represent a statistical majority within the broader American or evangelical population, these shared prophetic beliefs are intensely popularized through multi-mediated televangelist programming and mobilized throughout popular culture. To dismiss this segment of religiosity as peripheral to mainstream America is to naïvely underestimate its deeply embedded cultural influence.

Prophecy interpretation is a complex area of religious and secular belief. While there is consensus over certain aspects, there are many competing claims about the significance of contemporary events and the timing of key prophetic stages, such as the rapture, tribulation, the rise of the antichrist, and the second coming of Christ. End time scenarios are a reflection of interpretations and belief systems, where overarching religious discursive narratives and the contributions of individual preachers and religious groups coalesce, overlap, and contradict each other at times. According to Thompson (2005), the concept of end times refers to “the period from the beginning of the fulfillment of the Bible’s eschatological prophecies until the dawn of the millennium⁹” (2005:181). Simply put, eschatology is the theological study of end times. While the timing and specifics of

⁸ Jesus Christ’s eventual return to earth is considered a key event for prophetic timelines. See Chapter 7: Apocalyptic Prophecy and the Responsibilization of Salvation for further discussion.

⁹ Here, the millennium is referring to the thousand-year peaceful reign of Christ after the defeat of the antichrist, and not to a specific calendar unit (Thompson 2005:181).

various apocalyptic timelines may vary, what is common to many variants of Christian apocalyptic narratives is the inevitability of a horrifying war on earth during the period of tribulation, otherwise referred to as the rise and reign of the antichrist. In the end, God is ultimately victorious after sending his son Jesus Christ to defeat the antichrist and assume a thousand-year peaceful rule on earth. This ultimate battle between good and evil is preordained and inevitable; it underlies any discussion of values, politics, salvation, and conflict for evangelical prophecy interpreters. While there are many chronological variants of end times scenarios, “premillennial dispensationalism, an eschatological system formulated in the mid-nineteenth century by the British churchman John Darby, a founder of the Plymouth Brethren sect” (Boyer 2005a) holds a powerful grip on the conservative Protestant evangelists considered in this research, heavily contributing to what Paul Boyer (2005a) refers to as the politicization of prophetic belief in contemporary America¹⁰. Therefore, the apocalyptic narratives and prophecy interpretations that are mobilized throughout mediated evangelism offer a political critique of the contemporary social order, while also offering insight into the utopian visions of the groups that espouse these belief systems.

The centrality of apocalyptic thinking to American evangelicalism is vital to understand because this belief structure discursively shapes expectations for conduct and attitudes toward political engagement, foreign policy, and everyday lived experience. One cannot effectively examine discursive formations in this area without recognizing the centrality of a governing belief system that constitutes history as the preordained,

¹⁰ While premillennial dispensationalist narratives are overwhelmingly expressed throughout this sample of televangelist discourses, it is by no means the only way in which evangelicals express apocalyptic and prophetic narratives. See [Chapter 6: Situating Contemporary Televangelists](#) for further discussion of other variants of premillennialism.

inalterable plan of God. It underlies the actions, beliefs, attitudes, and identities of evangelicals, and highlights a complex notion of individual responsibility. Any analysis that ignores the connection between apocalyptic prophecy and the ambitious political and cultural influence of this group would be shallow at best. Evangelical political influence is undeniable in contemporary American politics where political engagement is increasingly becoming legitimated as an expected practice for governed saved subjects. As such, this dissertation explores the ways in which mediated evangelists participate in a cross-mediated public sphere to better understand the discursive effects of the apocalyptic worldviews espoused by evangelicals. In doing so, I ultimately unearth the ways in which responsibilized religious-political evangelical subjects are both constituted and governed through religious mediated discourses.

Research Questions

Two primary research questions have informed this doctoral research:

1. What prevailing apocalyptic and evangelical discourses take shape through contemporary American televangelism?
2. How are evangelical subjects constituted and governed through these mediated apocalyptic discourses of responsibility and salvation?

Several secondary research questions have also helped to shape the theoretical, methodological, and substantive frameworks for this work. They include:

- How do evangelicals use media and technology to advance their messages?
- How can we theorize a methodology appropriate for the holistic study of discursive formations that cut across technological platforms?

- How do evangelicals mobilize techniques of governance and strategies of legitimation through media? How is evangelical ‘truth’ constituted and what modes of authority legitimate these knowledges?
- How do contemporary evangelical subjectivities represent a notable discursive shift toward a politically active and responsabilized saved subject? How is this subject defined and how are they trained to see the world? What are the implications of these expectations?

A Sociology of Mediated Evangelism

This project is situated in an overarching research agenda that is driven by an interest in knowledge construction as a discursive practice that is capable of exposing social action and meaning. Because of this orientation, I see the study of discourse as a critical component of our sociological toolkit, not just for what discursive content can tell us about religion, society, and culture, but for what discourses can *do*. All discourses are active in the production of both knowledge and subjects. They define the limits of experience, truth, and identity; not just for the evangelical laity, but also for the televangelists that more emphatically contribute to the discursive formations under study here. As such, discourse analysis is a powerful sociological, theoretical, and methodological tool. Before I begin to explore the contours of mediated evangelical discourses that emanate from contemporary American televangelism, this research briefly assesses definitions of religion and mediated religion before exploring the evangelical media packages that result from the latter. Brief description of both concepts are offered here before turning to the theoretical-methodological framework that grounds this research.

Religion has been a central topic of inquiry for sociologists since the early days of the discipline. It has been defined and categorized in a seemingly endless array of scholarly work that can be traced back to the foundational thinkers who defined sociology itself and helped shape the trajectory of what this discipline can do. While the central object of analysis for this dissertation is evangelical discourse, and not religion itself, a brief exploration of various definitions of religion takes shape in the following chapter as a means to legitimating the study of mediated religion as a form of religious expression that takes shape through a technological platform. Of course, the nature and limits of *mediation* as an abstract concept have been regularly deconstructed across a number of disciplines, notably by communications scholars. While contemporary studies tend toward exploring the role of digital mediation in the information age, nuanced theories of mediation recognize that this broad concept moves beyond understanding electronic mediation, and enjoys a history that locates its traditions in much older technologies, such as print. Likewise, while it is tempting to talk about the relationship between media and religion as an exciting new feature of the religious landscape, it too enjoys a much broader history where religious scholars have advanced varied theories of mediation situated to their disciplinary boundaries. In some regards, religion as a social phenomenon is always mediated and scholars today largely recognize the need to explore the implications of how religion is mediated, regardless of what period or context is under study (Mahan 2014). For the purposes of this dissertation, these debates are important to acknowledge but lie outside the scope of this research. My research examines the electronically mediated evangelism of today and mobilizes the concept of *mediated religion* as a practical organizing concept that encompasses all forms of religious expression that occur through a technologically

mediated environment, including (but not limited to): radio, television, internet, and social media. Therefore, *mediated religion* is a unique, but situated aspect of *religion* more broadly.

At the outset of this research, mediated religion (and particularly religion in cyberspace) was still an emerging concept. It was met with both praise and skepticism as a worthy site of sociological investigation. Now, almost a decade later, we see much more enthusiasm for investigating the contours of mediated social phenomena but also still see residual evidence of early stigmas that sought to negate the authentic meaning that is generated through online religious experience¹¹ (Campbell & Teusner 2011). In this age of innovative internet research, we also find a palpable deficit in the amount of scholarly attention devoted to the ways in which television still serves as an important platform for religious expression, not just in North America, but around the world. Despite these issues, mediated religion continues to flourish and the evangelists under consideration here have been thoroughly engaged in this trend for some time.

The American evangelical preachers that populate the contemporary media landscape have come a long way from their early origins in revival, radio, and the early years of television. While other groups were slow to embrace the electronic frontier, televangelists have long since mobilized the full capacity of the modern media landscape

¹¹ Outside of religious experience in cyberspace, we also see a more general hesitance to accept online practices as meaningful and impactful when compared to ‘real’ experiences that take place in more traditional physical environments. This popular polarization of a less meaningful *virtual* space that is secondary to the *real* spaces that we have occupied throughout most of history has enabled a dangerous precedent, not just for scholarly analysis but for broader society. For instance, the normalization of detrimental online behaviour as ‘harmless’ because of the lack of physicality in cyberspace has ensured that practices like online harassment, cyber-bullying, hate speech, oppression, and assault have largely gone unchecked by the Canadian legal system (See *R. v. Elliott 2016*). It is clear that we have more work ahead of us in establishing the legitimacy of mediated interactions when held against the historical privilege of face-to-face social interaction.

and truly offer something for everyone. Some televangelists speak to us in soothing voices, with perfectly kept hair and megawatt smiles. Some of them read the news headlines to us and assure us that everything is happening as God intended. Some of them scream at us that sin is everywhere, that global morality is declining, power is centralizing, and the end is always near, while others hold hands with their cohosts and pray for us in their studio before offering up a recipe for a kale superfood salad in the next segment. The field is characterized by diversity in style and content, yet key evangelical tenets remain largely intact across the spectrum of contemporary programming.

The televangelists of today can be more aptly described as *mediated evangelists* as their message cuts across all forms of popular media, and all technological platforms; they fully mobilize comprehensive *media packages* in their mission to proselytize to all corners of the earth. This doctoral research examines three popular and diverse televangelist programs: *John Hagee Today* (hosted by Pastor John Hagee most often), *the 700 Club* (hosted by Pat Robertson and a variety of co-hosts), and *Jack Van Impe Presents* (hosted by Jack and his wife Rexella). The mediated evangelists included in this study have been chosen for their diversity in programming style but also for their common expressions of apocalyptic belief structures that are grounded in Christian biblical prophecy. While there is no monolithic concept of what a ‘televangelist broadcast’ may entail, the discursive formations that emanate from and through evangelical media packages are unified through apocalyptically informed narratives of salvation. This dissertation explores the concept of responsible salvation as a prevailing discursive formation in contemporary televangelist programming that has great impact on how responsabilized evangelical subjectivities take

shape in our digitally mediated age to govern everyday decisions and inform political engagement.

Pushing the Boundaries of Theory and Method

This dissertation employs a Foucauldian framework to guide a theoretical-methodological analysis of evangelical discourses, subjectivities, and techniques of governance. For Michel Foucault, theory and method are inseparable; one informs the other where neither is mutually exclusive of the other. In line with the spirit of a true Foucauldian inspired analysis, I also treat them as such. Foucault's conceptualization of text, discourse, discursive formations, archaeology, genealogy, and subjectivities all shape this theoretical-methodological framework. The multi-mediated discourses that form the data for this dissertation necessitated a comprehensive methodology that was best achieved through Foucauldian style discourse analysis. Here, text is conceived of as a holistic interplay between visual, auditory, and symbolic discursive practices where discursive statements are conceptualized as much more than just their composite parts or linguistic structures. Starting from this more engaged understanding of discourse as a complex set of social practices and meanings that is active in the constitution of objects and subjects forms a much more suitable match for this work than other more basic forms of textual analysis. For Foucault, discourse is not just a tool that describes reality (van den Hoonaard 2015), it defines the very conditions and limits of what constitutes knowledge and how we define ourselves.

This project is also enhanced by Foucault's understandings of government where his conceptualization of governmentality forms the analytic framework that enables my

analysis of the ways in which discursively constituted subjectivities also make evident underlying rationales and techniques of governance for the self. As such, this research explores the ways in which religious-political discourses contribute to the construction of evangelical subjectivities, but also examines the ways in which apocalyptically informed salvation narratives serve as a governing structure for the religious and seemingly secular everyday experience of evangelical subjects. Here, we see the ways in which mediated evangelists contribute to a discursive formation that defines an ideal evangelical subject as one who embodies what I refer to as *responsible salvation*. As noted, *responsible salvation* is shaped by a constellation of evangelist, political, and secular discourses¹². It illuminates the ways in which evangelist understandings of individual and collective salvation are regularly constructed as an active and ongoing choice for believers. This theme is overwhelmingly present within my data and offers a counterpoint to those who depict this group as entirely fatalistic¹³. While apocalypse is inevitable and divinely foreordained in days long past, ultimately salvation is always up for grabs for the truly faithful. This construction of salvation as an active choice – as a deliberate and continual effort in reaffirming one’s faith – contributes to a further responsabilization of evangelical subjects that reinforces expectations and consequences of evangelical conduct as a technique of governance for the self.

¹² I should note here that I recognize the complex relationship between the seemingly *secular* and seemingly *religious*, an expansive debate that stands well outside the scope of this dissertation but inevitably seeps into the discussions that will follow here. I do not intend to reinforce a sharp conceptual divide between what constitutes the religious and what constitutes the secular in American society. That said, the mediated evangelists that inform this doctoral research do frame this divide as rigid and important, where saved evangelical Christians are positioned against the unsaved (secularists, atheists, and non-evangelicals). My reference to secularity, secular discourses, and secular tactics are pragmatic ways of assessing a divide that possesses much meaning for the group under study but still challenges academics seeking to better understand the often blurred boundaries between the religious and the secular.

¹³ See Wojcik (1997) and Chapter 9: A National Politics of Salvation for a more thorough discussion of this tension.

At the outset of this research, I had only envisioned television as my primary site of analysis. I quickly realized, as so many of us who study contemporary media do, that this would not suffice. We no longer occupy a social world where any single medium can be understood in isolation from another. Under these conditions, attention to televangelism's networks of mediated relations is essential for understanding how discursive formations not only cut across one another but also cut across the media in which they are articulated. It is for these reasons that I now refer to these televangelists as *mediated evangelists* and to televangelism as *mediated evangelism*. Their programming and influence are no longer solely located within our increasingly flat televisions, and nor are our televisions the only platform for consuming televised programming. While the television programs of Pat Robertson, John Hagee, and Jack and Rexella Van Impe form the primary starting point of enquiry for this research, the analysis would be incomplete without attention to each evangelist's accompanying media products, most notably their digital ministries. Their virtual presence is not just a relevant comparison to televangelism, it is an almost seamless extension of television presence.

The evangelists of today construct and employ true media empires. Their televised programs and specials work alongside their ministry websites, they own and operate broadcast networks, and their books, DVDs, podcasts, and other consumer products appear not just during televised advertisement segments, but are also regularly referenced throughout programming content. Their social media presence is often pervasive¹⁴, and their physical presence at conferences, speaking engagements, and political events further

¹⁴ While social media is now a common feature of evangelical media packages, it was not nearly as utilized by these evangelists at the outset of this research project and thus has been largely excluded from analysis. Future research projects will be designed to account for this more recent innovation; see [Chapter 11: Conclusion](#) for further discussion of these potential research opportunities.

reinforces their efforts. In other words, they create comprehensive *media packages* for their message, utilizing every available medium to advance a message that cuts across physical space and technology to enable unprecedented levels of interactivity for the evangelical consumer. Using the television programs as a starting point, I then follow a data-centric approach to lead me through the full contours of these mediated discursive formations, bringing in online ministry content and consumer product analysis where appropriate.

Sociological Significance

To conclude, this project contributes to an ongoing literature that emphasizes the importance of understanding the interactions between evangelical religion and politics, not just in the United States but across the world through the globalization of popular media. For the most part, this literature has focused on the ways in which American evangelicals have influenced conservative politics, how voting patterns correlate with religious affiliations, how evangelicalism contributes to political orientations, how we can understand evangelical perceptions of public and political issues, and how apocalyptic evangelical narratives frame public figures and current events¹⁵. This dissertation uniquely contributes to this expansive literature by articulating the ways in which politics are religiously engaged at the discursive level by applying a Foucauldian inspired theoretical-methodological framework to popular evangelist media. This dissertation also examines

¹⁵ This list is not meant to be a comprehensive overview of an expansive literature that seeks to better understand the intersection of evangelical religion and politics. See Chapters 7 through 10 for a more detailed articulation of how this literature informs my analysis of televangelist discourses and the resultant subjectivities. See also Boyer (1992, 2005), Wojcik (1997) for comprehensive discussions of the interactions between apocalypticism and politics, Kyle (2006), Brint and Reith Schroedel (2009, volume 2), Steensland and Wright (2014) for comprehensive overviews of evangelical influence in American conservative politics, Cromartie (1989), Boyer (2005) and Amstrutz (2014) for in-depth engagement with evangelical influence in American foreign policy and international relations, and Bean (2014) for an articulation of the differences between American and Canadian evangelicals and their political orientations.

the ways in which a politicized evangelical subject is constituted throughout this discursive formation and thereby made visible through modern media packages. In doing so, this original analysis offers a snapshot of how conservative mediated evangelists use apocalyptic lenses to expertly mobilize biblical authority, charisma, and their own crafted theological expertise to lend weight to their spiritual and secular advisements concerning an endless variety of religious, political, and lifestyle matters – for individual, national, and international affairs.

Robertson, Hagee, and the Van Impes all offer a ‘no nonsense’ approach to privileging and attaining salvation by crafting a fairly consistent narrative that shows subjects how easy it is to access divine promises, while also providing them with actionable plans for attaining salvation. Overwhelmingly, we see an emphasis on an unbounded divine capacity for granting salvation but we also are exposed to a narrative of responsibility and choice where evangelical subjects are routinely responsibilized to actively pursue their own salvation through deliberate planning in belief, faith, and practice. In accordance with the broader concept of responsible salvation, the wanting subject is therefore imbued with a sense of control in setting right their own misfortunes, as well as those of the nation. As they await the foreordained fate of the world, assured in their own salvation, they are empowered with a sense of optimism and rapture-readiness through their ongoing project of the self. Under these conditions, political engagement is no longer optional and subjects are provided with divine motivation, where the consequences of inaction (or wrong action) is a terrifying apocalyptic end where the subject is left out of God’s divine favour.

Because of the rapid rate of innovation, any project that takes media as a central object of investigation will inevitably be dated by the time it reaches publication. Despite

this inherent reality of media analysis, I am constantly struck by the timeliness of this project. The mediated apocalyptic evangelical narratives under study here still have immense explanatory power for providing insight into today's religious-political climate and broader American culture wars. By articulating expectations for both personal and political conduct, *the responsible evangelical subject* is constituted as one who votes against the perceived socialist agendas of the Democratic Party and supports politicians who espouse pro-Israel agendas. This evangelical subject has the capacity to attain both individual and national salvation by actively engaging in personal, financial, and political support for these causes, while also feeling the weight of a subjectivity that frames inaction, or alternative actions, as antithetical to God's own divine plan.

As this project concludes, on the cusp of what will likely be another religiously-charged presidential election, these conversations feel even more pressing. As Donald Trump mobilizes his own media package throughout his Republican bid, he too is emphatic in his targeting of Muslims and problematization of an endemic morality crisis in American government and society¹⁶. Here we see the discursive overlap between evangelical and seemingly more secular discourses that coalesce to shape the American political landscape. Whatever the outcome of this impending election, I am confident that the guiding influence of responsible salvation will be mobilized throughout the evangelical programs under study here, typical of the longstanding religious and secular apocalyptic narratives that are continually reshaped to reflect contemporary critiques of the social order.

¹⁶ I find myself wondering about the convergence of discourses that perhaps constitute a secular political evangelist, but alas, that is a task for a future project.

The Roadmap

This dissertation consists of eleven chapters, including this one. **In this chapter**, I overview the introductory elements of this doctoral research. I began by recounting the events and academic currents that sparked the origins of this project, before offering a brief synopsis of relevant background information concerning American culture wars, evangelicalism, and apocalyptic prophecy. I proposed primary and secondary research questions that help set the boundaries for the scope of this research. I then offered a brief assessment of mediated religion and evangelical media packages before outlining the theoretical-methodological framework that guides my analysis. I have also offered a brief summary of what this dissertation aims to achieve and now conclude with an overview of the chapters that follow.

Chapter 2 offers a critical summary of several relevant literatures. I begin by assessing a variety of foundational and contemporary sociological definitions for religion to establish mediated religion as an organizing concept that is part and parcel of what constitutes religion itself. I then offer a brief assessment of what mediated religion can look like by exploring a selection of the ways in which religion is expressed through both television and the internet. The chapter concludes by outlining and assessing several common critiques that have narrowly conceptualized mediated religion as a less meaningful setting for religious expression.

Chapter 3 is the first of two chapters that seek to better understand the relationship between theory, method, and methodology. I begin by further exploring and applying the concept of mediated religion in a methodological sense. I then examine the ways in which Foucault and media studies inform my understanding of what constitutes mediated

evangelism, in order to define the boundaries of the field of the study. The chapter concludes with a brief discussion of the style and content of *the 700 Club*, *John Hagee Today*, and *Jack Van Impe Presents* before articulating the details of the research sample.

Chapter 4 is the second of two chapters that seek to better understand the relationship between theory, method, and methodology. It outlines the research design and theorizes the Foucauldian framework that underlies my analysis. I begin by assessing the strengths and limitations of content analysis, semiotics, and several forms of discourse analysis, before concluding that Foucauldian discourse analysis is best suited to this project. The chapter also assesses conceptualizations of what constitutes text and discourse before assessing the relationship between truth, epistemology, and knowledge in terms of research design. I conclude the chapter with comprehensive definitions of *discursive formations* and *subjectivities*, while elaborating how Foucault's two articulated methodological approaches (archaeology and genealogy) inform the Foucauldian inspired research approach that is used in the analysis of my data.

Chapter 5 examines what broadly constitutes various forms of evangelicalism. I begin by briefly examining the social histories that have defined the key tenets of evangelicalism before highlighting the relevance of an analysis of American evangelicalism for Canadian and global scholarship. I conclude by examining contemporary trends in evangelicalism that are reshaping the contours of this identity.

Chapter 6 traces the evolution of mediated evangelism. I begin by locating the origins of mediated evangelism in revival, radio, television, and now internet before examining the ways in which today's televangelists create holistic media packages for their message. I explore several prominent themes that shape mediated evangelist discourses and

conclude by examining traditional styles of televangelism and how they have evolved into the ones considered throughout this project.

Chapter 7 begins the empirical analysis of my findings by examining the importance of the relationship between salvation and apocalyptic narratives. I also begin to explore the contours of the discursive formation that surrounds my concept of *responsible salvation* to establish the ways in which it speaks to evangelical understandings of salvation that responsabilize the subject to take action in pursuit of their own salvation. This chapter also further elaborates my use of governmentality as an analytical framework and concludes by applying the framework to the empirical data under study.

Chapter 8 continues the empirical work from chapter seven to summarize the ways in which prosperity discourses contribute to the discursive formation surrounding responsible salvation. This analysis examines the ways in which matters of health and wealth are framed as prosperous divine blessings that can be activated through faith and action. The chapter explores how the discursive constitution of evangelical subjectivities work to govern everyday decisions regarding health and financial lifestyles for the saved subject.

Chapter 9 examines the ways in which mediated evangelist discourses work to establish a politics of salvation by exploring the domestic political priorities that have been articulated throughout the data. I discuss the ways in which the role of government, socialism, healthcare reform, and economic crisis are constructed as political priorities for evangelical subjects. The chapter concludes with an analysis of actionable plans for political engagement that are offered up to assist evangelical subjects in their active pursuit of responsible salvation for both the subject and for the nation.

Chapter 10 extends this analysis to better understand a global politics of salvation. This discussion is thoroughly grounded in the apocalyptic influences that shape evangelical discourses regarding the international role of America as a Christian nation in end times scenarios. I examine the prophetic interpretations that shape an at times uneasy alliance between American evangelicals and Israel, before exploring the discursive effects of an apocalyptic belief system that legitimizes Middle Eastern conflict as an inevitable foreordained reality, and therefore enables anti-Muslim rhetoric. I conclude this analysis by overviewing actionable plans for global political engagement that are available to evangelical subjects in their active pursuit of responsible salvation.

Finally, in **Chapter 11**, I summarize the core ideas from each chapter that inform the dissertation and offer general conclusions for this project. I also comment on the limitations of this research and situate my contributions. I conclude by suggesting several possible topics for further research and offering my final remarks.

Chapter 2: Theorizing Mediated Religion

Introduction

My research for this project originated in an academic climate that did not fully embrace the multitude of mediated spaces where religion and broader social life were beginning to flourish. Despite the increasing prevalence of lived experience of socially and digitally mediated spaces, we have still yet to fully overcome this challenge and do not yet have an entirely cohesive sociological language to talk about mediated environments in the ways in which this topic merits. Without doubt, we have come a long way in theorizing what was previously termed *the electronic frontier*, yet this is a task that will remain perpetually unfinished given that the technologically mediated landscape for social interaction expands at a rate that leaves academic research dated by the time it reaches publication. More importantly, we have still yet to fully push past an imagined polarity between so-called ‘virtual’ and ‘real’ worlds where these realms are conceptualized as mutually exclusive arenas of social interaction and religious expression. The implications of employing terms like ‘virtual,’ ‘mediated,’ or ‘cyber’ are oftentimes still entwined with connotations of insincerity; as if virtual/mediated environments are mere replications of their ‘real-world’ counterparts and somehow less meaningful spaces for those who believe and practice within their increasingly fluid boundaries. That said, we have moved past certain obstacles to fully embracing the importance of mediated spaces for our everyday experiences. In North America, we now seldom maintain the myth of mass media as an intriguing novelty as we increasingly live parts of our lives through technological mediation. While this truth might be more self-evident for younger generations who have grown up fully immersed in online extensions of social life, education, and leisure pursuits

as part of their everyday existence, we may still confront a stigma of inauthenticity for the practice of religion through electronically mediated means, notably through cyberspace (Campbell & Teusner 2011). As academics, we have also been initially slow to articulate the realities of mediated social interaction and communication, but have now wholly embraced the challenge of analyzing these authentic spaces. As our everyday lived experience becomes increasingly mediated by digital technologies, we need to push past relying solely on nostalgic interpretations. In doing so, we can better appreciate the ways in which mediated environments operate as spaces of social interaction similar to our physical streets, universities, social institutions, and religious materialities¹⁷. Through this chapter, I will explore these issues by articulating a definition of religion that accounts for the mediated religious landscape of today while also exploring the evolution of debates concerning religious expression through mediated environments. By exploring foundational understandings of religion and media, this dissertation contributes to a growing literature that recognizes *mediated religion*¹⁸ as a worthwhile site of analysis.

At the time of this research, scholars of religion have largely dismissed the notion of an all-encompassing secularization thesis that predicted religion's total demise and now acknowledge that religion and spirituality continue to flourish in the twenty-first century

¹⁷ My contention here is that technologically mediated social interaction can provide meaning for participants, on par with, more so, and/or less so than face-to-face interaction, depending on the circumstances. This claim is informed by broader debates concerning the acceptance of digital spaces as 'space.' These debates are largely articulated through deconstructions of the socially constructed boundaries between the so-called *real* and the so-called *virtual*. The overall tone of such debates suggests that the boundaries between mediated and more traditional spaces are becoming blurred as technology becomes increasingly embedded in everyday lived experience. While this rather vast literature is in many ways outside the scope of this dissertation, similar debates can also be located in the broader field that connects media and religious studies, which will be addressed later in this chapter. See also Mahan (2014) and Hoover & Echchaibi (2014) for discussions of *lived religion* and the *third spaces* of digital religion as more recent examples of how we can better understand meaningful forms of religious expression that take shape through technologically mediated spaces.

¹⁸ The concept of mediated religion will be defined more thoroughly throughout this chapter and in [Chapter 3: Addressing Method](#). The concept will be utilized throughout the dissertation.

in complex, diverse, and socially significant ways (Berger and Zijdeveld 2009, Bailey & Redden 2011). Yet, the role of secularity and religion in Canada remains complex. According to a recent poll conducted by Reginald Bibby (2015), in conjunction with the Angus Reid Institute of Public Interest Research, almost three-quarters of Canadians (73%) express belief in God or a higher power. Of those surveyed, thirty percent are inclined to embrace religion while approximately one-quarter (26%) are inclined to reject religion¹⁹. The identification of belief and religion in the United States is more decisive in some respects as eighty-nine percent of Americans report belief in ‘God, or a universal spirit’ (Pew Research Center 2015b). More relevant to this project is the context of religious expression in the twenty-first century. Mass media are now thoroughly embedded in American society and have helped to shape, and have been shaped by, religious expression. Recent Pew data suggests that eighty-four percent of Americans use the internet (Pew Research Center 2015a) and sixty-five percent of American adults²⁰ use social networking sites, such as Facebook, Instagram, or Twitter (Perrin 2015). It is also clear that religious Americans are using both internet and television for spiritual and religious purposes. Religiously active adults in the United States are equally or more likely than their less active counterparts to utilize a variety of digital media, including the internet, broadband, email, cell phones, and text messaging (Jansen 2011). Recent Pew Research Center data (2014b) also shows that in an average week, one in five Americans (20%) share their

¹⁹ Many of those who were likely to reject religion were also located in the growing category of ‘no religion.’ This trend has been discussed extensively by Bibby throughout his career (see Bibby 2003, 2007, 2009, 2011, 2015). While this is a notable and complex phenomena that informs the broader study of religion in Canada, it is beyond the scope of this research project.

²⁰ An even larger overall percentage of American internet users use these sites; the same report states that seventy-six percent of internet users use social networking sites (Perrin 2015).

religious faith online and almost half (46%) have witnessed religion being shared online²¹. White evangelical Americans are just as likely to have seen religion expressed online but are much more likely (34%) than the general population to share their religious faith online. The same study shows that white evangelicals are also much more likely than the general population to watch religious television, listen to religious talk radio, and listen to Christian rock music (Pew Research Center 2014b). For instance, while slightly more Americans watch religious television (23%) than share their faith online (20%), thirty-nine percent of white evangelicals watch religious television. This group is eclipsed only by the forty-five percent of ‘black Protestants’ who watch religious television²². Furthermore, “Americans who said they frequently attend religious services were more likely to engage in these electronic religious activities than those who said they attend religious services less often” (Pew Research Center 2014b:1). Therefore, instead of declining, religious expression in our time has adapted to the changing nature of social interaction more broadly and continues to remain socially significant for Americans. Much like the rest of our social experiences, religion in North America, particularly for white evangelicals, continues to be shaped by both society and technology, producing novel yet situated forms of religious expression in our digital age.

As more and more formats for religious expression and practice become available through the mediated environments of television and the internet, academics have been

²¹ In comparison, forty percent of those surveyed and fifty-nine percent of white evangelicals surveyed have also shared their faith in a ‘real-life’ setting. It should be noted that, “faith sharing does not necessarily mean evangelizing or proselytizing. The survey question asked respondents whether they had ‘shared something about’ their ‘religious faith offline, in a real-life setting.’ This could include a wide range of interactions, such as offering a prayer or blessing, quoting from scripture or describing a religious experience, to mention only a few possibilities” (Pew Research Center 2014b:5).

²² This finding is not unsurprising given the proliferation of ‘black televangelism’ over the past several decades. See Walton (2009) for a detailed discussion of this trend.

confronted with the task of evaluating the *legitimacy*, *authenticity*, and ‘*reality*’ of mediated religious expressions and communities. This endeavor has often been challenged by popular assumptions that communities formed through mediated environments are somehow always less meaningful than more traditional spaces of social interaction. According to Heidi Campbell, “describing an online group as constituting a religious community has been a contentious claim for some, challenging the religious understandings of community. This has led to some religious authorities and leaders fearing an exodus of members from the pews of churches and temples to religiously focused chat rooms and email communities” (2006:13). These tensions and fears are not wholly specific to online activities, or online religion practice; they can be located in broader social anxieties regarding the role of most ‘new media’ in society and more specifically linked to older tensions and concerns over the role of television in religious practice. These fears concerning a ‘mass exodus’ from traditional forms of religious practice have typically been unfounded, with the majority of data supporting televised and online religious involvement as a supplement, rather than a substitute, to traditional practice (Wuthnow 1987, Katz and Rice 2002). For instance, Pew has found that “that religious engagement through TV, radio, music and the internet generally complements – rather than replaces – traditional kinds of religious participation, such as going to church” (Pew Research Center 2014b). Despite these longstanding findings, concerns over the authenticity of mediated religious experience have been expressed concerning both religious television and online religious expression and still haunt us today. In order to broaden our conceptualization of religion in this media-saturated age, this chapter serves as an investigation of contemporary literature on religion and media in order to examine the recent history of debates surrounding the

reality of mediated religious experience and the communities formed through both televised and online forms of religious expression.

By critically examining these debates, we can also begin to broaden our definition of contemporary religion. We can also further challenge assumptions about modern secularity as religion re-emerges and flourishes in a now mediated public sphere (Hoover 2012). According to Morten Højsgaard, “the internet does not generate or construct religion online, only people do. But while they are doing so, they make use of and they are influenced by the technological possibilities as well as the social, political, and cultural conditions of their time” (2005:62)²³. Højsgaard (2005) highlights a key epistemological consideration in regard to the study of mediated environments. Critics tend to divorce the medium from the human actors that are connected to it, without acknowledging the fluidity of the somewhat imagined boundaries between *the real* and *the virtual* or *the technology* and *the people* who use these platforms. By exploring the evolution of debates concerning the authenticity of mediated religious expression, we ultimately see more similarities than differences between so-called virtual (mediated) and real (face-to-face, traditional, or ‘bricks and mortar’) religious expression²⁴. In recognition of these fluid boundaries and the social construction of an imagined dichotomy, I argue that mediated religion should not be conceptualized as entirely distinct from its traditional face-to-face counterparts. As such, this chapter concludes by arguing that mediated religion cannot be thought of as a mutually exclusive realm that is distinct from more traditional, less mediated forms of face-to-face

²³ The same can be said of all mediated environments at play in this research.

²⁴ This claim is also evidenced by the analysis of mediated evangelism taking shape throughout this dissertation.

religious expression. They are extensions of the same phenomena; fruits of the same proverbial tree.

Definitions of Religion

A required task of this literature review involves an inevitable exploration of how various scholarly definitions of *religion* have been conceptualized, mobilized, and resisted at key moments in the social sciences²⁵. In doing so, I am not attempting to establish a fixed definition of religion as an exhaustive category. Instead, my goal is to examine a variety of definitions to establish that despite a range of definitions, *mediated religion* fits into all of them. As a result, *mediated religion* can be defined and accepted as a meaningful site of religious expression that takes shape through technological platforms, and is located squarely within broader sociological understandings of what constitutes *the religious* in contemporary societies. While ultimately the subject matter of this dissertation is located in the ways in which religious discourse contributes to the constitution of evangelical subjectivities²⁶, broadening our awareness of how religion has been traditionally and more recently conceptualized helps to locate this project within the broader sociology of religion.

Critiques of mediated religion have been heavily dependent on outdated, institutionalized definitions of religion that fail to acknowledge the diversity of

²⁵ While defining religion is not a primary focus of the dissertation, this chapter serves to address an academic tension where we spend an inordinate amount of time trying to construct comprehensive, but still elusive, accounts of what *religion* is. In doing so, we have also at times lacked conceptual depth when trying to develop a much broader conceptualization of religion that recognizes the mediated contexts of contemporary social relations. For more comprehensive discussions how religion (and spirituality) has been defined in the social sciences, see Nancy Ammerman (2013), Grace Davie (2013), Linda Woodhead (2011), James Beckford (2003), Rodney Stark (2001), and Anthony Blasi (1998), to name a few.

²⁶ See [Chapter 4: Theorizing Methodology](#) for further discussion of how discourse and subjectivity are conceptualized for this project. [Chapters 7 through 10](#) examine the ways in which subjectivities emerge through mediated evangelist discourses.

contemporary religious expression while simultaneously treating religion as a “disappearing, residual category” (White 2004:214). These critiques are often related to more rigid understandings of what constitutes religion and fail to take into account the ways in which believers actively practice religion through their own interpretive lens in their everyday lives (McGuire 2008). These narrow views reject the legitimacy and authenticity of mediated religion and reproduce hegemonic definitions and values. Throughout this chapter, I will engage in a brief assessment of sociological definitions of religion where I start by revisiting Émile Durkheim’s foundational definition of religion as ‘an eminently social thing’ before exploring more recent critiques of what constitutes religion. These discussions contribute to a vast sociological, anthropological, and religious studies literature that attempts to better understand religion as a social phenomenon while broadening our sociological understanding of this concept and carving out a legitimate space for mediated religious experience as a site of analysis. By pushing conceptual boundaries and challenging unfounded assumptions of inevitable and absolute secularity, we can then seriously reflect on the actualities of shifting religious landscapes and explore mediated religion as a growing trend instead of a frivolous and novel space for religious expression.

In order to assess the ways in which mediated evangelical discourses help to constitute evangelical subjectivities, it is important to first understand what mediated religion is, or more importantly, how we constitute this category of religious expression. This inherently requires attention to how *religion* itself has been defined, a task that could consume an entire dissertation on its own. Most sociological definitions of religion often tell us that “religion is a set of beliefs and practices focused on the sacred or the

supernatural, through which life experiences of groups and individuals are given meaning and direction” (Emerson & Smith 2000:17). While helpful in determining some of what qualifies as religion, much is missed when attempting to set boundaries around what qualifies as religion. Almost all basic definitions of religion inevitably exclude some religious phenomenon while including seemingly non-religious phenomenon. In other words, most fall short in fully capturing the complexity of religious diversity within one static definition. While I agree with Linda Woodhead (2011) that projects need not always begin with a working definition of religion, the academic conventions of constructing a dissertation have overcome me. Although I have neither the time nor the resources to thoroughly address the complexities of assessing the breadth of intellectual history that defines such a complex social phenomenon, a working understanding of how religion has been conceptualized is still important, particularly for understanding where I will end up: thoroughly immersed in the discursive sphere in an endeavor to unearth the conditions of possibility for evangelical subjectivities.

Peter Berger (1974) addresses this inclination for conceptualization: “definitions focus intellectual attention. Definitions ‘slice up’ reality in different ways. As between functional and substantive definitions of religion, this becomes very clear if one looks for what they, respectively, include and exclude” (1974:127). In other words, definitions matter. Not so much for how effectively and comprehensively they define the subject of their definition, but more so for how they are used and mobilized. This is a fairly significant departure from Berger’s (1967) previous perspective on definitions of religion where he acknowledges them as simply ‘matters of taste’. In *The Sacred Canopy* (1967), Berger recognizes definitions of religion as ‘ad hoc constructs’, maintaining a certain level of

tolerance for a variety of definitions of religion (1974:127). I am no stranger to Berger's intellectual struggle. It would be a mistake to ignore the ways in which our definitions alienate aspects of religious expression often at the privilege of so-called 'western' Christianity; however, we must start somewhere. Despite an ongoing body of critique and conversation, Durkheim still maintains a unique 'founding' role within our discipline. It is this foundational understanding that will serve as a starting point for understanding the evolution of mediated religion. To speak to Berger's alter ego, it would also be counterproductive to maintain a rigid definition going forward with a review of the literature. Therefore, throughout this chapter, I have been cognizant of Berger's earlier notion of 'ecumenical tolerance' for definitions and this dissertation is informed by a variety of definitions from multiple fields, as established throughout this review. This body of definitions and concepts shapes the broadened understanding of mediated religion, as offered in the conclusion of this chapter.

For Durkheim, religion was the key to understanding society from his newly formulated sociological perspective (Pickering 2002:29). Durkheim defines a religion as "a unified system of beliefs and practices relative to sacred things, that is to say, things set apart and forbidden – beliefs and practices which unite into one single moral community called a Church, all those who adhere to them" ([1912] 1995:44)²⁷. His distinction between *the sacred* and *the profane* does not correspond to popular dichotomies of good and evil, but instead refers to the division of the world into two distinct domains. Accordingly, "the

²⁷ It should be noted that like many scholars of his day, Durkheim is commonly critiqued for his use of ethnocentric language. While Durkheim uses the term 'the church' here to refer to a collective of likeminded believers and not a Christian church as such, this critique of language remains valid as his European experiences have likely shaped the ways in which he has crafted linguistic framing here. It is undeniable that his defining work of religion is in many ways better suited to defining institutional, Christian forms of religion at the expense of other forms of religious expression and identities.

sacred and the profane are always and everywhere conceived by the human intellect as separate genera, as two worlds with nothing in common...the sacred is thrown into an ideal and transcendent milieu, while the residuum is abandoned as the property of the material world” (Durkheim [1912] 1995:36). While the profane encompasses much of our everyday mundane practices, the sacred is mysterious and transcendent, something to be treated with awe and steeped in ritual and ceremony. Movement between the two realms is governed by strict rites and rituals, demonstrating “the fundamental duality of the two realms, for it implies a true metamorphosis” (Durkheim [1912] 1995:37).

Many have highlighted this dichotomy between *the sacred* and *the profane* as paramount in Durkheim’s definition of religion (see Gane 1983, Datta 2005), yet it is only one part of the definition. In interest of maintaining religion as a thoroughly social phenomenon, Durkheim cautions us to be careful of privileging one over the other ([1912] 1995:44). The importance of the ‘Church’ is also evident in his definition of religion as he states, “a society whose members are united because they imagine the sacred world and its relations with the profane world in the same way, and because they translate into identical practices, is what is called a Church. In history we do not find religion without Church” (Durkheim [1912] 1995:41). He further clarifies that “a Church is not simply a priestly brotherhood; it is a moral community made up of all the faithful, both laity and priests” (Durkheim [1912] 1995:42). His emphasis on the Church is important because it establishes religion as a fundamentally collective practice. Durkheim expresses this sentiment in *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life*: “in showing that the idea of religion is inseparable from the idea of a Church, it conveys the notion that religion must be an eminently collective thing” (Durkheim [1912] 1995:44). By grounding religion in the

social, Durkheim pushes beyond divinity based understandings of religious expression to firmly establish religion as a human construct because of its collective nature. Therefore, a Durkheimian understanding of religion predictably positions religion as not just a reflection of social current, practices and norms, but as an extension of the essence of social collectivities. Therefore, for Durkheim, religion's most important function is the maintenance of social unity and the continual reproduction of society itself.

Through his exploration of totemic religious forms, and for all of his faults²⁸, Durkheim shows us a vision of religion that is always grounded within the social realities from which it emerges. For this, we owe him acknowledgment; however, the scope of religious definition has evolved greatly since his time while accounting for, and also neglecting, the changing nature of our social realities. The task of defining religion remains a lively debate, yet it consistently proves impossible to construct a social scientific definition that accounts for the vast array of religious expression where all stakeholders are intellectually satisfied (Woodhead 2011). While this is true of the vast majority of complex social phenomena, James Beckford (2003) and Meredith McGuire (2003) are right to note that "religion is not just another example of a contested concept. The history of disputes of what counts as religion or 'true' religion is long and bloody (McGuire 2003). Religion is also a particularly interesting 'site' where boundary disputes are endemic and where well-

²⁸ It should be noted that the ideas brought forth in Durkheim's *Elementary Forms of Religious Life* have been subject to a fair amount of critique. For instance, the rigid separation between *the sacred* and *the profane* and the idea that religious adherents of the same faith express a unified set of beliefs has been challenged by scholars who embrace a more nuanced concept of *lived religion* (see Orsi (1997), Hall (1997), Ammerman (2007), and McGuire (2008) for more elaborated discussions of *lived religion*). Also, empirical data shows syncretism (the blending of religious faiths) is common in modern America (Pew Research Center 2009). See James (1998) for further discussion of religious syncretism. These issues are not lost on me. My discussion of Durkheim's definition of religion locates a starting point for sociological inquiry and highlights the longstanding tradition of examining *the social* within *the religious*. Therefore, I use his work as a stepping stone to explore how definitions have evolved in order to establish the legitimacy of mediated religion within a range of definitions of what constitutes religion more broadly.

entrenched interest groups are prepared to defend their definition of religion against opponents” (Beckford 2003:13). Here, we see agreement with Berger’s (1974) contention that definitions matter, notably in terms of how they are mobilized²⁹. Regardless of how religion is counted or constituted, what is consistently important to the discipline of sociology is the fundamental conceptualization of religion as a social phenomenon. As Beckford (2003) suggests,

the starting point is the assertion that, whatever else religion is, it is a social phenomenon. Regardless of whether religious beliefs and experiences actually relate to a supernatural, superempirical or noumenal realities, religion is expressed by means of human ideas, symbols, feelings, practices, and organizations. These expressions are the products of social interactions, structures and processes, and in turn, they influence social life and cultural meanings to varying degrees. The social scientific study of religion, including social theory, aims to interpret and explain these products and processes (2003:2).

Furthermore, recognizing the social and cultural aspects of religion makes evident the reality that constructed definitions will be continuously in flux (Beckford 2003:214). This trajectory of religion’s embeddedness in society and culture has been evident since Durkheim’s early attempts at assessing what counts as religion, yet often forgets that our definitions themselves are constituted through a particular time and space. The remainder of this section briefly explores the ways in which our very attempts to define religion as a sociological category are discursively dependent.

While I have indeed found value in contemporary assessments of the landscape of religious definition (notably Woodhead 2011), my own reluctance to articulate an exhaustive definition for religion here is located both in my epistemological standpoint as

²⁹ This is of particular relevance to my analysis as mediated evangelists mobilize a decidedly narrow form of authentic Christianity as one built on biblical inerrancy and apocalyptic prophecy as a governing sacred narrative. Mediated evangelism will be addressed in more detail throughout this chapter and [Chapter 3: Addressing Method](#). See [Chapter 5: Deconstructing Evangelicalism in America](#) for an exploration of evangelicalism more broadly.

a qualitative sociologist, and in my own project's attempt to not actually study 'religion' itself, but instead explore the ways in which religious discourses actively constitute subjectivities. Woodhead's (2011) account of developments in the constitution of religion as concept shows us the trajectory of our efforts, noting the importance of historical conceptualizations of *religion as culture*, *religion as identity*, *religion as relationship*, *religion as practice*, *religion as discourse*, and *religion as power*. While my own project aligns most closely with conceptualizations of *religion as discourse* and *religion as power* that acknowledge the ways in which religion is embedded in language³⁰, it is not my intention to reduce religion entirely to discourse, nor do I assert that religious discourse can be segregated from belief, practice, meaning, and values. In this sense, *lived religion*, as a conceptual framework for understanding the ways in which we 'do' religion and the ways in which scholars explore "what really matters" for people's understanding of how religion provides meaning in their own lives, is an important but different level of analysis from what I will achieve through my research.

My research design does not allow me to make claims about how most evangelicals live out their religion but instead allows me to articulate the ways in which discursive formations are constituted throughout mediated evangelism. As such, while the importance of examining lived religion is undeniable, my own object of analysis is decidedly more discursive in nature and perhaps more closely aligned with the defining work of Talal Asad (1993). Asad's rejection of essentialist definitional efforts, stems from his argument "that there cannot be a universal definition of religion, not only because its constituent elements and relationships are historically specific, but because that definition is itself the historical

³⁰ See [Chapter 4: Theorizing Methodology](#) for further discussion here.

product of discursive processes” (Asad 1993:29). Therefore, religion itself, and any attempt to define it, are also discursively constituted and thus represent a variety of intersecting histories and social practices. According to Michael Lambek, “Asad’s account is indicative of a shift away from a symbolic anthropology toward a poststructural one that is more concerned with power and discipline and with the way religious subjects (i.e., practitioners) are formed” (Lambek 2002:114). Here, I follow Asad (1993) in avoiding the task of defining a *transhistorical religious essence*, and turn my sociological attention to the ways in which subjects are formed through intersecting sets of discourses³¹.

Despite the theoretical understanding that religion cannot be reduced to an easily identifiable checklist of what is and what is not present in order to count as the social phenomena, I still need to exercise a certain degree of pragmatism to move past this debate and determine the scope of what is to be included in this analysis. Understanding the complex relationship between media and religion, however, adds yet another layer of complexity to our sociological understanding of how to comprehend and study contemporary religion. Before we can assess the ways in which the landscape of religious definition stands up to the mediated realities of today, we must briefly explore the complex history of interactions between *religion* and *media* and our continually evolving academic understandings of *mediated religion*³². During the course of this project, the ways in which

³¹ See [Chapter 4: Theorizing Methodology](#) for a general discussion of subjectivity and [Chapters 7 through 10](#) for further discussion of how subjectivities are formed throughout the evangelist discourses under study here.

³² As with defining religion, an attempt to fully articulate the social history of defining mediated religion could itself form a multi-disciplinary dissertation. This discussion briefly assesses the scope of this trajectory as a means of highlighting key pieces in this literature as they pertain to the background work of this project without claiming to be entirely comprehensive. As a result of the fast-paced, constantly evolving landscape of technological use and mediation, it is acknowledged that the debates addressed here are inherently unfinished and it is likely that certain elements of these discussions will become seemingly out-dated even before publication. That said, many of these themes remain timeless within the scope of media studies more broadly.

we academically and socially accept, and understand technologically mediated religious expression, have evolved significantly. Despite a more recent acceptance that for religions “to exist today, you have to exist in the mediated public sphere” (Hoover 2012), this assumption that media and religion are thoroughly entwined was not the case at the outset of this research. In their early edited collection, *Rethinking Media, Religion and Culture*, Stewart Hoover and Knut Lundby (1997) “broke new ground by unequivocally replacing an understanding of mediated religion as religious messages *transported by mass media to people*, with a cultural interpretation of religious or sacred symbolism *as shaped by the mediation itself*” (1997:298). In a later essay, Hoover (2002) expands his earlier ideas about the interactions between *media* and *religion* by suggesting that we can no longer justify outdated categories of *mediated religion* or *religious media*. For Hoover (2002, 2012), the interdependent relation between these social phenomena is much more complex; treating religion and media as segregated phenomena makes for a shallow analysis. However, all these years later, scholarly definitions of the intersections of media and religion remain, perhaps inevitably, incomplete.

What further complicates this evolving field is the concurrent evolution of the field of ‘digital religion’ (Campbell 2013) and ‘the religious digital’ (Hoover & Echchaibi 2014), objects of analysis specific to the ways in which religion takes shape through and within all things Internet. Here we see scholars attempting to explore “what we might learn by assuming that in digital religion we are looking at something on its own terms in its own locations” (Hoover & Echchaibi 2014:5). In their efforts to do this, Stuart Hoover and Nabil Echchaibi (2014) take religious practice as a starting point to explore what they refer to as the *third spaces* of digital religion. Drawing on theoretical work from architecture (see

Soja 1996) and sociology (see Oldenburg 1989), their conceptualization of third space speaks to an ‘in-between-ness’ of religious digital spaces. They note,

our concept of 'third spaces' has its own in-between-ness—in-between the various approaches spawned by Oldenburg's ideas—and a range of other uses of the notion of "third-ness." Like Oldenburg, we do intend to suggest something beyond the home and the workplace, but in our frame of reference, the categories of "private" as the first space and "public" as the second, are also implied. In talking specifically about religion, we also intend to point to somewhere beyond institutions (churches, mosques, denominations, faith groups) as the first space and individual practice as the second space. As we are thinking about processes of technological mediation, we might also mean that the digital enables a third space beyond the first space of legacy media and the second space of entirely individual and solipsistic articulation and action (Hoover & Echchaibi 2014:9).

By carving out a third space to describe religious expression that takes shape throughout cyberspace, Hoover & Echchaibi (2014) establish the religious digital as a unique space that takes shape “between and beyond received polarities” (2014:9) and the imagined polarization that sees the real and the virtual as two distinct spheres of social and religious expression. This indeed adds complexity to our understandings of mediated religion more broadly and further demonstrates the breadth of scholarly engagements that seek to better understand the interactions between religion and media. Despite our best intentions, the preeminent authors of the field have yet to establish a fully coherent terminology for what many of us can intuitively conceptualize, but not always clearly articulate. I shall do my best here to contribute to this effort while establishing a space for an analysis of mediated religion that neither separates nor excludes various media platforms from mediated religious expression.

Despite the usefulness of Durkheim in establishing the origins of sociological definitions for the topic at hand, I shall not begin this project by treating social institutions like *religion* and *media* as only mutually exclusive, external, and constraining *social facts*

throughout this dissertation. Nor shall I accept an assessment of mediated religion as merely a conduit for religious messages, or as a replication of face-to-face religious practice. For the purposes of this dissertation, mediated religion will be understood much more holistically. While the internet as a technological, religious, and social *third space* expresses a rather unique capacity for fluidity and connectivity that has not been fully present in other earlier media (Hoover & Echchaibi 2014), my work seeks to recognize the connectivity and holism that exists across media, regardless of technological platform. We can logically accept that this umbrella term (mediated religion) can encompass mediated religious messages while also accepting that mediation inherently shapes both religion and its content. Mediated religion is a component of religion, not something entirely distinct and separate from traditional understandings of religion. However, throughout this dissertation, I am inclined to adopt a pragmatic usage of this contested term *mediated religion* as an organizing concept that can refer to all forms of religious expression that occur through a technologically mediated environment, including (but not limited to): radio, television, internet, and social media. Consequently, the concept of mediated religion is practically utilized to distinguish my objects of analysis from more traditional forms of religious expression, including (but of course not limited to) geographically specific forms of practice: weekly service attendance, volunteer activities, or pilgrimages to physical holy sites. Therefore, my references to mediated religion as an organizing concept allow for the language in which to articulate the scope of where my discursive analysis will be drawn from, with full acknowledgement that what I term mediated religion is a unique, but situated component of our overall understanding of simply ‘religion’. As such, most sociological definitions of religion itself (despite their

incompleteness and situated histories) must encompass this variety of mediated religious expression, as well as more traditional manifestations. This will be further explored in the concluding segments of this chapter.

Understanding the trajectory that follows from Durkheim's ([1912] 1995) original emphasis on the collective nature of religion and the evolving social constructivist position of Beckford's (2003) assertion that "the concept of religion should be tied more closely to its contexts of use" (Woodhead 2011:122) becomes vital to comprehending both now dated and contemporary understandings of mediated religion. The firm understanding that religion from a sociological perspective must be understood as a social phenomenon sheds light on the evolution of debates concerning the acceptance of mediated religion as an authentic form of religious expression. The issue of religious community/collective is at the heart of the debate over the authenticity of mediated, virtual, or the previously popular term, electronic churches. More specifically, scholars have been concerned with the plausible extension of religious *community* into the mediated realm. For instance, can physical/traditional religious groups, communities, or the evangelical congregations relevant to this dissertation, extend through radio and television broadcasts or exist and emerge in cyberspace? Are mediated religious communities something different than their face-to-face counterparts or are they authentically religious and thus part of the same lived religion? As a field, our response to these questions is undoubtedly a resounding 'yes' but as noted, that has now always been the case. While more contemporary understandings of religion may take for granted this embedded social reality, even much older Durkheimian definitions of religion at their most basic can be deconstructed to accept mediated religion as an authentic form of religious expression, as long as elements of the *sacred/profane*

dichotomy and *the Church* translate into the mediated context. As such, exploring the ways in which our definition of religious community has evolved to include mediated forms of community becomes essential in accepting mediated religion as an authentic form of religious expression. This will be explored in later sections of this chapter, following a brief description of some of the ways in which mediated religion has been expressed.

Describing Mediated Religion

The landscape of mediated religion today is one marked by diversity. I will briefly discuss what *mediated religion* is to help to develop an understanding of the varied forms it can take. This contested and robust social phenomenon occurs through many forms of religious expression and practice, and through all forms of technological media. For this dissertation, I am using *mediated religion* as an umbrella term to encompass all instances of religious expression that take shape through some form of technological medium, such as radio, television, or the internet. Despite early tensions between religious organizations and new media technologies, particularly with the advent of television (Rosenthal 2002), the two institutions are now intimately linked (Hoover 2002). Today we see interaction between media and religion everywhere, from popular religious music (Romanowski 2005, Pinn 2005) to bestselling novels (Frykhom 2004) to video games (Richtel 2007). The next two subsections of this chapter highlight several examples of mediated religion in television and cyberspace to provide insight into a small spectrum of the many ways in which religious expressions, practices, and beliefs have flourished in the mediated spaces of television and the internet.

Television

Although evangelical discourses are pervasive across all media, the object of analysis for this dissertation is located in the televangelist discourses that take shape through both television programming and online ministry websites, where the former is used as a primary focal point and the latter informs overlapping discursive analysis where necessary³³. As such, this chapter takes account of the mediated religious landscape of each³⁴. In many ways, social anxieties about the negative potentials of new media are repackaged and reshaped according to broader cultural concerns of a given time and place. According to Steve Bruce (1990), religious organizations were initially skeptical of fully embracing television as a tool for their messages, and although early television “output included Protestant, Catholic, and Jewish religious programmes...it was not until 1947 that any religious organization really grasped the potential of television” (1990:29). Since then, the popular presence of religion in television programming has waxed, waned, and evolved in many ways, yet remains a popular fixture of television today. We see the presence of religious practice, beliefs, and values not only in religiously structured programs like televangelist sermons, but also as fodder for fictional and non-fictional ‘secular’ content like sitcoms, newscasts³⁵, and reality television. In the 1980s, religious broadcasting predominantly featured Judeo-Christian content (Bruce 1990:40). Although the increasing diversity of religious expression within North America has also been reflected in televised

³³ See [Chapter 3: Addressing Method](#) and [Chapter 4: Theorizing Methodology](#) for more detailed discussions of the methods and theoretical methodology that have been used to conduct this research.

³⁴ It should be noted here that I do not accept the premise that television and the internet operate independently of one another. See upcoming sections of this chapter and [Chapter 3: Addressing Method](#) for additional discussion of how remediation has influenced the development of today’s interconnected forms of media.

³⁵ I should note that American newscasts regularly broach the topic of religion in a variety of ways but an analysis of news coverage of religion could form an entire dissertation by itself. In the interest of brevity, it will not be discussed in detail here.

programming in some ways, religious programming and content in North America are still largely reflective of Judeo-Christian values, with conservative Protestant content dominating the televised religious landscape.

The ways in which religion, religiosity, beliefs, and values are portrayed in mainstream American television and film are varied³⁶. Fictional movies range from countless adaptations of biblical narratives to *Dogma* (Smith 1999), a satirical critique of organized religion, to the *Left Behind*³⁷ series (Armstrong 2014, Baxley 2005, Corcoran 2002, Sarin 2001), which depicts obviously evangelical post-rapture apocalyptic storylines. Documentary film explores a broader range of religious expression. Examples include *8: The Mormon Proposition* (Cowan & Greenstreet 2010), a film that explores the relationship between homophobia and Mormonism, *Jesus Camp* (Ewing & Grady 2006), a film that follows the lives of an evangelical pastor and the children involved in her Bible camp, *Islam: Empire of Faith* by PBS (Gardner 2000), which documents the history of Islamic civilization, and *Religulous* (Charles 2008), Bill Maher's scathing critique of religion in general. Fictional television programming also offers a diversity of representation. Religion and religious issues may be the central focus of an entire series or may appear only as a storyline in a series that is not explicitly about religion. Examples of the former include the now concluded *7th Heaven* (1996), which depicts the life of a Protestant Reverend and his large family, CBC's now concluded *Little Mosque on the Prairie* (2007), which portrays Islamic minority life in a small Christian/secular prairie town, BBC's

³⁶ This discussion should not be taken as a comprehensive listing of the entirety of religious representation in contemporary television programming. It serves to highlight several examples for the reader in order to better understand some of the ways in which religious expression occurs through television. This list is admittedly and necessarily incomplete.

³⁷ These films are based on the popular book series written by Tim LaHaye and Jerry B. Jenkins. See *Left Behind* (2008) for the official site of the book series.

Father Brown (2013), which depicts a crime solving catholic priest, HBO's now concluded *Big Love* (2006) which feature religious polygamy, and the relatively new series *The Leftovers* (2014) that features life in a post-rapture(esque) world, respectively. Examples of the former (non-religious oriented shows depicting religious expression) include the HBO's *Sex and the City* (1998) and their portrayal of the conversion of a principle character to Judaism, *Grey's Anatomy* (2005), which has featured religious perspectives on life-saving medical interventions and religious conflicts over a same-sex partnership between two principle characters, and two long running animated series' *The Simpsons* (1989) and *South Park* (1997), both of which regularly feature controversial and satirical storylines about a variety of religious faiths, beliefs, and practices. Lastly, reality television participants' regularly bring their faith into their on-screen interactions but this genre also offers viewers a more in-depth glimpse of everyday life for a plethora of religious families, including TLC's *Sister Wives* (2010), which follows the lives of a non-mainstream Mormon polygamist family, the *Breaking Amish* (2012) series which features Amish youths experiencing life in large cities away from their insular communities, and the now concluded *All American Muslim* (2011), which depicted the lives of five Muslim families living in Dearborn, Michigan.

Apart from film, documentaries, and television programs, religion also enters our viewing world in North America every December through the notable scheduled intervention of 'Christmas specials'. Paul Nathanson argues that "every year, Christmas comes to television. Not only is the regular schedule studded with Christmas specials, but individual episodes in regular series are often devoted specifically to the festival" (1991:322). Nathanson (1991) also argues that the 'festival' of Christmas portrayed in

special programming is almost always secular in nature, featuring themes of generosity and sharing as ethical, rather than religious, messages for viewers. Similarly, Robert Thompson, argues “the American cultural Christmas is a perfect match for television. Christianity itself ...is not well suited for a commercial medium like television, but Christianity as it is reconfigured in Christmas specials to match American expectations is a different story” (2005:45). Thus, while Christmas is an overtly religious holiday in origin, Christmas television specials typically water down the overtly Christian elements with the addition of secularized characters such as Rudolph, Frosty, and Santa while giving an ‘obligatory nod’ to other religious holidays such as Hanukah and Kwanza (Thompson 2005:47-48). Despite efforts to repackaging Christmas specials as ‘holiday programming’ the maintenance of obviously Christian traditions, such as religious hymns and nativity scenes, televised Christmas specials often remain decidedly Christian with an emphasis on the ‘Christmas spirit’ that subtly reinforces latent Christian values (Thompson 2005). Without wading too far into the debate over what constitutes the boundaries between what is religious and what is secular, it is likely that most holiday programming represents a mix of both religious and secular influences. While they may not be considered *wholly religious* or *wholly secular*, these holiday specials are often conceptualized as part of the religious television spectrum.

In addition to regular mainstream programming and holiday specials, religious television also takes shape through the object of this discourse analysis: televangelist programming. Televangelist programs include broadcasts of traditional sermons as well as

other non-sermon varieties, such as talk shows, variety shows, and newscasts³⁸. While televangelist programming is widely available on public access and basic cable stations, entire religious broadcast networks are also available online and through extended cable packages. Christian broadcast networks, such as TBN (2016) and CBN (2016), as well as Canada's YesTV³⁹ (2015) and graceTV (2016), offer a variety of televangelist sermons, talk shows, and news segments, as well as the occasional 'Christian-friendly' fictional television show or film. The website for TBN (2016) presents their network as an alternative to mainstream news, media, and pop culture where core values of faith and family can be celebrated. Therefore, for Christian media consumers dissatisfied with the treatment of religious beliefs and values in mainstream programming, these broadcast networks offer an alternative that reflects and reinforces their worldview and religious values.

The emergence of twenty-four hour Christian broadcast networks means that all year round, at almost any time of the day, most cable viewers have access to a variety of televangelist programming. Of course televangelism is no longer restricted to television anymore and the availability of current and archived programming is exponentially increased in the online environment. Even though most religious broadcast networks showcase a variety of programming, televangelist programming is a dominant feature of most religious networks' schedules, to the extent that many people have traditionally conflated 'religious television' with televangelism (Bruce 1990:40). Of course, religious organizations have not always embraced new forms of media to this extent. Early anxieties

³⁸ Televangelist programming will be addressed below in more detailed. See Chapter 6: Situating Contemporary Televangelists for a general discussion of common themes that are present in the broader genre of televangelist programming.

³⁹ YesTV was rebranded in 2014. It was formerly known as *Crossroads Television System* (CTS 2014).

envisioned televangelism as a negative influence that was capable of drawing believers away from their physical congregations and into the electronic churches offered through television (and now online). It had been argued that this would further exacerbate a perceived individualization and privatization of faith but these claims have long since been put to rest. Robert Wuthnow (1987) was among the first to empirically dismiss this contentious claim in the 1980s. Based on Gallup data from 1984, Wuthnow (1987) found that televangelism and religious television act as more of a supplement to traditional religious activity rather than as a substitute for church attendance. As we can see from the more recent Pew data presented earlier in this chapter, these claims continue to hold up today in our increasingly mediated landscape. Today, televangelist sermons represent a central component of *religious* and *mediated religious* landscapes. The varied forms of evangelist programming will be further assessed later in this chapter and throughout this dissertation.

The Internet

To some degree, academic attention has shifted away from religious television with the advent of the internet and the widespread existence of religious expression in cyberspace. While the two mediums are both important in our contemporary world, the internet, as a medium, allows for a much wider scope of religious expression and practice than its predecessors of radio and television. A 2004 study estimated that “twenty-five percent of internet users have gotten religious or spiritual information online at one point or another”, a demonstrated increase since the last survey of its kind, conducted in 2000 (Larsen 2004:17). Of these so called ‘Religion Surfers’, eighty-one percent describe their

faith as ‘very strong’ with seventy-four percent reporting weekly church attendance (Larsen 2004:19). These reports lend support to earlier studies of television that contested assumptions that mediated religion would serve as a substitute for traditional religious practice, rather than a supplement or companion practice (Wuthnow 1987, Horsfall 2000). Another survey suggests that as many as “sixty-four percent of wired Americans have used the internet for spiritual or religious purposes” (Hoover, Clark & Rainie 2004:1⁴⁰). As noted earlier, individuals use the internet for spiritual purposes in a plethora of ways and for various reasons. For instance, “79% of those who are active in religious and spiritual organizations use the internet” (Jansen 2011) and twenty-two percent of those surveyed claim that their involvement in their group is enhanced by their use of internet. More recent data suggests that one in five Americans (20%) share their religious faith online and slightly under half (46%) have observed religion being shared online (Pew Research Center 2014b). Ultimately, we no longer inhabit a world where cyberspace can be constructed as a novel area of interest for specialist hackers and tech savvy teens looking for new friends or attention. Now that a reliable internet connection is no further away than the phone in your pocket, we can safely conclude that online religious interest is likely to remain a prevalent social phenomenon in cyberspace as the internet becomes even further engrained in the daily lives of North Americans⁴¹.

⁴⁰ This finding from *the Pew Internet & American Life Project* data estimated 128 million American Internet users, at the time of data collection. Therefore, the study suggests that roughly 82 million Americans were using the internet for faith-based matters (Hoover, Clark & Rainie 2004). A more recent Pew Research Center (2016a) study of general internet usage suggests that (as of 2014) eighty-seven percent of Americans now use the internet. The same study suggests that only sixty-three percent of Americans used the internet in 2004. While a more precise assessment of how Americans are using the internet for spiritual purposes would be ideal, logic holds that millions of Americans are still likely to be engaging their faith online given the significant increase in general internet usage over the past decade. See Pew Research Center (2014b) for the most recent comprehensive analysis of these trends.

⁴¹ It should be noted here that there has historically been a ‘digital divide’ created by internet access issues, as well as through social and economic constraints. For instance, at the time of Helland’s (2000) early

As the world continues to embrace the internet, so too have the dominant and fringe religious groups of our day. As early as 1989/1990⁴², the highly recognizable Pope John Paul II decried a need for religious-internet integration (Helland 2004:25, O’Leary 2004:37). A few years later, a 1996 study recommended that all major religious organizations quickly establish an online presence or risk losing touch with their congregations (Helland 2004:26). Institutionalized religions are not the only organizations that embrace the capacity of cyberspace; the internet provides space for religious expression of all sorts (Helland 2004:26-27). According to Helland (2007): “this medium has been embraced by most of the world’s religious traditions, to the point that not having internet representation is a rarity for a religious organization, even if it is Luddite in its beliefs and practices” (2007:957). Therefore, whatever the size or scope of a particular religious group, it is becoming increasingly evident that online participation is no longer optional for remaining relevant in today’s increasingly diverse religious landscape.

The character of online religious expression is as diverse as the various groups that use the medium. Religion initially became entangled in online life in the Usenet newsgroups of the early 1980s (Helland 2007:958); however, it was not until May 2004 that the first virtual church service occurred through churchoffools.com (2016), a website sponsored by the Methodist Church (Peterson 2005). In addition to virtual services for a variety of religions, we also find an abundance of less traditional forms of religious expression through blogs, message boards, discussion communities, virtual worlds such as

research, only two percent of Latin America had internet access (2000:212). While access has improved in many regions of the world, notably ‘global north’ countries like the United States and Canada, digital divides are still present and have been reshaped in many ways. More specific features of *digital divides* will be addressed later in this chapter.

⁴² This date is slightly unclear. While Helland (2004) claims an address in 1989, O’Leary (2004) claims an address in 1990. It is unclear from the information in both articles whether they are both referring to the same address or if two different addresses on the same topic took place.

*Second Life*⁴³, social media, and an immense variety of informational websites. Scholars have explored specific examples of *the religious* that allow internet users to take part in new religious forms of technopaganism (O’Leary 2004), explore dispensationalist belief structures that predict the approaching apocalypse (Howard 2000), train to be a missionary (Campbell 2006), indulge in anti-religious arguments of Freethought culture (Nash 2002) and even make virtual pilgrimage to Mecca (Peterson 2005) and other sacred sites throughout the world⁴⁴. While the acceptance of virtual adaptations of traditional religious practices can be controversial for some believers, few traditional practices are exempt from an online manifestation of some variety.

The ways in which we can interact with information, and one another, through cyberspace are almost limitless today as the availability of an internet connection is ever present through our computers, phones, tablets, and other gadgets. How we access and experience both the internet and television has also evolved quickly. We no longer live in a world where our television set is the sole provider of television programming; it is also available through a new generation of internet-enabled devices. Likewise, our television sets are now fully connected to cyberspace, broadening the scope, availability, and experience of television engagement. Through the wonders of remediation⁴⁵, we can watch televised programming through network websites, subscription services, and legal media sharing services, such as Netflix (Netflix Inc. 2016), Hulu (2016), iTunes (Apple Inc. 2016)

⁴³ According to an earlier version of their official website, “Second Life is an online, 3D virtual world imagined and created by its Residents” (Linden Research, Inc. 2016). *Second Life* was brought online in 2003 by Linden Lab. It has become a virtual space where real world currency can be traded for *Second Life* currency and goods and land can be bought and sold by its residents. It is a complex mix of virtual and material world interaction that blurs the boundaries of each and represents an interesting site for further research beyond the scope of this dissertation.

⁴⁴ See Google (2016) for a list of traditional and online pilgrimage sites.

⁴⁵ See [Chapter 3: Addressing Method](#) for additional discussion of remediation.

and Spotify (Spotify AB 2016), without worrying about copyright infringement, cable packages, or requiring any advanced computer programming skill set whatsoever. As such, the ways in which television and online capabilities are influencing and acting upon each other are constantly evolving. This makes it challenging for academics trying to keep up with this ever-changing media landscape. For instance, the rapid pace of technological advancement means that any analysis of media technology is, in some ways, inherently dated by the time it reaches publication. It is clear that new technologies will continue to evolve and will continue to shape religion as a social phenomenon. Despite the challenges presented by technological advancement, it is still important to draw upon the broad history of sociological research available in this area to locate similarities between newer religious mediations and their early predecessors of print and radio, as well as early forms of television and internet.

Meaning and Authenticity in Mediated Religion

The ways in which we mediate our everyday experiences have often been the subject of critique. Despite the advances we have made in our scholarly explorations of communications technologies and the ways in which mediated social interaction has become a taken for granted reality of our everyday lived experience in North America, mediated forms of religious expression are still stigmatized to a certain extent. Both scholars and key social actors amongst the broader public (i.e. news media) still sometimes characterize mediated religious expression as somehow less meaningful or less authentic when held against its more traditional counterparts (Campbell & Teusner 2011). Given the variety of mediated religious expression today, how do we begin to assess the authenticity

of mediated religion today? For the remainder of this chapter, I will examine mediated religious practices that locate their origins in more traditional settings, such as televangelism or virtual religious meetings and services. I have limited my analysis to these more formalized forms of mediated religious expression because they allow for comparisons to more traditional forms of religious practice that other examples cannot. This chapter serves as an exploration of three critiques concerning the authenticity of mediated religious expression that have been present throughout the history of this debate: *mediation dilutes reality*, *mediation decentralizes authority*, and *mediation inhibits the formation of religious community*.

While there is a considerable contemporary literature that explores online religious expression, it is becoming increasingly difficult to find engaged and theoretically significant resources on television and religion, particularly concerning the authenticity of religious expression through television. This is likely an unfortunate consequence of the current academic novelty still associated with online research. It may also be the result of easier access to public discourse and research participants in the online environment. While specialized knowledge was originally necessary for website publication, and even online participation, now advanced interactive features make website design and online interaction accessible to anyone with an internet connection and a desire to broadcast their thoughts. It may also be possible that religious organizations simply use television less as a residual of their early reluctance toward the medium and the prohibitive costs sometimes associated with television programming (Abelman and Hoover 1990:10); however, the recent Pew data discussed earlier do not support this theory. Whatever the reasons for the academic neglect of televised religion, much of the conceptual commentary on internet

religion can be applied to other forms of mediated religion in meaningful ways, given the interconnectivity of today's mediated landscape. As noted, televangelism remains prominent both on television and online and both mediums utilize traditional forms of religious practice to shape their mediated content. Despite a necessary reliance on a contemporary media literature that neglects television as an influential medium, I do not wish to reinforce this tendency. Televangelism has a strong grounding within television and this has been used as a reference point for the discursive analysis that informs this project. Following the mediated discursive formations of televangelism will require a brief exploration of the ways in which television and the internet interact with and influence each other through remediation (see Bolter and Grusin 1999). Remediation⁴⁶ generally refers to the ways in which new media influence older media to shift the scope of what they are capable of (and vice versa). Early examples of remediation include the influence that online 'interactivity' has had on television and film through the enhanced features of DVDs that allowed for greater user interaction within the older medium itself. These features also allowed for greater user interaction by allowing DVDs to be used in conjunction with a computer in order to access even more content. This has interconnected the two mediums by allowing the user to interact and engage across mediums, rather than remain steadily fixed to only one. More recent examples include internet-enabled televisions and the ability to consume televised programs through streaming online video, while podcasting and internet-based radio enhance even earlier forms of media. As a result of this increasing interactive connectivity across digital media, this analysis will encompass both televised

⁴⁶ As noted above, see [Chapter 3: Addressing Method](#) for additional discussion of remediation.

and internet forms of evangelical discourses, allowing the ‘televangelist’ to guide the direction of content across platforms when necessary.

As a subset of religious television⁴⁷, understanding the ways in which we assess the authenticity of mediated evangelism can be directly linked to the ways in which we assess the authenticity of both religious television and online religious expression. In his much cited early study of religious television, Wuthnow (1987) questions the common fear that religious television viewing contributes to the privatization of religion. He argues that there is little evidence to suggest this for two reasons. First, he suggests that “religious television has scarcely been limited to the private sphere” (Wuthnow 1987:128), arguing that religious television is often used to raise funds for political campaigns and educational institutions. Paul Adams (1992), echoes this sentiment by describing television as a ‘place without location’, arguing that television allows social congregation without physical proximity (1992:117). Second, Wuthnow (1987) argues that ‘relational bonds’ in religious communities are not declining as religious television viewers are still actively engaged in weekly church attendance, volunteering and financial contributions (1987:129). Wuthnow (1987) dismissed earlier beliefs that suggested religious television viewing would draw churchgoers away from the pews of their local church and back into their living rooms. He saw religious television as a supplement to traditional religious practice. Because television was constructed as a supplement, rather than a substitute, it could be thought of as another

⁴⁷ As noted above, televangelism has often been presented as the dominant image of religious television but the phenomenon of religious television encompasses much more diversity than this one subset of programming. Despite the diversity of available religious programming, not much has been done to evolve the term ‘religious television’. Likewise, mediated evangelism is a subset of religious television but the two should not be conflated. While religious television, as an umbrella term, can include any form of televised programming that includes religion or spirituality as a central narrative or component, this dissertation is concerned with the various forms of mediated evangelism that articulate a set of criteria central to conservative evangelical discourses. A further exploration of mediated evangelism will be offered in the following chapters.

resource to draw upon for fulfilling religious needs. Wuthnow's (1987) ground-breaking study legitimized religious television early on as an important component of religious expression while dispelling then common misconceptions regarding mediated religion more broadly.

While religious television remains a prevalent aspect of mediated religion in general, an even wider array of religious expression can be found online. One of the first comprehensive analyses of internet-based religious expression was published by Christopher Helland in 2000. In this ground breaking study, Helland (2000) took on the complex task of classifying religious websites into two different categories which he terms *Religion-Online* and *Online-Religion*. His classification of *religion-online* typically involves more traditional organized religious groups who seek to maintain an online presence to spread their message without enabling the possibility of debate or online interaction. These hierarchical religious websites exist solely to communicate 'official' information to the internet masses where the established religious organizations behind these websites seek only to replicate their traditional institutional structures through the online environment (Helland 2000:219). Helland cites the Vatican's official website as one of the most impressive examples of religion-online. At the time, it was offered in six languages (now in nine languages), had millions of internal web pages, and was hosted on three super computers aptly named Raphael, Michael, and Gabriel (Helland 2007:964). According to Helland, "the site offers just about everything one might want to know regarding the Catholic tradition [yet] there are no interactive areas" and no external links (2007:964).

On the other hand, *online-religion* embraces the interactivity of the medium, and is used by a diverse range of formal and informal religious groups from *The Global Hindu Network*⁴⁸ (Dharma Universe 2014) (Helland 2007:965) to *The Church of the Flying Spaghetti Monster* (CFSM 2016). Online-religion often appears as considerably less hierarchical and tends to offer more wide-ranging religious websites. While many still include extensive sections of informative material about their religion, these sites also tend to offer interactive sections in the form of chat rooms or discussion boards. More specifically, online-religion consists of unregulated, open-ended, non-hierarchical religious expression where “individuals are interacting with the religious beliefs systems presented on the internet; they are contributing personal beliefs and receiving personal feedback. It is a dialectic process...” (Helland 2000:214). These sites are often vibrant areas for religious discussion concerning practice and belief, while also offering forums for more practical elements, such as finding a suitable partner or exchanging recipes appropriate for one’s religious dietary requirements. According to Helland, “in this new use of the online environment, participants [are] not simply passive recipients of information; rather, they [become] actively involved in a dialectic” (2007:965).

Although widely employed in the literature, Helland’s (2000) concepts are not immune from critique. Hadden and Cowan (2000) and Young (2004) both note that many websites feature elements of both religion-online and online-religion, actively bridging the two conceptual definitions. For instance, virtual religious services and houses of worship such as *Church of Fools* or many of the spaces in the virtual world *Second Life* are complex representations of this convergence of religion-online and online-religion. These examples

⁴⁸ This website has now been renamed *The Hindu Universe*.

are also comparable to common formats for religious television in that they seek to replicate the experience of a traditional service through a mediated space, allowing us to conceive of a more fluid boundary between ‘bricks and mortar’ religious practice, televised religious programming, and religious programming in cyberspace. To be fair, Helland (2004) himself also acknowledges the limitations of his earlier conceptual framework when set against the context of a rapidly evolving world of cyberspace. He still challenges us to further explore how religious groups adapt to this changing environment to better theorize his work as these adaptations take hold.

Helland’s evolving concepts are helpful when exploring the mediated religious spaces of today’s evangelists. The mediated evangelism of today also represents a sort of convergence of *religion-online* and *online-religion*; this is particularly true if we conceptually adapt Helland’s (2000) *religion-online* to account for religious television. Since Helland (2000) uses *religion-online* to examine traditionally hierarchical uses of media by official, or more institutional religious organizations, we can further extend this category to media beyond cyberspace. Following this line of thought, we can see that televangelist sermons show great similarities to official church websites. Taken by itself, religious television represents the same sort of unidirectional, top-down communication, and limited audience engagement encapsulated in Helland’s (2000) concept of *religion-online*. However, televangelism today also no longer exists in a mutually exclusive bubble; it is part of a wide-ranging *media package* that is inclusive of all forms of digital media. These evangelical *media packages*⁴⁹ exhibit multi-mediated features of both religion-online and online-religion, where both hierarchy and interaction are prevalent. While

⁴⁹ See [Chapter 3: Addressing Method](#) for further discussion of the concept of media packages.

clearly dynamic and interactive, the reference point of these services is still traditional ‘bricks and mortar’ or ‘offline’ religious practice. These mediated spaces of religious practice thus blur the boundaries between Helland’s (2000) conceptualization of *religion-online* and *online-religion* since both online and televised religious sermons seek to adapt and reproduce traditional religious practice.

Here we can look to Campbell’s (2013) conceptualization of *digital religion* and Hoover and Echchaibi’s (2014) ideas about *the religious digital* and *the third space* as more recent endeavors to evolve Helland’s pioneering research. These concepts recognize the ways in which religion is constituted in unique ways through digital technologies and culture, as well as the ways in which religion shapes digital media and culture. Accordingly, “we can think of digital religion as a bridge that connects and extends online religious practices and spaces into offline religious contexts and vice versa” (Campbell 2013:4). As such, adapting this perspective to include all forms of digitally mediated religion can help to further evolve our understandings of what constitutes religion more broadly, recognizing the fluidity that now exists between technologically mediated and bricks and mortar religious practice.

While these forms of mediated religious practice might be gaining in popularity and legitimacy (in academia and broader society), they are not without controversy. As noted earlier, the authenticity of mediated religion has been questioned by religious leaders, news media, politicians, citizens, as well as academics. These concerns over meaning and authenticity in mediated spaces stem from repackaged social anxieties surrounding fear of new media and technology more broadly. The persistent concern that mediation produces watered-down versions of ‘reality’ is grounded in shifting perceptions concerning the role

of religion in so-called secular societies. In order to gain some modicum of insight into this rather large debate, the remaining sections of this chapter will examine three prevailing areas of concern over the authenticity of mediated religion. First, critics suggest that mediation somehow fundamentally alters the essence of traditional religious practice and therefore, mediated religion should be treated as something entirely distinct from and subordinate to traditional religious expression. Second, critics argue that mediated religion disrupts traditional religious authority structures, stemming from longstanding societal anxieties over the decentralization of authority and expertise through new technological mediums. Lastly, critics argue that mediated religious interaction does not foster religious communities or social bonds in the same way material religious practice does. In turn, the remaining sections of this chapter will briefly explore the ways in which these debates have evolved.

Mediation dilutes reality

Concerns over the interaction between media and religion are not unique to digital media and technology (Hoover 2002). According to Lundby and Hoover (1997), “mediations of religion are nothing new. To communicate within their cultures, religious institutions and religious studies have always had to rely on mediation through various media – from the oral, through writing and print, to electronic media – for the interpretation and sharing of religious symbols” (1997:300). Despite more recent recognitions that all religion has been mediated in some respects, specifically through culture and society (Woodhead 2011), concern over the alteration of reality through mediation continues to persist. Hardliners of this position argue that mediation fundamentally alters and recreates

meaning (Lundby and Hoover 1997:304)⁵⁰. Earlier concerns over the authenticity of mediated religion have evolved to focus on the more digitally interactive media of recent years, given the unprecedented potential of both television and internet to create novel forms of religion, community, and meaning for believers of all sorts. Accordingly, “electronic mediations introduce new conditions and potential consequences, because the broadcast media are able to reshape narratives and redirect former mediations on a much larger scale than are print media” (Lundby and Hoover 1997:301). Therefore, while mediation of religion is certainly not a new phenomenon, the mediation of religion through digital broadcast and web-enabled technologies makes possible relatively unique concerns as a consequence of the scope of the mediums themselves, as well as their potential to reshape the character of religious expression in unprecedented and unpredictable ways.

Concerns over the mediation of religion have often reflected a historical privileging of face-to-face religious practice, interaction, and expression at the expense of their mediated counterparts. These critiques often fail to acknowledge the diversity of mediations that take place in everyday experience. As Linderman (1997) argues, social interactions take “place in many different contexts, through various means of communication, involving various individuals and groups in different constellations at different times” (1997:267). Physical proximity is no longer a prerequisite for social interaction (Mahan 2014) and nor does it guarantee the automatic emergence of religious community or social bonds through face-to-face religious interactions (Lundby and Hoover 1997:306-307). By overlooking the possibilities, benefits, and meaning reflected in and created through mediated interaction, critics continue to privilege a form of face-to-face

⁵⁰ For example, Horsfield’s (2004:25-26) early work argues that televangelism fundamentally ‘loses the essence’ of the Christian message due to ideological and commercial restraints of television.

interaction that is in some ways becoming less common. Given the extent to which many of us now communicate through all forms of media, particularly internet, this privilege has made for an unconvincing critique as we move into a more evolved era of media studies. There is now a significant literature that problematizes the polarization of *real* and *virtual* religious spaces and explores the ways in which religious meaning is created through both⁵¹. As such, face-to-face interactions of traditional believers are no longer inherently assumed to be more meaningful than those occurring online; rather they are often thought to be socially constructed as such through historically shared meaning and a longstanding privilege of physical contact. While mediation is often assumed to be a poor substitute for ‘real world’ contact, for some it can be more meaningful and result in a richer experience than traditional practice where strangers may sit beside each other and still fail to interact at all. The meaning created through both traditional and mediated forms of religion is far more complex than a simple binary that polarizes the ‘real’ from the ‘virtual’ can account for. Those who negate the possibility of meaningful religious connections in mediated spaces neglect an entire population of ‘religious surfers’ (Larsen 2004) and religious television viewers who readily participate in these mediated practices. As Hoover (2013) suggests, “digital religion is essentially about religion and spirituality...it is about people using technologies to live out the spiritual. We must see digital religion as being about the generation of models of practice and the ability to produce meaning in the world that relates to the religious” (2013:268). Despite the complexity of these issues, concerns over the ‘inauthentic’ mediation of reality typically results from two problematic assumptions. First,

⁵¹ See Campbell’s (2013) edited collection titled *Digital Religion: Understanding Religious Practice in New Media Worlds* for the most recent and comprehensive discussions of these debates. This collection includes particularly relevant contributions from Campbell herself, Christopher Helland, Mia Lövheim, Kerstin Radde-Antweiler, Nabil Echchaibi, Rachel Wagner, and Stewart Hoover.

critics of mediation tend to treat religion and media as entirely distinct institutions; and second, critics often reify mediated experience by divorcing technologies from the human actors that create and use them. Both of these assumptions lack analytical power in our increasingly mediated world, while neglecting an entire body of early communications and religious scholarship that has long since engaged these issues.

While most authors now take for granted the interaction of religion and media, Hoover (2002) notes that “early considerations were rooted in a particular way of looking at both media and religion: as separate entities that could be seen as acting independently of one another. In this view, ‘religion’ and ‘the media’ are autonomous, independent realms” (Hoover 2002:1). By further maintaining a weak construction of religion and media as mutually exclusive institutions that operate separately from one another, we neglect “the multiple relationships between religion and the media [involving the] layered interconnections between religious symbols, interests, and meanings and the modern media sphere within which much of contemporary culture is made and known” (Hoover 2002:1). In other words, Hoover (2002) argues that the boundaries between religion and media are becoming increasingly blurred as we see convergence around the ‘everyday world of lived experience’ where the complexities of mediated religious practice inform the social and religious realities of participants. As such, mediated religious expressions can be understood as part of both religion and media at the same time. Given the extent to which religious groups interact with media technologies (Helland 2008), we can now task ourselves with further examining the ways in which media, culture, and religion collectively, and holistically, help to shape the beliefs and practices of religious populations and vice versa (see Forbes 2005, O’Leary 2004). Therefore, mediated religion becomes a

logical extension of traditional religion where meaning can be generated in authentic ways for participants.

The second problematic assumption is perhaps more disconcerting than the first. The tendency to disembody media neglects a vast body of communications scholarship that long ago argued that media is an extension of the social actors who create and make use of these technologies. According to Marshall McLuhan (1967), “all media are extensions of some human faculty...the wheel is an extension of the foot, the book is an extension of the eye, clothing an extension of the skin, electric circuitry an extension of the central nervous system” (McLuhan and Fiore 1967:31-40). Thus, media are constructed extensions of human faculties, yet still apart from us at the same time; they are reified in our everyday experience. As such, they both shape and constitute the environment in which we live, as “the environment that man creates becomes his medium for defining his role in it” (McLuhan and Fiore 1967:157). When societies undergo change, media do as well where a reciprocal arrangement results. Accordingly, “any understanding of social and cultural change is impossible without a knowledge of the way media work as environments” (McLuhan and Fiore 1967:26). Therefore, any understanding of contemporary religion without regard to the mediation of religious expression is necessarily incomplete.

While McLuhan and Fiore (1967) were mostly concerned with the social implications of the advent of television, over the past two decades, scholars have also taken up this tradition through critical application to newer digital media. As Peterson (2005) boldly states, “it is a mistake to think of cyberspace as disembodied. Rather, it is embodied nationally and even globally, creating a new kind of unity amidst the world’s diversity” (2005:132). Other scholars push this critique even further by problematizing the very

concept of cyber-religion. Brenda Brasher (2001) argues that “religions are only located or mediated in cyberspace because ‘somebody at some stage did something’...accordingly, a genuine example of a religion that has been set up in cyberspace without at least the initial interface of a human being remains to be seen” (2001:30). Accordingly, definitions that envision cyber-religion as ‘religion that exists exclusively in cyberspace’ (see Højsgaard 2005:51, Karaflogka 2002) are epistemologically suspect as they alienate human actors from the online environment in which they conduct their affairs (see Højsgaard 2005, Brasher 2001). Furthermore, Højsgaard argues that most examples of what has been referred to as cyber-religion are really just extensions of “real people, actual places, established institutions and so forth” (2005:60); they are extensions of more traditional face-to-face forms of religious expression. The digital representations of participants attached to their web-enabled devices carry out similar actions in virtual religious spaces as they do in their traditional counterparts. Therefore, televised or online sermons are mediated counterparts to traditional practice that have the capacity to serve as yet another option for religious populations to satisfy their spiritual needs where real people are still very much present, and embodied, despite the technological mediation required.

Mediation decentralizes authority

A second challenge to the authenticity of mediated religion stems from skepticism concerning the ways in which media *can* be used by social actors. More specifically, traditional religious groups tend to articulate concerns about new mediums because they present a capacity to operate outside the boundaries of traditional religious authority structures. This possibility of a decentralized hierarchy poses a threat to longstanding forms

of traditional religious authority and expertise. As Warner (1993) and White (2004) note, “the definition of what religion is must be based on what is expressed and experienced, not what is ascribed by hegemonic cultures” (White 2004:203). However, in practice this has not always happened, as we can see through more nuanced challenges to these types of definitions, such as those that conceptualize *lived religion*. That said, ideas about what constitutes religion are also heavily influenced by hegemonic religious culture. New media and technologies that have threatened this hegemony have historically been met with fear and dismissal by religious elites as a result of their potential to disrupt established hierarchies of authority and knowledge production. While religious groups that embrace new media often become part of a culture’s hegemonic status quo (Rosenthal 2002), this tension between power and fear is palpable concerning new media, particularly because it ensures that “knowledge [is] no longer the privilege of the elite” (Horsfall 2000:179).

It should be noted that there are several complications to this discussion surrounding concerns over authority in mediated religion. First, these critiques are much more often directed at the internet rather than television. Although televised religion certainly challenges established religious authority structures, the underlying issues are made much more evident through the interactive, connected environment of cyberspace. While religious programming is theoretically available to any group who can afford production and broadcast costs, the internet requires less economic means, only a minimal skill set, and access to computers or other web-enabled devices⁵². At the same time, concerns over the decentralization of religious authority are not unique to internet enabled religious expression. Similar concerns can be located in much broader anxieties concerning

⁵² Issues concerning access to technology and the *digital divide* have been discussed earlier in this chapter.

other social institutions that have populated cyberspace, most pronounced perhaps in the field of medicine (Hardey 1999, 2001, Nettleton 2004, Thomas 2006). Although these issues cannot be fully explored in this chapter, they are noted here to provide context for the following discussions.

In 2007, Campbell highlighted an important methodological issue in the study of religious authority and media by stating unequivocally that research of authority in cyberspace was still lacking and ill defined. She continues to investigate how religious authority has shifted since the advent of cyberspace and encourages further research into this complex area (Campbell & Teusner 2011). Campbell distinguishes between four *layers of authority* in the study of religion and authority in the cyber context and argues that, “studying authority online involves identifying these multiple layers in order to discover whether it is religious roles, systems, beliefs or sources that are being affected” (2007:1044). For the purposes of this chapter, I am interested in authority structures⁵³ which encompass multiple layers of each of her categorizations. Furthermore, I agree with Campbell that there is “a need to explore the relationship between offline and official structures or channels of authority and those formed in various online forums” (Campbell 2007:1059). The remainder of this section will explore some of the issues involved in this challenge.

Campbell’s (2007) research complements the earlier work of Gary Bunt (2004) by helping to illuminate the interaction between online and ‘offline’ worlds in terms of religious authority structures. Yet again, we find support that these realms are not entirely

⁵³ While I respect Campbell’s (2007) attempt to break down and unpack the concept of religious authority in the online context, I should note that I do not believe her classifications work as mutually exclusive categories in practice. I agree with her that further research is absolutely necessary to further illuminate how these layers of authority operate and interact.

distinct from one another but rather operate as integrated extensions of one another that enable interactions between traditional religious authorities and religious laities through internet capabilities. For example, Bunt (2004) notes that religious websites often depend on ‘experts’ from traditional organizations in the material world to answer questions. In another discussion concerning the blurred boundaries between online and offline Islamic content, Bunt suggests that “it is difficult to generalize as to whether the Internet is a reflection of conventional understandings of either Islam or the Qur’an. Given the diversity of expression, however, it is clear that many understandings of both Islam and the Qur’an...are represented online” (2004:134). Here, we again see a complex interaction between online and offline authority structures where participants are exposed to both traditional religious elites as well as multiple religious perspectives through the diversity of content available online.

The complexity and diversity of information and social interactions available through online spaces has fueled institutional anxieties over the decentralization of authority hierarchies⁵⁴. As noted earlier, Sara Horsfall argues that “knowledge is no longer the privilege of the elite but is available to anyone who has the time and interest to search for it” (2000:179). The internet has been most notably feared for this capacity to increase access to information and therefore encourage lay interpretation of complex expert knowledge that had previously been guarded by elite authorities in such organizations. The amount of information available online is staggering, and much like the impact of the printing press and other new mediums before it, some have predicted that the impact of the

⁵⁴ It should be noted that this challenge is somewhat specific to more hierarchical authority structures and that religious groups that do not already possess a centralized authority structure may experience this challenge differently or not at all.

internet “may well lead to a Personal Reformation similar to the Protestant Reformation” (Horsfall 2000:179). Since the internet makes vast amounts of expert and lay religious resources and opinions available to its users in an unprecedented way, “individual congregants can now develop their own theology supported by a variety of information, official and otherwise” (Horsfall 2000:179). Furthermore, contrary arguments, pluralistic and secular resources, and anti-religious sentiment are also likely to be encountered online which could “influence believers to lose their faith, or make their faith stronger” (Horsfall 2000:179). Thus, the easy availability of diverse online information has historically been a concern for hierarchical religious groups, given that they no longer can possess sole control over religious interpretation and have little to no means for keeping ‘un-vetted’ information from their participants.

Expanding on Horsfall’s (2000) discussion, Helland (2004) notes that *unofficial* or *popular religious* websites “pose a significant challenge to official religious traditions simply by the very fact that they exist – firmly established and thriving in cyberspace” (2004:30). Because the internet represents a space that opens up access to *all* kinds of religious information and interpretation, it is likely that ‘religious surfers’ will come into contact with content that offer both supportive and oppositional perspectives, either reinforcing or calling into question participants’ belief systems⁵⁵. With the proliferation of online-religion, traditional religious organizations and authorities are no longer the sole producers of religious knowledge. As Helland (2004) argues,

although the internet is in many ways a blessing to religious institutions that use it to their advantage, it can also be an official religion’s worst nightmare. Like the printing press, power has shifted through the development of a tool of mass

⁵⁵ While ‘social media’ is not a central focus of this dissertation, ‘comments sections’ can serve as an exemplar here where contrary arguments are not simply present but often sought out in an effort to engage in debate/argument with those of different beliefs.

communication. Doctrines and teachings that were once centralized and controlled can now be openly challenged, contradicted, or ignored through a medium that is accessed by hundreds of millions of people every day (2004:30).

As such, we have seen a ‘radical shift’ occur in the locus of control and authority over theological interpretation in our increasingly mediated environment.

This shift may also be a concern for *new religious movements (NRMs)* whose authority structures are often less established to begin with (Barker 2005, Baffelli 2013). In her empirical work on new religious movements, Eileen Barker (2005) explores “how one kind of ‘real’ new religion, with one type of authority structure, finds its authority structure being affected by the arrival of cyberspace” (2005:68). According to Barker (2005), ‘real’ NRMs are typically very hierarchical and maintain an authority structure that “allows for little in the way of horizontal exchange of ideas or information, and any upward communication is likely to take the form of either reporting back or requests to the spiritual superior for elucidation of correct practice and/or ‘The Truth’” (2005:70-71). While there can many types of challenges to these types of authority structures as is, the internet multiplies them by more easily exposing members to “alternative information, both from the outside world and from unofficial sources within the movements themselves” (Barker 2005:74), which may serve to further undermine the ‘plausibility structure’ of new religious movements. While some NRMs have responded by out rightly banning internet, radio, and television communication for their members, Barker (2005) notes that the internet may also serve as a powerful tool for strengthening control and authority, as well as for marketing the movement. Barker (2005) again highlights the double-edged sword faced by most religious groups: the tension between their concerns over the impact of new media and the necessity of maintaining an online presence is palpable. Barker (2005)

concludes that religions are best served by embracing the medium and using it to their advantage instead falling behind in the digital age based solely on potential detriments⁵⁶. Baffelli (2013) echoes this conclusion more recently by suggesting that new religious movements who lack access to more traditional media can greatly benefit from the exposure granted to them through cyberspace, despite its potential limitations.

A secondary concern that emerges regarding internet challenges to traditional authority structures is also related to broader discourses concerning the credibility of online information; a so-called *illusion of authority*. Hadden and Cowan (2000) highlight this concern: “in e-space, there is no peer-review process, no editorial chain up which a potential article or book must be sold, no reliable mechanism by which information is vetted...the issue is not merely one of identity but of the authority given the textual voice in the discourse” (2000:6). The implication here is that online information is suspect by virtue of being online because anyone can publish a website, misrepresent their identity, or mislead readers through a façade of expertise. Cowan (2004) further articulates these concerns in a later piece that explores the ‘contested space of cyberspace’. He argues,

the internet is used as a platform for the projection of both authority and a self-limiting construction of reality, and how the Web is used as a communications medium in which counter movements flourish largely because the statutory controls (e.g. the peer-review process or international copyright laws) in force in real life are either virtually absent or practically unenforceable in e-space (Cowan 2004:257).

⁵⁶ As I have alluded to earlier, these fears are presumably more pronounced for more hierarchical religious institutions such as the new religious movements in Barker’s (2005) study or an established organized religion like Catholicism. Although it is not directly addressed in the literature, one could surmise that more individualized religions that centralize a personal relationship with their god(s), such as Protestantism, may have fewer concerns over the decentralization of authority. Because these religions rely more on ‘personal experience with the divine’ (Howard 2000:238), they may be less likely to depend on religious expert interpretation of theology and already possess a more decentralized notion of authority.

While Cowan does acknowledge that “cyberspace is simply one more venue in which struggles for dominance and authority in the real world are carried out” (2004:257), he has not fully situated the internet within its cultural and historical context. In their earlier work, both Hadden & Cowan (2000) and Cowan (2004) assume an uncritical audience where the passive reception of online content is prevalent, the portrayal of personal opinion as fact is common, and the uncritical acceptance of religious information are all constructed as novelties of the cyber environment that never occur in the so-called real world. This type of argument is often critiqued in studies of religion and media, and communications studies more broadly⁵⁷.

These concerns are certainly not unique to religious information and are grounded on some fairly questionable assumptions. Not only do these criticisms unfairly privilege the world of credentialed expertise, academia, and peer-reviewed publishing as the sole purveyors of legitimate knowledge, they also assume that people accepted and made use of these sources more so before the advent of the internet. More importantly, they assume an uncritical mass of media consumers that are constructed as incapable of digesting complicated knowledge and theology, or of sifting through foolishness to find accurate and helpful information. The problematic grounding of these assumptions equates media consumers to ‘cultural dopes’; an argument that no longer holds up in reception research concerning the active negotiation processes employed by media audiences (Hall 1980, Barker 1999).

⁵⁷ See Stuart Hall’s ([1980] 2010) work on encoding and decoding for an example of passive audience critiques. Hall has been an important voice in recognizing that media audiences are not simply passive receivers of information but are instead active in filtering information to construct meaning based on a variety of social contexts beyond the mediated information that has been consumed.

A final concern is less about potential challenges the internet poses for traditional authority structures, and more about the ways in which the internet may, on the contrary, reinforce pre-existing, traditional authority structures. According to Hadden and Cowan (2000), “economic realities render the technocratic dream of universal access to the internet just that – a dream. A hierarchy of access still exists, determined by those who can afford the equipment and the connections; as a result of this, there is still a threshold below which access does not occur” (2000:13). Therefore, the presumption of a truly global and democratic cyberspace is still a fiction, as evidence of *digital divides* is still very much pronounced (Robison and Crenshaw 2010, Helland 2000). Despite the challenges discussed above, it is rare for religious groups to completely disengage from the online environment (Helland 2008). As a result, a gap exists between those who can enhance their spiritual diets through mediated access and those who cannot. Under these conditions, religious information and authority may be controlled by a different elite: the wealthy, educated, and tech-savvy ‘religion surfers’. In this scenario, access to vibrant spaces of religious conversations becomes the privilege of a technological elite most often located in the global north. Television is even more complex in terms of digital divides. While it shows more promise in terms of access, it is not without issue. This older and more widely used medium maintains the potential to disseminate religious programs to unconnected users in less wealthy countries that lack adequate infrastructure for the internet. However, much of the global religious programming is heavily American produced and Protestant-centric; a likely result of the dominance and wide availability of televangelism around the world (Hoover 1997)⁵⁸. This reality of Christian dominated global television programs

⁵⁸ As Thomas and Lee (2012) note, this is beginning to shift as we see more variety in global and local examples of televangelist programming.

reinforces concerns that televangelism is reinforcing the reach of Christian missionary work and maintaining modern forms of colonization (Lundby 2002). While this dissertation cannot fully address the consequences of an evolving digital divide, these issues are highlighted as evidence of the complexity of authority issues in cyberspace and beyond. While concerns over the decentralization of traditional authority structures have started to subside in both academic and religious discussions of digital media, we are still a long way from achieving a mediated utopian democracy of information. Traditional religious hierarchies are certainly still being challenged, but they are also reinforced through various media. While this may still be a prominent concern for religious groups who wish to maintain greater control, it should not be a factor in dismissing the authenticity of mediated religious spaces as a worthy site of analysis. The existence of these anxieties and the articulated concern over disruptions to traditional authority hierarchies indicates that mediated religion is something that *is* already being taken seriously by believers, religious groups, as well as academics. My work continues to further establish this field of research by examining the ways in which televangelism, as a form of mediated religion, articulates expectations of conduct for believers through discursively constituted subjectivities⁵⁹.

Redefining community

The final set of critiques that challenge the authenticity of mediated religion have less to do with characteristics of media and more to do with definitions of religious communities. It has been argued that ‘a true community’ cannot possibly develop through

⁵⁹ See Chapters 7 through 10 for further discussion.

media (see Helland 2000:216). Given that the prominent definitions of religion considered earlier in this chapter suggest that religion and community go hand and hand, the absence of community in mediated religion would be detrimental in assessing authenticity. Similarly, it has also been argued that religion, following the path of broader modernity, has become increasingly individualized, fragmented, and privatized (Bellah et al. 1985, Giddens 1990, 1991), thus questioning the reality of what constitutes religious community in any environment. As noted, opponents have been quick to blame mediated religion for amplifying this trend by further enticing believers away from their bricks and mortar religious settings (see Wuthnow 1987 and Peterson 2005). However, as determined earlier, this is not the case; mediated religion continues to serve as a supplement rather than substitute for traditional practice with users of mediated religion typically demonstrating high levels of faith, religiosity, and attendance (Wuthnow 1987, Jansen 2011). Our understanding of ‘community’ is also further enhanced by accounting for the ways in which mediated religion can help create and reinforce social bonds. This shifts the very boundaries of how we have traditionally conceptualized religious community while still acknowledging the presence of individualizing features (Peterson 2005:130). Given these concerns, our acceptance of the authenticity of mediated religion in terms of community has been largely dependent on how we define religious community, where critiques often relied on western-centric, antiquated notions of face-to-face community as a key indicator of what constitutes an authentic religious community (Dawson 2004:76).

As the landscape of religious expression continues to shift across North America, a major issue for most religious groups concerns participant retention and a widening gap between youth members and traditional forms of practice. According to Robert White

(2004), traditional religious organizations run the risk of alienating younger members of their congregations by rejecting media and popular culture since “young people know that the [traditional] community space is far less important for their survival than popular culture” (2004:207). He goes on to suggest that “in the postmodern, postnational context, popular culture may be a more real foundation of connectedness, the real basis for building community... [therefore], a central question for those in religious education is how to help people find God in the media” (White 2004:207-208). By embracing new media and popular culture, instead of rejecting its potential, White (2004) argues that previously shaky bonds between youth members and congregation may be repaired and result in stronger, rebuilt religious communities⁶⁰.

While it is important to highlight a need for rebuilding communities and attending to fragmented social bonds, it is more important for this chapter to address definitions of community in order to account for how communities may form through mediation. In their earlier work, Lundby and Hoover (1997) explicitly called upon scholars to attend to inconsistent definitions of community:

there is an immediate need to specify and define the concept of ‘community’ when it is applied. Communities may still be geographically defined, but there is a difference between the context of a city of several hundred thousand and a small town of hundreds or thousands. In any case, geographic communities interact with various nongeographically defined communities... (1997:306).

Lundby and Hoover (1997) highlight here the existence of many different types of communities; both restrained and unrestrained by geographical proximity. They further argue that religious community is often assumed to automatically emerge in traditional religious contexts, yet because religious organizations and leaders are often unable to

⁶⁰ Megachurches can be seen as one example of these efforts to re-popularize Christianity as a lifestyle and religion. See [Chapter 5: Deconstructing Evangelicals in America](#) for further discussion of this trend.

accommodate changing patterns and trends in broader society, “they do not manage to reproduce the popular modes of community searched for by some, and they do not manage to create meaningful contrast in the terms of community that is sought by others” (Lundby and Hoover 1997:307). Accordingly, physical proximity does not automatically guarantee the emergence of religious community and when community seekers find traditional religious practice unsatisfying they are likely to seek out other means of fulfilling their desire for community attachments.

While Lundby and Hoover (1997) attempt to broaden our notions of religious community, Robert Glenn Howard (2000) pushes these ideas further by taking for granted the very existence of media created communities. For example, he argues that viewers of the same television program or users of the same message board can constitute both *influence* and *discourse communities*. Howard (2000) also categorizes several types of communities, ranging from the more traditional *single discourse community*, where community is locally defined and external influence is minimal, to *multiple discourse communities*, where individuals involved “simultaneously engage one another on multiple topics informed by potentially unlimited sources of influence” (Howard 2000:230-231). Howard (2000) broadens conventional notions of community by dismantling requirements of physical presence, geographical space, or even engagement. While Howard’s (2000) definition of community is perhaps robust, he helps to broaden our understanding of the many varieties of community made possible through cyberspace and television.

While Lundby and Hoover (1997) and Howard (2000) have laid the groundwork for an evolved definition of religious community in the digital age, Helland (2000) contributes a more extensive discussion of online religious community by drawing on

Victor Turner's (1969) anthropological study of tribal religion. Helland argues that "on the Web, particular manifestations of community are developing around this form of religious interaction, virtual religious communities that are best classified as expressions of virtual *communitas*" (2000:214). According to Helland, *communitas* refers to religious interaction that occurs in a "liminal and unstructured environment...in direct opposition to the socially structured world the people normally inhabited" (2000:214). Furthermore,

distinguishing *communitas* from community is particularly relevant when addressing issues concerning the concept of virtual community. This discrimination recognizes that 'communities do not have to be solidary groups of densely knit neighbors but could also exist as social networks of kin, friends, and workmates who do not necessarily live in the same neighborhoods... (Helland 2000:216).

Therefore, Helland (2000) further solidifies the idea that communities are no longer confined to geographical space in the modern world. He further elaborates three reasons of his own in support of the formation of online communities:

First, because *communitas* is centered upon the liminal individuals and their experience, it is a community of free choice and free association that has at its core a religious element drawing the participants together. It is a community based on social networks rather than on geographical space (Wellman, 1988). Second, situating the requirements for a community based on "tradition and history of location" excludes the marginal members of a community who do not belong to the dominant group (Simpson 1999)...Finally, although the question of virtual community is complicated and multi-dimensional, if participants explicitly state that they are experiencing a sense of community on-line, it is distinctly questionable to tell them they are not (Helland 2000:216).

Therefore, while alternative forms of community may exhibit different features or bonds than traditional understandings of community, they are not inherently lacking in meaning and authenticity because of this. What we can garner from these discussions is the acceptance of a changing understanding of what constitutes religious community in our media saturated world, where many varieties of community exist; some which are unbounded by geographical space and time yet still provide meaning for their members.

While redefining our notion of community allows us to conceptualize the breadth of community formation that is possible under these conditions, it does little to help us understand the complexity of the religious communities being formed. According to Sara Horsfall (2000), “religious community is perhaps more affected by the internet than other components of religion, for those on the net, one’s community is no longer the immediate physical locale” (2000:180). Here, Horsfall (2000) is engaging earlier scholars (Hoover 1997, Beyer 1994) who argue that “the media age has come to diminish the cultural significance of national and regional boundaries to an increasing extent” (Hoover 1997:290). Because of this capacity, the internet becomes especially important for connecting likeminded religious followers and allowing religious minorities and diaspora populations in a variety of geographical spaces a feeling of community through online community formation. Another example of this relaxing of national and regional boundaries can be seen even earlier in the globalization of televangelism (Hoover 1997, Thomas & Lee 2012). The export of televangelist programming to other countries allows American televangelists to maintain a global presence for Christianity (Hoover 1997:290). While this example highlights some of the ways in which religious community can be expanded through mediation, it also highlights concerns regarding mediated forms of religious colonization in the digital age⁶¹. While we are making progress here, the complex social impacts of mediated community formation have yet to be fully explored; the analysis put forth in latter chapters of this dissertation serves as a contribution to this ongoing area

⁶¹ It should be noted that mediated evangelism has now evolved beyond its Christian and American origins. For instance, we now see examples of local Christian programming emerging in Africa, Christian and Hindu examples in India, and Islamic examples in Egypt and Indonesia. See Thomas & Lee (2012) for further discussion of local and global trends in mediated evangelism.

of research by establishing mediated religious discourse as an important piece of the puzzle.

While online communities may certainly represent a double-edged sword for some religious groups, Horsfall (2000) was accurate in her prediction that they would remain a steady fixture of the religious landscape; capable of both changing the shape of religion without necessarily threatening traditional forms of religious practice. To this end, she suggests “the expansion of the community does not seem to spell the end of the importance of contact with others...it seems that internet communities will not replace real time community experiences. Rather the two augment each other” (Horsfall 2000:180). However, Horsfall (2000) was not the first or only scholar to address this issue. As noted earlier, Wuthnow (1987) was advancing similar arguments in the eighties regarding television; suggesting that the results of his research “provide little support for the idea that religious television viewing is associated with declining participation in organized religious activities” (Wuthnow 1987:128). By returning to the foundational work of these scholars, we can see that both internet and television can be conceptualized as companion mediums to more traditional religious activities for their users. Here, community formation occurs both through digital mediation and outside digital mediation, allowing for a much more complex mix of individualizing *and* community enhancing tendencies. Likewise, Wuthnow (1987), Peterson (2005), and Dawson (2004) all conclude that mediated religion is much more complex than most people give it credit for. According to Peterson,

the internet has not created a new god, but it has changed the way religious communities act. Neither has the internet eliminated religious community, as the critics feared, as much as it has changed the way religious communities act, identify themselves, and relate to one another. While the internet lends itself to questing and individualism, its more profound impact is that it reshapes and redefines religious community (2005:130).

Peterson (2005) goes on to argue that the internet is the most advanced medium for extending traditional forms of community and while it may seem

perfectly designed for promoting individuality...[it] seems to promote new kinds of community more than individualism. Whereas previous forms of mass media, especially radio and television, impose a passivity on the part of the viewer or listener, the internet encourages interaction, encouraging the formation of community. Rather than being disembodied, as many claim, these new communities are connected to physically existing communities in complex ways (2005:136).

Therefore, in the same way that media are extensions of the social actors who create and use them, mediated religious communities can be seen as extensions of traditional religious communities where members interact and form social bonds in a variety of mediated and non-mediated ways.

In the same way that we cannot assume the automatic emergence of religious community through traditional practice, Dawson (2004) argues that we must also be equally careful in how we categorize instances of mediated community. More specifically, we cannot assume presence of religious community in the mediated environment without addressing why or how it has emerged (Dawson 2004:77). For Dawson, a set of criteria is necessary: “since community implies more than mere social interaction, not all virtual groups are communities” (2004:77). When virtual communities are established they have the potential to free participants of “such limiting factors such as ethnic stereotyping, class distinctions, gender discrimination, and differences in time and space” (Dawson 2004:76)⁶². They also have the capacity to

⁶² It should be noted that while the internet has been heralded as a democratizing medium, new forms of hierarchy have already emerged in the online environment, such as the early privilege of web programming expertise; however, with the evolution of Web 2.0 this may become less pronounced. While this is certainly a worth area of study, it is beyond the scope of this dissertation.

allow individuals to reach out globally to form bonds with people of like mind, overcoming the physical barriers and social distinctions that have held them apart, but at the price of reducing the self presented and the social interactions established to a text-based and largely asynchronous exchanges by physically isolated individuals (Dawson 2004:77).

Therefore, while mediated religious community has the capacity to broaden its membership and extend itself globally, it does not always do so and may still evoke a physically isolating experience for some participants. Given these potential challenges, Dawson reminds us that

religion is coming adrift from its conventional social moorings, just as our identity constructing processes are, and the internet offers one of the few forums for the reflexive construction of identity by means of the interpretation of highly personal and more or less global concerns, issues, and resources (Dawson 2004:86).

This assertion still holds up today; Dawson (2004) was right to assume that the character of religion remains in flux and that concerns over mediated religious communities have been largely located in romanticized notions of North American, small town church communities, and a cultural nostalgia for paradise lost. What these concerns neglect is the diversity of North America's religious landscape and the ability of digital media to reestablish religion and religious community within the public sphere (Helland 2000:221, Peterson 2005:130, Hoover 2012). Mediated religion is a complex mix of individualizing tendencies and community building possibilities. In reality, mediated religious communities (as extensions of face-to-face religious communities) are becoming a cornerstone of religious experience for participants of many different faith groups. Those who argue against the authenticity of mediated religion can only do so by holding on to definitions of community that fail to take account of the social realities in North America and across the globe.

Conclusion

While mediated religion cuts across all mediums in various ways, we have been traditionally reluctant to accept it as an integral part of our everyday religious experience; as if somehow acknowledging the authenticity of mediated religion will inevitably signify the demise of physical and traditional forms of religious expression. While criticism of mediated religion may be representative of common social anxieties, these critiques often stem from a nostalgic worldview and a romanticized yearning for a technology-free world that is long gone. As I have demonstrated, mediation does not always stem from a disembodied realm of technologies divorced from the real people who engage in mediated religious expression. Likewise, concerns over the decentralization of authority and mediated challenges to traditional religious structures may still be concerns for the groups involved, but they should not have any impact on our academic acceptance of these phenomena as a site of analysis. Lastly, dismissals of mediated religion based solely on the idea that media do not foster community are shallow at best and rely on nostalgic definitions of community that no longer reflect the societies we live in today. More recently, academic attention to this area has reflected a more accepting stance toward mediated religion; this dissertation contributes to this evolving field of research that accepts mediated religion as a meaningful form of lived religious expression.

Historically, fear and apprehension have been common while societies attempt to account for digital technologies that innovate at a pace far more rapid than previous generations have been accustomed to. According to McLuhan (1967), “innumerable confusions and a profound feeling of despair invariably emerge in periods of great technological and cultural transitions. Therefore, our *age of anxiety* is, in great part, the

result of trying to do today's job with yesterday's tools – with yesterday's concepts” (McLuhan and Fiore 1967:8-9)⁶³. While television and internet have been thoroughly engrained in our daily lives for many years, we still face challenges in finding ways to study and address the complexities and fluid interactions between digitally mediated and face-to-face engagement. Accordingly, “where it has emerged, electronic communication has so radically changed the way human discourse is conducted that new approaches must be developed to address contemporary communicative event of all sorts” (Howard 2000:230). Communication patterns and technological advances are evolving before our eyes at increasingly rapid rates. As such, academia needs to continually push the boundaries of research innovation to employ new and adapted approaches and concepts to keep up with technological shifts. The evolution of digital media is inevitable⁶⁴; yet, researchers and institutions often still attempt to use *yesterday's concepts* to address *today's world*. While mediated religion is a concept in flux and any work in this area will be inherently dated by the time it reaches publication, this dissertation is an attempt to take up the challenge of developing new concepts and models appropriate for contemporary media analysis. The following chapters address practical and theoretically informed methodologies appropriate for exploring the complexities of mediated religion today.

⁶³ Hoover & Echchaibi (2014) remind us that this tendency is still present within scholarly investigations of religion and media, as we sometimes attempt “to understand new developments in terms of traditional and received practices and expectations” (2014:2).

⁶⁴ In light of the rapidly evolving technological and media landscape we find ourselves in today, I acknowledge that, in many ways, any scholarly attempt at assessing ‘the literature’ of media and religion will inevitably be dated by the time a project draws to a close. Throughout this chapter, I have relied on relatively recent but also now ‘classical’ works that highlight the evolution of these debates while acknowledging that any conversation about the interactions between media and religion will remain unfinished for all scholars attempting to make sense of this evolving field of social interaction and religious expression. While the limits and scope of this dissertation require me to end this discussion somewhere, I continue to stay immersed in and truly excited about a literature that is evolving faster than academics can keep up. See Hoover and Emerich (2010), Knott and Mitchell (2012), Knott, Poole and Taira (2013), Granholm, Moberg and Sjö (2015), and Horsfield (2015) for other recent discussions of these evolving debates concerning contemporary intersections between religion and media more broadly.

In conclusion, we return to conceptual definitions of religion to legitimate mediated religion as a meaningful site of analysis. Whether we employ a basic Durkheimian ([1912] 1995) understanding of religion, or follow Orsi (1997), Beckford (2003), McGuire (2008), Woodhead (2011), or other proponents of *lived religion* to expand our notions of what constitutes ‘community’, we have no intellectual cause to dismiss mediated religion as ‘inauthentic’, or devoid of meaning for its participants. Under these intellectual conditions, establishing the authenticity of mediated religion is ultimately an oxymoron. We need not create an entirely new and novel category for this mediated experience, we simply need to broaden our conceptual understandings of religion itself to account for these emergent forms of mediated religion, as concepts like lived religion and digital religion attempt to do. Thus, religion that is experienced through some form of technological mediation, while different and unique in many ways, is not an entirely distinct experience. Mediation may alter or reimagine the character of a religious experience but it does not inherently negate its meaning or authenticity. Mediated religion is therefore one extension of the same broader understanding of religion that is established through all of the sociological definitions considered here⁶⁵. While the debates surrounding the individualizing tendencies of media in general are certainly complex, we can already see evidence that media also help to enhance group attachments and feelings of community (Peterson 2005). It can be argued that mediated religion may in fact contribute to a re-establishment of religion in the public sphere; a new vision of the public sphere, unbounded by geography, time, or space. When held against these foundational frameworks, we must accept mediated religion as a

⁶⁵ As such, any discussion of mediated religion utilized in this work is done so in full recognition of this claim. While I accept ‘mediated religion’ as ‘religion’ more broadly, I still employ the term, in order to practically distinguish my site of analysis while recognizing that discourse cuts across (often seamlessly) these realms.

legitimate and vibrant form of religious expression today and continue to move past these debates to take up the task of furthering our understandings of these complex social phenomena.

Chapter 3: Addressing Method

Introduction: Exploring Theory, Method and Methodology – Part 1

Despite what our undergraduate textbooks may suggest, theory and method should not be conceptualized as mutually exclusive frameworks in which we deploy *the why* and *the how* of the practice of sociology. While this dissertation contains distinct chapters concerning method and methodology, theory is entwined with both. This sociological toolkit serves as a holistic framework that informs every aspect of this research from its origins to analysis to dissemination. This first chapter of my theory-method-methodology discussion concerns research methods, or the so-called ‘nuts and bolts’ aspects of research design. Here I outline the logistics of my research design using discourse analysis as an analytical tool. The first half of this chapter briefly expands on the boundaries of the concept of mediated religion, its role in religious experience and religious discourse, and the challenges of conducting research in a mediated environment. I then outline how televangelists use *media packages* for spreading their message in a highly organized and holistic way. The second half of this chapter describes the ‘recipe’ for my research design by outlining how the data was constructed through conceptualization and sampling. Most importantly, this chapter is a description of process that should not be taken out of context; it should be read as a companion to the next chapter concerning methodology and analysis, and understood in relation to the entirety of this document and its theoretical underpinnings.

Finding ‘the Field’ and Conceptualizing Mediated Religion

Ethnographers seem to have little trouble finding their field since there is an unavoidable and overwhelming sense of place in so-called ‘real’ world settings. Practicing sociology in a mediated context requires considerably more creativity since establishing the boundaries of a field where physicality is seemingly lacking can be far more challenging. Left unchecked, researchers can spiral down the digital rabbit hole, channel after channel, click after click, with no end in sight. Although my field requires elements of mediation (through television and internet) for inclusion, the obvious starting point is the televangelists themselves; the preachers who deploy mediated religion and construct mediated religious discourse to spread their evangelical gospel to the now global masses⁶⁶. In the decades following the exposure of the scandalous behaviours of Jimmy Swaggart and Jim and Tammy Faye Bakker, televangelists have been scrutinized in the public eye for lavish spending, tax fraud, sexual behaviour, and questionable private morality. Many in the academic world were also quick to jump in, resulting in a large body of literature on the excesses of televangelists⁶⁷. This sensational popularity has since dropped off throughout the 1990s and televangelists remained a relatively marginalized subject within sociology and religious studies until more recently. In 2007, American Senator Charles Grassley publically questioned the excessive capital accumulation and tax exempt status of six popular teleministries run by Benny Hinn, Kenneth Copeland, Joyce Meyer, Paula White, Creflo Dollar, and Eddie Long (Walton 2009:xi). People starting paying attention

⁶⁶ Televangelism and the key televangelists analyzed in this dissertation are only discussed here in relevance to method. See Chapter 6: Situating Contemporary Televangelists for further discussion of prominent televangelist themes and the televangelists under study in this doctoral research.

⁶⁷ See Hadden & Swann (1981), Hadden & Shupe (1988) and Schultze (1991) for accounts of these popularized scandals.

to televangelists again – within and outside academia. While most of the named preachers centralized a re-vamped version of prosperity gospel, apocalyptic tones are also prevalent. This inquiry has contributed to the reemergence of religious broadcasting as a public interest and further fuels the public fascination of televangelist celebrity, yet it has done little to help us truly understand the religious-political messages emanating from contemporary religious broadcasters, and the influence evangelical discourse has on the governance of believer identity, values, and lived experience.

Instead of using this dissertation to produce yet another descriptive analysis of scandalized and sensationalized hypocritical preachers, I have set a different course for this project. I am interested in a specific subset of contemporary ‘mediated evangelist’⁶⁸ preachers who centralize apocalyptic prophecy and personal salvation in their discursive constitution of responsible evangelical subjectivities⁶⁹. This subset includes popular preachers who seek to educate their congregation and legitimate their message through both secular and religious practices. While the preachers included in this analysis are often at the centre of controversy, more often than not, it is their politics and theological interpretations in question, not their tax returns and sex lives. This dissertation also stands outside of traditional ‘effects’ style media analyses that wish to make claims about how media content and technologies *cause* shifts in various behaviours and attitudes⁷⁰. To these

⁶⁸ I will be using the term ‘mediated evangelism’ to refer collectively to both televangelism and internet-based or online evangelism, as well as any other mediated product or discourse designed or articulated by these televangelists to fulfill their perceived duty to evangelize and spread the gospel.

⁶⁹ See [Chapter 4: Theorizing Methodology](#) for further discussion of subjectivities and [Chapter 7: Apocalyptic Prophecy and the Responsibilization of Salvation](#) for an elaboration of ‘responsible salvation’ and the ‘responsible evangelical subject’.

⁷⁰ The media effects literature is a complex, varied, and contested field that transcends multiple disciplines and often neglects the complexity of social interaction and human behaviour by making assumptions about passive audiences (Hall [1980] 2010). While we cannot, and should not, dismiss the possibility of causal relationships between media and behaviour, much of the experimental research that informs these claims overestimates isolated effects, neglects the complexity of social influences, is limited by methodological

ends, I have employed a Foucauldian inspired form of discourse analysis to examine the discursive formations⁷¹ that develop through televangelist (and corresponding online ministry) programming. This methodological entanglement of theory and method moves beyond basic analysis of linguistic structure or pure description of language to allow for a more complex examination of *discourse* and *text* as broader statements that incorporate visual, written, and auditory aspects of these discursive formations. As such, this approach allows for a more holistic analysis of the mediated objects of analysis by taking account of the ways in which seemingly discrete political, religious, and secular discourses coalesce through mediated spaces.

This holistic analysis of visual, written, and auditory forms of discourse is necessary for fully understanding mediated religion as an extension of traditional religious belief and practice, instead of the less meaningful, distinct religious pastime that others argue it is⁷². Even our earliest sociological attempts at defining religion, written long before the advent of digital technology, allow for the acceptance of mediated religion as a legitimate form of what we call religion. Durkheim defines religion as “a unified system of beliefs and practices relative to sacred things, that is to say, things set apart and forbidden – beliefs and practices which unite into one single moral community called a Church, all those who adhere to them” ([1912] 1995:44). Durkheim’s ([1912] 1995) latter emphasis

constraints, and approaches the problem from the assumption that influence should be examined from the starting point of media content rather than individuals themselves. While I do wish to examine how expectations for conduct are discursively constituted and made evident through evangelical subjectivities, I make no claims of causality and do not employ a research design that would allow for this. See Gauntlett (1998, 2001), Barker & Petley (2001), and Doyle (2006) for more comprehensive discussions of critiques of effects style research.

⁷¹ The following companion chapter ([Chapter 4: Theorizing Methodology](#)) offers expanded definitions and discussions of discourse and discursive formations.

⁷² See [Chapter 2: Theorizing Mediated Religion](#) for a through discussion of issues concerning the authenticity and legitimacy of mediated experience.

on the collective component of religious belief and practices originally established religion as a worthy topic of sociological analysis and set forth an expansive trajectory of sociological engagement with this topic; a trend that has greatly influenced my specific object of analysis: televangelism and online evangelism (mediated evangelism). Instead of looking at television and the internet as simply passive or individualizing forms of media, I contend that the remediated and socially adaptive television and internet of today, as mediums for religious discourse, feed into the collective component of religion more aptly than other more dominantly passive mediums, such as print⁷³ while also providing a meaningful supplement or alternative to traditional religious expression. As North American social relations become increasingly mediated by technology (Kong 2001), the role of mass mediated evangelism has become a key component of the contemporary evangelical movement in the United States, where technology is readily embraced instead of being feared or shunned. To understand the landscape of American evangelism⁷⁴ today

⁷³ This argument is at the centre of the evolution of heated debates surrounding both internet and television as 'new media'. It has been argued that both mediums are inherently individualizing and collectivizing (Wuthnow 1987, Peterson 2005). While we may now be more acceptant of the social elements of digital media, stigma still persists.

⁷⁴ Although I address why I am specifically interested in television and internet as unique visual mediums in later discussions, let me make it clear here why I am looking specifically at 'American' mediated evangelism. First and foremost in terms of media itself, globalized mass media is now a reality. Thus, while my focus is on American programming, the global reach of contemporary mass media suggests that American mediated evangelical discourses have the potential for global implications. That said, my focus on American evangelism runs more deeply in the roots of evangelicalism itself. While Darby, the arguable originator of dispensationalism (Boyer 2005), was British, dispensationalism has been widely adopted by American evangelical preachers and prophecy proponents. More importantly, the United States is the epicentre for the evangelical movement, and while the movement is present in Canada, most televangelism programming is broadcast through American networks and has been created by American evangelical groups. As such, biblical prophecy is often interpreted with an American Christian nation playing a more righteous role in end times scenarios than the 'evil' forces at work in other nations; for instance, the antichrist is born and comes to reign somewhere in Europe before taking over the earth through the unification of global political, legal and economic systems. Lastly, the prominence of evangelical Christianity in the United States is far more influential in American politics than in Canada (Halton 2007) and has far reaching implications for influence in American foreign policy (Boyer 2005).

is to understand this complex entanglement with technology and media; one can no longer be examined without attention to the other.

While American evangelicals have been one religious group that has traditionally embraced new media, as discussed in the previous chapter, mediated religion has faced scholarly and popular challenges to gaining acceptance for its authenticity. It has been argued that religion has become increasingly privatized in the United States (Bellah 2005), and early religious television as an inherently individualizing phenomenon has confounded this trend (Wuthnow 1987). Wuthnow's (1987) initial studies of religious television⁷⁵ contest this claim as he argues that there is little empirical evidence to suggest that religious television further privatizes religion. According to Wuthnow (1987), viewers of religious television were more likely to attend weekly church services and self-reports indicate that viewers look to both religious television and church services to fulfill different spiritual needs, thus indicating that one religious medium does not draw participants away from the other. As discussed in the previous chapter, a more recent Pew study confirms similar findings regarding participant consumption of televised, radio, and online religious expression (Jansen 2011).

Both Wuthnow (1987) and Alexander (1997) also contest the idea that religious television itself is inherently individualizing because of the ways in which it is consumed by viewers. Wuthnow (1987) argues that religious television viewing is often a ritualized family event, while Alexander (1997) argues that ritualized religious telecasts enforce shared belief and morality systems among likeminded viewers. Furthermore, Alexander argues that the televangelist emphasis on the special divine power of God enlists the viewer

⁷⁵ While it can be deduced from Wuthnow's (1987) examples that he is discussing televangelist programming, he does not actually conceptualize a definition of 'religious television'.

into the larger community of the faithful by enforcing the idea of an “added status of being a significant social group because they are significant to God” (1997:1999). Thus, both Wuthnow (1987) and Alexander (1997) argue that the ritualized collective element built into religious television programs, as well as the incorporation of ritual in the viewing of religious television itself, enhances the collective connections established through televised religion and therefore does not contribute to further privatization of religion in the United States.

Similar arguments have been made contesting the notion of the internet as an inherently individualizing medium. Based on his study of online Christian and Muslim communities, Peterson (2005) argues that like other mass mediums, “the internet both reflects and shapes cultural developments, including religion, in both obvious and subtle ways” (2005:124). Peterson also argues that in a somewhat paradoxical trend, the internet “magnifies both individualism and community in particular ways” (2005:125) that reflect and shape the broader social climate. In other words, while internet engagement is typically a socially isolated activity in a physical sense, it “also fosters community in novel and sometimes unexpected ways” (Peterson 2005:125)⁷⁶. For instance, rituals can also be practiced through cyber-environments. Given the collective nature of ritual itself, online participants may be able to establish similar connections to their faith and likeminded believers through these types of cyber-practices.

There are also subtler influences built into television and the internet that could reinforce feelings of community within the mediated evangelist audiences. As David

⁷⁶ The creation of virtual worlds, where digitalized representations of their creators can interact in an online space, is a good example of how the internet can foster feelings of community through the interactive elements that are built into the medium itself.

Morgan (2005) suggests in his discussions of *the sacred gaze*⁷⁷, *visual practices* can be thought of as “forms of entanglement with oneself, with others, with the past, with the worlds engaging viewers as viewers look at them in one manner or another” (2005:2-3). The experience of the visual in mediated evangelism further connects the viewer to a larger community in ways that other mediums cannot⁷⁸. For example, panoramic shots of a televised congregation nodding in agreement or responding to a sermon in similar ways to one’s neighbours in church may represent virtual representations of ‘real’ life church going experience. Furthermore, as discussed in the previous chapter, the idea that television or the internet cannot enhance the experience of the collective element of religious community, speaks more to a nostalgia for traditional notions of community and social interaction, and less so to intellectual roadblocks. Throughout this dissertation, I work from the premise that religious expression thrives in mediated spaces and accept that the remediated⁷⁹ visual mediums of television and internet meet the criteria established by definitions of religion that require the presence of community (such as Durkheim’s definitional requirement of social/moral communities). To this end, the religious communities that emerge through television and internet can be studied in many of the same ways that sociologists examine more physically present, traditional forms of community. While the central focus of this dissertation concerns discursive formations and not religious communities per se, one cannot be intellectually separated from the other. As such, the research field for this particular project encompasses a complex multi-

⁷⁷ See Chapter 4: Theorizing Methodology for further discussion of Morgan’s (2005) conceptualization of *the sacred gaze* and the importance of material and visual culture for the study of religion.

⁷⁸ Meyrowitz (1991) refers to this as the ‘grammar’ of a particular medium. Examining the grammar of a medium looks at the ways in which production variables are manipulated in subtle ways that are often not apparent to the viewer, but influential in terms of reception (Meyrowitz 1991:148-149).

⁷⁹ See below for an expanded discussion of of remediation.

mediated package of televangelist discourses that ultimately always starts and ends with *real* people and their religious beliefs and practices where the boundaries between mediated and face-to-face interactions are increasingly blurred.

In the interest of clarifying concepts, I use the terms *mediated religion* and *mediated evangelism* when discussing religious and evangelist expressions that take shape through television and the internet, despite the troubling limitations of the concept that have been discussed earlier⁸⁰. In the case of mediated evangelism, it is becoming increasingly more difficult to conceptualize ‘media’ and ‘religion’ as separate entities for social analysis (Hoover 2002). The constructed relationship between media and religion has been historically portrayed as rife with tension and oppositional. This analytic is no longer useful because contemporary intersections of mediated religious discourse are far too complex to treat the phenomena as simply ‘mediated religion’ or ‘religious media’ as these terms have been traditionally utilized. We need to continue to push beyond the boundaries of these original concepts to more fully understand contemporary evangelical discourse, which is almost always both religious and mediated at the same time. That said, the pragmatic need for concise conceptual definitions has necessitated a choice in terminology here. To this end, the term *mediated religion* will be employed throughout this dissertation to encompass the broad spectrum of mediated-religious practices, beliefs, expressions, and discourses all the while understanding that *mediated religion* is simply *religion* practiced through another technological platform. Lastly, it is through mediated religion that I find my field so to speak. While lacking the physicality of ‘bricks and mortar’ religious settings, the shared

⁸⁰ As noted above, see [Chapter 2: Theorizing Mediated Religion](#) for a more extensive discussion of mediated religion and issues of authenticity and legitimacy concerning online religion and emergent religious communities.

meaning, beliefs, and practices expressed through these mediated environments are no less influential in the discursive construction of evangelical subjectivities than their more traditional church counterparts across the United States and around the world.

Finding Foucault

Studying mediated religion as a meaningful and legitimate extension of more traditional notions of religion presents unique challenges for researchers. More specifically, television and internet incorporate elements of visual experience that add another layer to the analysis of written or oratory discourse. The element of the visual has traditionally been an under-researched area in communication studies (Tolson 1996, Hill and Helmers 2004) where variants of emergent methods inform contemporary research. While semiotics, visual rhetoric⁸¹, and other forms of discourse analysis represent areas of cultural and communication studies that inform my method and analysis, it has been Foucault that has been most influential in shaping my methodological practice. Foucauldian method is inseparable from his theoretical work and allows for broader definitions of both text and discourse. This understanding has helped inform a method of analyzing discourse that can account for the visual and interactive elements of television and internet, while allowing me to interrogate television and internet evangelism as a holistic text that incorporates all written, visual, and aural elements of discourse as broad discursive statements without drawing out the individual strands. Using Foucault to guide

⁸¹ Both semiotics and visual rhetoric are methods aimed at a more thorough reading of visual elements of television. Semiotics considers ‘the visual’ as the primary point of analysis. The use of semiotics allows the researcher to examine the subjective meanings attached to the categories that content analysis only counts. Visual rhetoric allows us to examine visual text and explore “the many ways in which visual elements are used to influence people’s attitudes, options, and beliefs” (Hill & Helmers 2004).

the practice of method also pushes past a strictly technical and linguistic model of discourse analysis where language structure and prevalence take precedence over content, underlying messages, techniques of governance, and subjectivity. I want to move beyond the rigidity of early forms of content analysis and semiotics to expand our understanding of what discourse is, what it does, and why it is important to analyze⁸².

The idea of discourse is central to Foucault's entire body of work. Accordingly, "discourse can be seen basically as a group of statements which together have a certain 'modality of existence'; they 'belong to a single system of formation'...the signs of language do not form a statement; it is rather a 'function' which 'cuts across' such unities" (Carrette 2000:11). In effect, a discursive statement is not confined to written text in Foucauldian style discourse analysis, thus allowing for an analysis that cuts across mediums. This style interrogates discourse to make apparent the underlying rationales of government and prevailing subjectivities. Therefore, a qualitative Foucauldian style discourse analysis allows for a comprehensive understanding of mediated evangelical discourse and gives us the tools to move past more strictly linguistic models. Here, we can begin to unearth discursive formations that actively work to constitute ideal subject positions, such as that of the politically engaged, responsible evangelical subject⁸³. Understanding how contemporary evangelical subjectivities are constructed through televangelist discourses is the first step to understanding the impact and influence of mediated evangelism on American and global religious landscapes.

⁸² The following chapter offers a more thorough discussion of these matters and a theorization of Foucauldian methodology.

⁸³ See [Chapter 4: Theorizing Methodology](#) for a defining discussion of this form of subjectivity. [Chapters 7 through 10](#) work through the analysis of this subjectivity in relation to the primary research of evangelical programs.

Making Method: A ‘nuts and bolts’ approach

As stated, my primary research sites are located in contemporary televangelist programming and their companion online resources and ministries. While many religious institutions and groups have historically been engaged in fervent battles against new mediums, (Newman 1996, Peterson 2005), this is no longer always the case. As scholars, we now pay close “attention to how religious institutions, communities, and individuals resist and adapt to media change as part of negotiations of theological and political power” (Mahan 2014:58). American evangelicals in particular have been at the forefront of religious-media innovation and have embraced media platforms in a multitude of ways, long before their peers. Mediated evangelism can no longer be simplified and conflated with the stereotypical ‘fire and brimstone’ revival rants and scandal-prone celebrity seekers of the genre’s early originators. Emergent styles of televangelism have diversified greatly and now also focus on informational education, lifestyle coaching, and entertainment while relying on both religious and secular practices of legitimation for their messages⁸⁴. The evangelist programs of today have evolved from their narrowly focused origins and now feature everything from traditional sermons to fitness, health, and financial advice. Some encourage more traditional charitable work at home, through tithing and volunteer opportunities abroad, while others encourage active political participation by offering lobbying opportunities and citizen engagement assistance. By suggesting an evolution in televangelist preaching, I am certainly not suggesting that televangelists have become more

⁸⁴ See [Chapter 1: Introduction to the Dissertation](#) for a brief discussion of the fluid boundaries between what constitutes the sacred and the religious. In the same manner as religion, the notion of *the secular* is also a contested definitional field but fully assessing the complexity of this debate is well outside the limits of this dissertation. My references to secular legitimating strategies throughout this dissertation are pragmatically employed as a means to discussing the discursive techniques present in mediated evangelist discourse that are not obviously mobilizing a reliance on the religious authority that is located in the evangelists’ own understandings of what religion (specifically Christianity) is.

tolerant or less outspoken than their fire and brimstone predecessors⁸⁵. Morality, family values, terrorism, religious veracity, and the role of America as a Christian nation are hot topics in many of these programs. While younger evangelical populations may be more likely to advance more liberal attitudes⁸⁶, the evangelists under study here rarely mobilize a language of tolerance for alternative worldviews and lifestyles. While intolerance is still prevalent, contemporary televangelists appear to have also learned to subtly veil controversial attitudes when necessary by deploying a variety of biblical, patriotic, and secular legitimating strategies⁸⁷. The latter chapters of this dissertation offer an analysis of the shifting mediated landscape of televangelism, as well as an analysis of the discursive content. Here, we find a field that has become a complex multi-mediated realm where prophetic doctrine is still centralized, and the education and subsequent salvation of non-believers and non-born-again Christians is paramount.

⁸⁵ When making this claim, I am relying on common usage language norms for the definition of tolerant. For example, the Oxford English Dictionary (2016) defines tolerant as “one who tolerates opinions or practices different from his own; one free from bigotry.” It is not my attempt to wade into the broader debate over defining religious tolerance as it pertains to conflict (See Clarke, Powell & Savulescu 2013) where definitions of *tolerance* and *intolerance* are debated at great length. The tension between these mediated evangelists, government, and broader social attitudes is made apparent throughout my data, and will be discussed at great length in the chapters that follow. For instance, Hagee regularly expresses disdain for what he perceives to be liberal attitudes of tolerance more broadly: “If there’s a word that has America bowing down, it is tolerance [Hagee makes a bowing motion, dramatically] Ooooh, I want to be tolerant of everything and everybody [read with mocking tone]. Really? What’s the difference between truth and tolerance? People say if you love me, you’ll endorse my behaviour. Wrong. Love looks at the inevitable results of wrong behaviour and says stop it” (JHT: November 10th, 2009). He also regularly addresses the issue of in/tolerance when discussing a lawsuit filed against him for using the term ‘Islamofascism’ on-air. In one episode where this topic is raised, he discusses his perception of judicial intolerance for his Christian views, stating that “the purpose is through lawsuits to intimidate the gospel to be silent in the pulpit. To intimidate this pulpit to silence. It didn’t work” (JHT: November 23rd, 2009). As discussed later in this chapter, all three evangelists under study here have also been the focus of regulatory complaints for the controversial language they have used on-air, suggesting that at least some members of the broader population find the evangelists’ language to be intolerant according to their own subjective experience.

⁸⁶ See Smith & Johnson (2010), Farrell (2011), and Danielsen (2013) for discussions of potentially shifting beliefs and values in evangelical populations and the so-called *liberalization* of young evangelicals.

⁸⁷ See [Chapter 9: A National Politics of Salvation](#) for further discussion of how Van Impe alludes to this in his discussion of his DVD titled *Dictator of the New World Order: Alive and Waiting in the Wings* (Van Impe & Van Impe 2010).

The evangelists chosen for this analysis serve as exemplars of the various popular formats found throughout the spectrum of contemporary televangelist programming. While their program formats are diverse, the evangelists and their discursive content express more similarities than differences overall. They all exude key tenets of evangelicalism, the importance of a responsabilized saved Christian subject, biblical inerrancy, and embrace apocalyptic prophecy interpretation. As such, they express disdain for inauthentic Christianity and those who claim the Christian faith without structuring their daily lives, beliefs, and acts in accordance with key evangelical tenets⁸⁸. The declining role of America as a moral Christian nation is also a dominant feature of these mediated evangelist programs, where opposition to Christian values is depicted as both un-American and unchristian. Although televised programming forms the primary starting point for this research, the analysis would be incomplete without attention to each evangelist's online ministry. Given that thirty-four percent of white evangelicals share their religious faith online (Pew Research Center 2014b), this virtual space is not just a relevant comparison to televangelism, it is also an extension of face-to-face evangelism. The evangelists considered here have readily embraced both television and internet resources as a means of spreading their religious-political messages to the 'unchurched' and the converted. Therefore, *mediated evangelism* serves as a more pragmatic and inclusive term for the types of *media packages*⁸⁹ that contemporary evangelists use today. As such, their televised

⁸⁸ See [Chapter 5: Deconstructing Evangelicals in America](#) for an exploration of these tenets.

⁸⁹ As noted throughout this dissertation, we no longer occupy a social world where any singular medium can be understood in isolation – attention to media networks of relations is essential for understanding how discursive formations not only cut across one another but also cut across the media in which they are articulated. Evangelist programming is no longer solely located within television. Although the televised programs form the primary starting point of enquiry for this research, the analysis would be incomplete without attention to each evangelist's accompanying media products, most notably their digital ministries. Their virtual presence is not just a relevant comparison to televangelism, it is an almost seamless extension of their television presence. Their televised programs and specials work alongside their ministry websites,

programs and specials, along with their companion online ministry websites, charitable organization websites, and consumer product content⁹⁰ form the boundaries of the sample for this analysis. By casting a wide net, we can gain a more thorough understanding of how evangelical subjects are discursively constituted and governed in contemporary, remediated American society by allowing the contours of discursive formations to guide the direction of the research process.

This focus on both televised and internet sources also allows for an analysis of the complex ways in which media figure into contemporary religious practice and is important for theoretical reasons as much as pragmatics. Just as we can no longer accept mediated religion as something entirely separate and distinct from traditional religion, we can no longer sustain the notion the mediums exist and operate independently of other media. As Michael Bailey and Guy Redden (2013) suggest, “people tend to think of media in terms of the most recent physical means for communicating information. In our times these are electronic and digital” (2013:7). Their argument speaks to the recent popularity of internet research, oftentimes at the neglect of older mediums like television and radio. As we can see throughout this chapter, evangelicals rarely use technological media platforms in isolation anymore so we must also adjust our analytical tools to account for this. The concept of *remediation* is useful to this discussion. Remediation implies a

they own and operate broadcast networks, their books, DVDs, podcasts, and consumer products appear not just during advertisement segments but are also regularly referenced throughout programming content, their social media presence is often pervasive, and their physical presence at conferences, events, and political lobby opportunities further reinforces their work. This comprehensive and holistic approach to mediated evangelism forms a *media package* for their message where evangelists use every available medium to advance a message that cuts across physical space and technology to enable unprecedented levels of interactivity for the evangelical consumer.

⁹⁰ While social media is now a common feature of evangelical media packages, it was less so at the outset of this research project and thus has been largely excluded from analysis. Future research projects will be designed to account for this more recent innovation.

problematization of a traditional hierarchy of media technologies which privileges new mediums over older ones and rejects the notion of a logical digital progression that would envision the eventual demise of older media such as print and radio. Remediation evolves from McLuhan's suggestion that "the 'content' of any medium is always another medium" (1964:23-24) and is conceptualized as more of a 'borrowing' than 'repurposing' (Bolter and Grusin 1999) of media characteristics. As such, remediation refers to the "representation of one medium in another [and is] a defining characteristic of the new digital media" (Bolter and Grusin 1999:339). For instance, smart phones that allow us to connect to just about everything have remediated features that allows users to watch television programs or listen to radio via data connections or Wi-Fi. It is important to note that remediation is not unidirectional between new and old mediums. According to Bolter and Grusin, "remediation operates in both directions: users of old media such as film and television can seek to appropriate and refashion digital graphics, just as digital graphics artists seek to refashion film and television" (1999:342). For instance, smart televisions that feature connections to online content and social media applications serve as an example of how the newer medium of internet has shifted the development of the older medium of television. Here we see how newer digital media, such as the internet, have been profoundly influenced and shaped by older mediums such as print and television. Consequently, remediation of these same mediums is evident in our contemporary 'digital information age', meaning that pre-internet television and post-internet television become two distinct analytical categories of the same medium. Thus, an analysis of televangelist religious discourses is enhanced and strengthened by the inclusion of online evangelist counterpart discourses and all of the remediated instances of their content. To study one

medium without attention to the other explores only one piece of this complex puzzle. Since this dissertation is foundationally concerned with the holistic and comprehensive analysis of discursive formations across evangelical media packages and discourse leads the direction of the research, making decisions about the inclusion of both television and internet ministries seemed obvious.

Making Data Out of Discourse

It has been difficult to ascertain an exact number of practicing American televangelists at any given time. *Trinity Broadcasting Network* (TBN 2016a) alone boasts a programming schedule of hundreds of Christian-oriented programs so it is likely to be a significant population. This number grows further when we include the multitude of local and public access televangelism and multiplies exponentially when accounting for the availability of online streaming video of evangelical sermons⁹¹. This has understandably made narrowing down a representative sample a rather daunting, if not impossible task. This would be much more of a concern for quantitative research that typically employs probability sampling and relies heavily on drawing a random sample from the target population in order to obtain a sample that is representative. Proponents of quantitative research assert that this type of sampling allows for more *reliable* and *valid* findings (Babbie and Benaquisto 2002, Neuman 2004). Fortunately, qualitative research does not privilege the principles of randomness and representation in the same way, and typically

⁹¹ It should also be noted that televangelism has also become popular outside of the United States, in both Brazil and Sweden – with both imported American programming as well as local televangelists (see Juergensmeyer & Roof 2011). Also, non-Christian televangelism has emerged as a relevant global trend (see Thomas & Lee 2012). Accounting for this even broader focus only increases the difficulty in determining the full population of practicing evangelists.

employs non-probability based sampling methods. In light of this, *purposive sampling* has been used in this dissertation. Purposive sampling is ideal for this type of research as it allows “you to select your sample on the basis of your own knowledge of the population and the purpose of the study” (Babbie and Benaquisto 2002:165). While the conclusions will not be representative according to probabilistic models, they will be representative of the sample drawn and of the target population when based on the researcher’s thorough knowledge of the available field. My selection of televangelists has been based on popularity, longevity, relevance, and prominence in the religious-political sphere. In line with the principles of purposive sampling, it has been drawn according to my thorough knowledge and acquired expertise on the subject.

Employing a Foucauldian inspired discursive analysis has also presented research design challenges in that it does not draw methodological sampling boundaries in the more clear-cut way that other methods do. Challenges aside, this project does require a starting point to work outward, backward, and forward from while letting discourse lead the way. Therefore my core sample encompasses some of the diversity represented through the mediated evangelism available to North American, international, and online audiences. It includes popular examples of mediated evangelist sermons (televised and online), as well as non-sermon based television programming and informative ministry websites. This varied sample of television programming and online ministries allows for a comprehensive analysis of the ways in which evangelicals employ various and integrated media packages while also allowing for the unpacking of discursive formations at play in the constitution of contemporary evangelical subjects through apocalyptic discourses of salvation.

The three televangelists selected for this sample have been chosen for a number of reasons. Pat Robertson, John Hagee, and Jack Van Impe are all prominent figures who have been producing televangelist, and now online evangelist programming, for an extensive period of time. In addition to the popularity of their content and personality, each evangelist considered here has proven that their various program formats are also able to stand the test of time. Each evangelist draws on the salvation and apocalyptic themes relevant to this project and brings his own unique style to the field. While all three programs utilize family members or co-hosts to assist in spreading their message, it is clear that Robertson, Hagee, and Van Impe are still the main attraction for each of their televised programs and multi-mediated ministry⁹².

Given the variety of formats employed by these three evangelists, narrowing down a data sample required careful consideration of method, data collection, and my theoretically informed analytical frameworks⁹³. For instance, while both Hagee and Van Impe were producing thirty-minute programs at the time of data collection, Robertson's program filled a sixty-minute time slot. Also, at the time of data collection, Hagee and

⁹² It should be noted here that the field of mediated evangelism is heavily gendered and racialized, with white male evangelists dominating the field. While Black Televangelism has emerged as a disrupter of this trend, gendered challenges have been somewhat less prevalent within the field of televangelism itself. Although all three programs regularly feature female hosts, family members, and guests, traditional gender roles are distinct and reinforced in various ways. For instance, Jack's wife Rexella Van Impe is a co-host for his program but takes on a much more passive role in the interpretation of biblical prophecy. Rexella reads news headlines and asks questions throughout the program but Jack is the sole conveyor of biblical knowledge and much more actively involved in prophecy interpretation. He is the star of the show and despite her longstanding presence as co-host, wife, and news anchor, she is clearly positioned in a supporting role. Future research projects would do well to explore an intersectional analysis of gender and race issues in televangelism as a field. Unfortunately, the timing and scope of this current project have restricted my ability to attend to these important conversations in an extended manner. See Stacey (1990) and Gallagher (2003) for discussions of gendered evangelical identities concerning family life and work, Stewart (2012) for a discussion of gender and charismatic evangelical online practice, Emerson and Smith (2000) for a discussion of American evangelicals and race, Walton (2009) for a comprehensive discussion of the relevance and popularity of Black Televangelism, Tucker-Worgs (2011) for a discussion of Black Megachurches, and Barnes (2015) for a discussion of Black Megachurches and gender inclusion.

⁹³ Given the nature of graduate research, these factors also needed to be balanced with 'time to completion' and financial constraints.

Robertson appeared on Canadian and American television schedules five times a week from Monday to Friday, while Van Impe's program only aired once per week on Saturday or Sunday. Given these key differences, a sample was drawn with consideration afforded to both the number of episodes and hours of programming, as well as the chronological time span in which the episodes aired. With all of this in mind, the overall sampling timeframe for data collection began in November 2009 and ended in June 2010. Each program was collected in a manner adapted specifically to its unique format and the characteristics discussed in subsequent sections of this chapter. Data was collected through the use of a personal digital video recorder (PVR) and cable television, as well as through downloaded or streamed videos made available through official network or publicly disseminated online sources such as *YouTube*. While data were collected for the vast majority of episodes aired during this timeframe, a non-significant number of aired episodes are missing from the sample as a result of human error, technological failure, or the repetition of a previously aired episode from within or outside the sampling timeframe. While purposive sampling was used to draw the sample of televangelists, both purposive and random sampling were applied to the available population of televangelist episodes for the first stage of textual analysis as described later in this chapter. Given that all three programs follow an extremely predictable and formulaic style, a smaller core sample has also been drawn from the representational primary sample for the second and third stages of analysis in order to allow for a richer, more in-depth textual analysis of key discursive themes. The remaining sections of this chapter address the specifics of sampling each evangelist's televised program.

M.G. Pat Robertson and *the 700 Club*

According to its official website, as well as Pat Robertson's personal website, *the 700 Club*⁹⁴ is one of the longest running religious programs still on television today, reaching roughly one million Americans daily (Robertson 2016a, CBN 2016a). The show premiered in November of 1966 on Robertson's own Christian Broadcasting Network (CBN 2016). *The 700 Club* television program was born out of an earlier fundraiser telethon conducted in 1963 where Robertson called on seven hundred people to pledge ten dollars a month to help get CBN off the ground. The show was originally hosted by the infamous Jim Bakker, and regularly featured his then wife Tammy Faye (Hadden & Swann 1981:32). Robertson took over as host in 1972 after the departure of the Bakkers and has steadfastly remained in *the 700 Club* limelight ever since⁹⁵ (Brooks & Marsh 2007:1217). Despite the lack of reliable availability on Canadian public networks or cable stations at the time of data collection, the inclusion of the American version of this iconic televangelist program was essential for the purposive sample integrity of this project⁹⁶.

The 700 Club is widely available in the United States and around the world. It is still produced by The Christian Broadcasting Network (CBN) which was the first Christian television network in the United States, founded by Robertson himself in the 1960s (Robertson 2016a). At the time of my initial research, *the 700 Club* was also available to American viewers through Trinity Broadcasting Network (TBN 2016) and other local cable

⁹⁴ This section is meant to be a brief introduction to Robertson and *the 700 Club* to enable a discussion of sampling. Detailed analysis of Pat Robertson and *the 700 Club* will take shape in [Chapters 7 through 10](#).

⁹⁵ This is true with the exception of a brief absence during his failed bid for the presidency. During his campaign throughout 1987-1988, Pat Robertson's appearances in the 700 Club were substantially reduced with his son Tim largely taking control. After this brief absence, the senior Robertson resumed his role as full-time host and steady fixture of *the 700 Club* on and off camera (Brooks & Marsh 2007:1217).

⁹⁶ To this end, downloaded copies and streaming videos of the sampled *700 Club* episodes have been used as a substitute for the televised broadcasts that were easily available for *John Hagee Today* and *Jack Van Impe Presents*.

networks. International versions are available in over one-hundred languages and can be viewed in over two-hundred countries. In addition to its traditional televised broadcasts, full episodes can be viewed online through CBN's official website (CBN 2016b). Many episodes are also made available through official CBN and *700 Club* YouTube Channels (see YouTube 2016a, 2016b, 2016c).

According to the official program website, "*the 700 Club* is a news/magazine program that has the variety and pacing of a morning show with live guests, special features, music, prayer and ministry. It also features in-depth investigative reporting by the CBN News team" (CBN 2016a). At the outset of this project, Robertson remained the primary fixture of this program, but was also assisted by a variety of co-hosts, including Terry Meeuwsen, Kristi Watts, Lee Webb, and Robertson's own son, Gordon (CBN 2016a). While Pat serves as the primary male host, his son Gordon generally takes his place once a week, usually on a Friday. Terry serves as the primary female host, while Kristi takes her place regularly on Wednesdays for their weekly show on health and fitness issues. She also occasionally fills in for Terry on other days of the week. Lee Webb serves as the CBN News anchor of the show and is rarely replaced by others, but is regularly joined by a variety of CBN news reporters and contributors for news and special features segments. The continuity and format of *the 700 Club* remain consistent regardless of whom the daily hosts may be. For this reason, episodes that do not feature Pat Robertson as a primary host for that particular day have still been included in the sample.

The sample population for *the 700 Club*⁹⁷ was drawn from January 1st, 2010 to June 30th, 2010. Since *the 700 Club* is broadcast five times a week (Monday to Friday), this

⁹⁷ It should be noted that minor differences exist between the television broadcast version and the streaming video available online through CBN. The following disclaimer is offered to viewers: "*Web coverage of the*

produces an available population of one hundred and twenty-eight episodes. While purposive convenience sampling was appropriate for Hagee's program, simple random sampling is better suited for Robertson's and Van Impe's programs as each broadcast can serve as a stand alone product relatively independent of previous or future episodes. To allow for consistency, a simple random sample of twenty-five episodes has been drawn from the population where each episode broadcast during this timeframe was assigned a number from one to one hundred and twenty-eight and equally eligible for inclusion. Using a free online random number generator (Random.org 2016), twenty numbers were generated and the corresponding episodes recorded to the sample. After this initial sampling, no episodes from January 2010 were included so a second random sample for four episodes was applied including only dates from this month. This produced a random sample of twenty-four episodes. In addition to this primary sample, a special fiftieth anniversary episode from Monday, January 11th 2010 that focused on the first fifty years of CBN and *the 700 Club* was also included to bring the sample to twenty-five episodes⁹⁸.

To allow for further concentrated analysis, a smaller core sample has been drawn from these initial twenty-five episodes. This core sample consists of ten hours of programming where five individual episodes were chosen through another simple random sample of the twenty-five episodes and five additional episodes were chosen through purposive sampling according to relevance to emergent discursive themes taken up for analysis. By focusing on a larger primary sample for the initial stages of research before

700 Club is considered an international broadcast, and as such, is treated differently than the televised version of the show. Due to legal copyright constraints, there are times when we must edit portions of certain editions of the 700 Club. This might cause a delay in the posting of the show on our Web site. If this occurs, check back later. Thank you for your patience as we continue to offer you the best possible service" (CBN 2016c). These differences appear to be minimal.

⁹⁸ Please refer to [Appendix B: Episodes of *the 700 Club*](#) for a full list of what episodes were selected for the sample.

narrowing in on a smaller core sample for in-depth analysis, I am confident that a comprehensive analysis of Robertson's program has been achieved.

John Hagee and *John Hagee Today*

John Hagee's⁹⁹ often controversial sermon program¹⁰⁰ *John Hagee Today* is regularly broadcast on multiple American and Canadian broadcast and satellite networks, including Daystar, TBN, and YesTV (formerly CTS). Hagee also created his own internet-based video channel, Global Evangelism Television (GETV), that broadcasts his sermons as well as other John Hagee Ministry live and on-demand content. According to the official John Hagee Ministries website¹⁰¹, Hagee's radio and television programs were also broadcast in two-hundred and thirty-five nations worldwide. At the outset of data collection, this program was regularly available in Canada through Crossroads Television System (CTS 2014, YesTV 2015¹⁰²) and GraceTV (2016) by way of a popular extended cable package. During this time, the program was broadcast Monday to Friday at eleven pm EST, in a thirty-minute time slot each day. Currently, YesTV airs John Hagee's sermons during the weekend in a one-hour time slot under the schedule heading *Cornerstone with John Hagee*¹⁰³. All episodes utilized in this analysis have been recorded

⁹⁹ This section is meant to be a brief introduction to Hagee and *John Hagee Today* to enable a discussion of sampling. Detailed analysis of John Hagee and *John Hagee Today* will take shape in Chapters 7 through 10.

¹⁰⁰ John Hagee has been at the centre of several religious and political controversies during his time on-air. Some of these controversies include accusations of adherence to dual covenant theology, a public fall out with Pat Robertson and Jerry Falwell, rejected Presidential endorsements, and CRTC and CSBC complaints for using hate speech against homosexuals (CBSC 2005) and Muslims (see Chapter 10: Apocalyptic Governance of International Relations for further discussion of his discursive intolerance of what he calls 'Islamofascists' and 'Radical Islam').

¹⁰¹ At the time of data collection.

¹⁰² As previously noted, CTS has now been rebranded as YesTV.

¹⁰³ Little appears to have changed in terms of sermon style and content; however, time and formatting appear to be varied at present day.

through the use of a digital PVR and stored on the digital hard drive in the device¹⁰⁴. At the time of data collection, no online streaming video or YouTube videos were available for the collected episodes.

The sample for *John Hagee Today* was drawn from November 9th, 2009 to March 15th, 2010. Since *John Hagee Today* was broadcasted five times a week (Monday to Friday), this produced an available population of ninety-one episodes. While simple random sampling is easily utilized for Robertson's and Van Impe's programs, purposive or convenience sampling is more appropriate for Hagee's sermon style program, as each broadcast cannot serve as a stand alone product relatively independent of previous or future episodes. At the time, Hagee's weekly sermon at Cornerstone Church in San Antonio, Texas was broken into several segments and broadcast as two episodes of *John Hagee Today*. Each sermon (two episodes) represents one part in each ongoing 'sermon series' which may include upwards of seven distinct weekly sermons on one overarching theme¹⁰⁵. For example, the weekly sermon entitled 'Seven Things God Can't Do' is one component of a broader sermon series entitled 'The Magnificent Seven' and needs to be contextualized within its sermon series to fully understand its discursive function. Therefore, to allow for thematic consistency, a simple random sample cannot be applied here. All ongoing sermon series' available at the beginning of the sampling timeframe were followed to completion by the end of the sampling timeframe and made available for sampling; sermon series' that

¹⁰⁴ Secondary copies of the program were stored on VHS tapes and later transferred to USB storage for analysis.

¹⁰⁵ It should be noted that these series' do not always occur in perfect chronological order – it is unclear if this is a feature of the mediated broadcast or the 'bricks and mortar' sermons that take place in his Texas church.

were recently started or unfinished at the end point of the timeframe were excluded from the population¹⁰⁶.

While the continuity and format of *the 700 Club* remains consistent regardless of who is hosting a particular episode, the same cannot be said about *John Hagee Today*. John Hagee was the featured preacher for the majority of programming at the time of data collection; however, on occasion, *John Hagee Today* featured other preachers and special interview programming, often featuring Hagee's charities, authors of relevant books, and experts on Israel or health related matters. The most common guest preacher was Hagee's son Matthew, who is often featured in his role as executive pastor at Cornerstone Church. Although Matthew's format mirrors his father's sermon style, the two preachers offer their own unique style of evangelism. More importantly, the sampling timeframe did not include enough content of Matthew's sermons to be able to determine whether they would be appropriate for analysis. For these reasons, the sermons featuring Matthew as the sole preacher have been largely excluded from the sampling population. While the majority of Matthew's sermons have been excluded, the two unique special features that aired during the sampling timeframe were included in the sample. These include a special on diet with Dr. Don Colbert and another special on surviving cancer with Hagee's wife Diana and other important women in his life. Despite their departure in style, John Hagee hosts both in a primary role so they have been included. In total, the sample for *John Hagee Today* includes forty-seven sermon style programs featuring John Hagee, two special interest programs, and one of Matthew Hagee's sermons for quick reference¹⁰⁷. The total sample

¹⁰⁶ Please refer to Appendix A: Episodes of *John Hagee Today* for a full list of what episodes were selected for the sample.

¹⁰⁷ This has been done to enable a brief assessment of the tone of his narratives, content, and style of evangelism for preliminary research purposes; however, the episode is not included in the discourse

consists of fifty individual thirty-minute episodes for a total of twenty-five hours of programming.

To allow for further concentrated analysis, a smaller core sample has been drawn from these initial fifty episodes. Given the specific format and style differences of *John Hagee Today*, purposive sampling was also used for drawing this smaller core sample. Because Hagee's program consists of broken down components of longer, multi-part sermon series', the core sample focuses on further analysis of two primary sermon series': 'The Magnificent Seven' and 'Prophetic Mysteries Revealed'. These series' reflect the most complete and thematically relevant of the sermon series' captured during the sampling timeframe. This core sample consists of twenty-one individual episodes for a total of ten and a half hours of televised programming. Again, the larger primary sample provides a broad and comprehensive overview before narrowing in on a smaller core sample for an extended analysis of Hagee's program.

Jack and Rexella Van Impe and *Jack Van Impe Presents*

Jack Van Impe's weekly prophecy based televangelist program *Jack Van Impe Presents*¹⁰⁸ has been on-air since 1988¹⁰⁹ and is aired in 247 countries around the world (JVIM 2016a). *Jack Van Impe Presents* provides a very different format from *John Hagee Today* and *the 700 Club*. The show examines current events, newspaper headlines, and political issues to make apparent their relationship to apocalyptic prophecy fulfillment. In

analysis and is therefore not listed in the appendix. The analyzed sample of *John Hagee Today* consists of forty-nine episodes which has provided more than enough content for analysis.

¹⁰⁸ This section is meant to be a brief introduction to the Van Impes and *Jack Van Impe* to enable a discussion of sampling. Detailed analysis of Jack and Rexella Van Impe and *Jack Van Impe Presents* will take shape in Chapters 7 through 10.

¹⁰⁹ This information was gathered from personal email correspondence with a Jack Van Impe Ministries representative named Ken Muehlhoff while using the website's email option.

this regard, it has a much more singular focus than the other programs. *Jack Van Impe Presents* also features Jack's wife Rexella Van Impe in a co-host style position. Both Jack and Rexella were the only featured hosts in the episodes aired during the sampling timeframe. Other than an announcer that occasionally discussed product offers, no replacement hosts or other expert contributors appeared in the episodes. At the time of data collection, *Jack Van Impe Presents* was regularly available to Canadian cable subscribers through YesTV (formerly CTS), Joytv (2016), and multiple other networks. At the time of data collection, online archives were not available but have recently been added to the much improved Jack Van Impe Ministries' website (JVIM 2016a). Although televised recordings were collected through the same methods used for *John Hagee Today*, digital hardcopies for the majority of selected *Jack Van Impe Presents* episodes were widely available through YouTube. These copies were downloaded and often used as a substitute for the recorded broadcasts because they offered greater convenience for data storage and analysis.

The sample for *Jack Van Impe Presents* has been drawn from November 28th, 2009 to June 26th, 2010. Since *Jack Van Impe Presents* is broadcast only once per week (on Saturdays), this produces an available population of thirty-one episodes. Although this provides the smallest population from which to draw a sample, *Jack Van Impe Presents* is by far the most formulaic of the three programs so a smaller population does not detract from the analysis. As stated above, Van Impe's program is ideally suited to random sampling as each broadcast can serve as a stand alone product relatively independent of previous or future episodes. Of the thirty-one available episodes, four episodes from December 5th, 2009, February 27th, March 27th and April 10th, 2010 are missing from the

collected data because they either could not be found online or could not be recorded because of technical problems. To allow for consistency, a simple random sample of twenty-five episodes was drawn from the twenty-seven collected episodes where each collected episode was assigned a number from one to twenty-seven and equally eligible for inclusion. Using the same online random number generator two numbers were generated and the corresponding episodes were excluded from the sample. The excluded episodes were originally aired on January 16th and February 6th, 2010¹¹⁰.

To allow for further concentrated analysis, a smaller core sample has been drawn from these initial twenty-five episodes. This core sample consists of five hours of programming where five individual episodes were chosen through another simple random sample of the twenty-five episodes and five additional episodes were chosen through purposive sampling according to relevance to emergent discursive themes taken up for analysis. By focusing on a larger primary sample for the initial stages of research before narrowing in on a smaller core sample for in-depth analysis, I am confident that a comprehensive analysis of Van Impe's program has been achieved.

Conclusion: Media Packages

While the televised programming of Robertson, Hagee, and Van Impe forms the primary focus of analysis for this project, as discussed earlier, only examining television data paints an incomplete picture of prevailing evangelist discourses. The evangelists of today build true media empires, taking serious the biblical directive from NIV¹¹¹: Matthew

¹¹⁰ Please refer to Appendix C: Episodes of *Jack Van Impe Presents* for a full list of what episodes were selected for the sample.

¹¹¹ New International Version (NIV).

24:14 and 28:18-20 to spread the gospel to all the world. They create comprehensive *media packages* for their message, utilizing every available medium – print, radio, television, internet, and now social media. As such, their message cuts across platforms to enable an unprecedented level of interactivity for users in our digital age. For these reasons, online resources have also been subjected to a thorough discursive analysis and the vast informational websites associated with each televised program are included in this analysis. However, instead of examining the separate components of the modern mediated evangelist's arsenal as mutually exclusive and distinct forums for content, this analysis lets discourse lead the way by looking at evangelist media packages in a holistic manner to unearth the prevailing discursive formations and subjectivities that cut across media.

As Hoover & Echchaibi (2014) aptly note, understanding televangelism is

more profoundly about a re-making of the expectations, meanings and contexts where and through which religion is not only transmitted, received, shared, and practiced but also about new generativities, new forms of "the religious," and their extents and boundaries. Televangelism itself was not the point. It opened the door to re-imagining where religion might be produced and by whom (2014:2).

In line with this understanding of televangelism as more than simply a new vessel for religious sermons, the analysis that takes shape throughout the latter sections of this dissertation is about much more than televangelism itself; it underscores the importance of religious discourse in American public life. The evangelical discourses that inform this analysis are mirrored in American society (and vice versa) yet it is a relationship that take shape at the discursive level, rather than the causal relationships implied through 'effects style' media research¹¹². By taking seriously the discursive level at which religious subjectivities are constituted, my work contributes to our ongoing conversations about

¹¹² The field of effects style research has been discussed in earlier sections of this chapter.

religion and media and constitutes another new chapter in “the story of the mediation of religion that took a significant turn with the Gutenberg Revolution” (Hoover & Echchaibi 2014:2). To further understand the relationships between text, discourse, and subjectivity across media packages, I turn now to the second piece of this complex puzzle, and the second part of this two-chapter assessment of method and methodology: theorizing Foucauldian methodology and developing a comprehensive reading and analysis of discursive formations.

Chapter 4: Theorizing Methodology

Introduction: Exploring Theory, Method and Methodology – Part 2

This chapter continues to address methodological issues relevant to this dissertation by exploring the ways in which a theoretically informed Foucauldian methodology can enhance the analysis of mediated religious discourses that is complicated by cultural, historical, and political discursive intersections. Having addressed the practical logistics of research design and the objects of analysis at play in the previous chapter, the next step involves clarifying the theoretical, methodological, and epistemological assumptions for a project of this nature. To that end, this chapter explores the ways in which discourse analysis can be used as a theoretically and epistemologically grounded methodology that is capable of assessing unity, as well as the tensions and contradictions that run through prevailing evangelical discourses. While it would certainly be easier to treat religious discourse as a vacuum that is entirely isolated from secular, political, and cultural discursive influences, a shallow analysis would indeed result. Many popular narratives envision the American separation of church and state as a cultural cornerstone, but the two have long been culturally entwined. The ways in which religion and politics intersect in the United States suggests a more complex cultural reality than many may perceive at first glance. For instance, leading up to the 2008 presidential election, polls showed that sixty-nine percent of Americans agreed that it is important for a president to have strong religious beliefs (Lugo et al. 2007). More recently in 2014, close to half of American adults believed that “churches and other houses of worship should express their views on social and political questions – up from 43% four years ago” (Lipka 2014a). The same study showed that “a growing percentage of U.S. adults (now 72%) think that religion is losing influence

in American life” (Lipka 2014a) and most of those surveyed were not pleased about it. Religious demographics can also correlate with party preference and in the 2014 midterm elections, seventy-eight percent of white evangelical/born-again survey participants unsurprisingly voted for a Republican candidate (Pew Research Center 2014a). In fact, of the most recent representatives to take oath, “more than nine-in-ten members of the House and Senate (92%) are Christian, and about 57% are Protestant” (Pew Research Center 2015). This evidence contradicts popular cultural mythologies that envision a completely secularized American political system set against a distinctly private religious sphere; to this end, I put forth an analysis that takes account of these intersections and accepts the fluidity of boundaries between *the religious* and *the political/public*.

Not only do I need a methodology capable of assessing the entanglement of religious-political discourses, this dataset is also further complicated by its mediated contexts and requires a means of examining discourse as embedded within and across mediated platforms. As such, this research requires a strong methodological and epistemological toolkit to allow for a holistic exploration of the ways in which these discursive intersections between religion, politics, and media help to shape evangelist media packages. In turn, this methodological toolkit also must unearth and explore the discourses that shape subjectivities; specifically, the governing discourses that actively constitute an idealized responsible and politically active evangelical subject in American society. This chapter expands on our discussions from the previous chapter to further explore the methodological and epistemological issues relevant to research in this complex field. It therefore contributes to the formation of a Foucauldian methodology appropriate

for an in-depth analysis that is capable of understanding religious-political discursive formations across mediated packages.

While our daily lives become increasingly entwined with digital media and technologies, our research methods are still catching up. Although much of modern social life is mediated by written text (Peräkylä 2005:870), until recently, we have previously neglected the mediations of sound and image that are prevalent in popular electronic media. This leads me to ask what exactly constitutes *discourse* and *text* in this image-saturated mediated context that I am studying. Before I establish the boundaries of a methodology appropriate for the seamless incorporation of multiple discursive contexts and both theory and method, this discussion must also be taken up. This chapter allows me to accomplish these several important tasks: the first section evaluates established methods for discourse analysis and their relevance to this project. I then elaborate and assess more robust understandings of both discourse and text in relation to media and religion. The second section looks specifically to Foucault's own conceptualization of discourse before elaborating a Foucauldian inspired methodology appropriate for the discursive analysis of mediated evangelist discourses. This discussion also highlights relevant epistemological issues assumed by a research design of this nature. The third, and final, section of this chapter seeks to integrate the two discussions by putting theory into practice. This concluding section attempts to articulate the logistics for conducting this more complex form of methodology by providing a description of the hands-on process of analysis utilized throughout the research process.

Starting from Scratch?

Discourse Analysis, as a field of inquiry, encompasses a wide ranging spectrum of specific methodological approaches that range from more quantitative forms of content analysis to the predominantly qualitative field of semiotics. According to Don Slater, the cultural objects we study, “present considerable methodological difficulties to social researchers. At the same time, they are increasingly found at the centre of their analyses” (1998:233). Despite the popularity of discourse analysis and the study of cultural objects, such as written or visual texts, the clear articulation of what is involved with actually working with discourse as data, from both a theoretical and a practical standpoint, is often lacking in discussions of research design. This project seeks to clarify this process. It is a project that is led by the discourses under study and therefore needs a methodological focus capable of centralizing discourse as fluid and contextual data. As discussed in the previous chapter, the data for this project consists of hours of televised televangelist programming, hours of streaming and hard copy digital online video, large numbers of individual web pages housed under each ministry’s website, as well as online evangelist sermons and email newsletter documents. While purposive transcription¹¹³ has been utilized for this dataset and online resources provide the ease of written text, as much as possible, the majority of programming used here has been analyzed as a complete package, without separating transcribed text from the visual and auditory elements of the evangelist programs. This

¹¹³ Throughout the analysis of my data, I have loosely transcribed for content, themes, framing, narratives, visual symbolism, and subjectivity while inserting more detailed word-for-word transcriptions in areas that were intuitively important to my objects of analysis. During each subsequent reading of the data, and during the writing process, more detailed transcriptions took place when necessary to articulate detailed exemplar quotes within this written document. As such, the entirety of the dataset was never completely transcribed word-for-word into written transcripts. This was partly done for timing but more so for research design. During each reading of the data, it was always my aim to analyze the mediated discourses as intended by their producers – as holistic products that encompass both visual and auditory elements.

holistic approach presents many methodological challenges to be discussed later in this chapter but also allows for a more thorough and situated understanding of discourse in context. Before exploring the connections between Foucault, discourse, theory, and methodology, I turn briefly to an examination of qualitative forms of textual analysis to explore the landscape of relevant methodologies that could be appropriate for the analysis of mediated discourses. I first examine qualitative forms of *Content Analysis* and *Semiotics*, before assessing the potential suitability of three commonly employed forms of *Discourse Analysis: Linguistic, Critical and Foucauldian*.

Content Analysis and Semiotics

It can be argued that many prevailing forms of discursive analysis locate their origins in two early methodological approaches to the study of cultural objects and texts: content analysis and semiotics. Content analysis is “one of the most direct methods of textual analysis [which] involves counting phenomena in texts” (Stokes 2003:56). It is typically regarded as a low-level quantitative method that allows researchers to count instances of a particular attribute by developing mutually exclusive and exhaustive categorization schemes. While coding schemes vary in terms of complexity and capacity, at its most basic quantitative level, content analysis is critiqued for its positivist assumptions. As Slater notes, “content analysis clearly represents an attempt to apply conventional, and indeed positivist, notions of rigor to the unruly and ostensibly subjective field of cultural meaning” (1998:234-235). As such, manifest forms of content analysis are effective for descriptive analysis of occurrences and patterns in established categories but have little capacity to investigate the social context and subjective meaning of these

patterns. For this reason, many qualitative researchers simply dismiss content analysis for its lack of depth, to the neglect of more subjective and in-depth evolutions of this method (Stokes 2003:56). These more qualitative forms of content analysis have been developed through attention to latent style coding schemes that aim to unearth underlying thematic and symbolic meaning within texts. These more in-depth manifestations of qualitative content analysis arguably share their assumptions and origins with more complex and subjective forms of textual analysis, such as semiotics.

While content analysis establishes instances of attributes and patterns of occurrences, semiotics attempts to paint a broader picture and represents a much more qualitative and subjective stream of analysis for image and text. Through the work of Ferdinand de Saussure (1966) and Roland Barthes (1967, 1977), we see the development of semiotics as a methodology that allows for the analysis of cultural meanings attached to *signs* present in written and visual texts. This appears in direct contrast to the aims and outcomes of base level content analysis. As Slater notes, “semiotics represents the exact opposite to content analysis along every dimension...it is strong on rich interpretations of single texts or codes but offers almost no basis for rigorous generalization” (1998:237). Therefore, the use of semiotics allows the researcher to examine the subjective meanings attached to the categories that content analysis only counts. As such, the limitations of content analysis are accounted for by the strengths of semiotics, and vice versa.

Discourse Analysis

While content analysis, semiotics, and discourse analysis all find their etymology in linguistics, most of these variants rely heavily on examining the structures of language

at the expense of the social and historical contexts that surround and contribute to discursive formations. As such, they are not wholly effective for the type of analysis required here and do not have the capacity to expose the ways in which discourse is active in the production of subjectivities. Given these aims, more elaborated forms of Foucauldian discourse analysis move us closer to the goal posts of my research design and will be examined after a brief assessment of other common variants of discourse analysis. According to David Deacon et al. (1999), “discourse analysis is generally concerned with extended samples of talk or text, with the structural, stylistic and rhetorical features of these samples, and with the form of dialogue or communicative interaction that occurs through talk and texts...” (1999:310). More specifically, *linguistic discourse analysis* “refers to research that aims at uncovering the features of text that maintain coherence in units larger than the sentence” (Brown & Yule 1983/Peräkylä 2005:871). This form of discourse analysis focuses on structures of language and alienates texts from their sociocultural contexts. As “cultural texts always entail social and historical contexts” (Deacon et al. 1999:326), researchers need to move beyond the narrow focus on linguistic structures and recognize that “a complex analysis of discourse is not limited to ‘textual’ analysis, but also accounts for the relations between structures of text and talk, on the one hand, and of their cognitive, social, cultural or historical ‘contexts’, on the other hand” (van Dijk 1991:110-111). While contemporary models for linguistic discourse analysis attempt to incorporate elements of semiotics to analyze the meanings *of* language¹¹⁴, other streams of discursive analysis move beyond meaning to examine representations of ideology that are *present in* language. This stream is commonly referred to as *Critical Discourse Analysis*.

¹¹⁴ See van Dijk’s (1991) discussion of *text semantics*.

Critical Discourse Analysis was initially developed by Norman Fairclough (1995) and merges key issues in linguistic analysis and critical social research (Peräkylä 2005:871). As its name suggests, this form of discursive analysis emerges as a more ‘critical’ mode of analysis for talk and text and attempts to address “relations between discourse, power, dominance, social inequality and the position of the discourse analyst in such social relationships” (van Dijk 1993:249). More simply put, critical discourse analysis interrogates “the ways in which texts of different kinds reproduce power and inequalities in society” (Peräkylä 2005:871). Accordingly, critical discourse analysts make no positivist assumptions that value neutrality and objectivity as roles that researchers can easily assume. Proponents claim that critical discourse analysis should be “primarily interested and motivated by pressing social issues, which it hopes to better understand through discourse analysis. Theories, description, methods and empirical work are chosen or elaborated as a function of their relevance for the realization of such a sociopolitical goal” (van Dijk 1993:252). As such, critical discourse analysis traverses disciplinary, theoretical, and paradigmatic boundaries and rejects epistemological positions that envision both knowledge and the researcher as value-free.

While critical discourse analysis starts to break away from more narrowly defined ideas of discourse as only a neutral linguistic structure and incorporates extended notions of text and discourse, it is still heavily influenced by traditional notions of text as recorded language and statements. Critical discourse analysis also works with a defined goal of exposing inequality and ideology in language, thus narrowing the scope of discursive formations and, at times, slipping into equating discourse to ideology. While some proponents of critical discourse analysis have also attempted to adopt Foucault’s

governmentality approach and analysis of modernity, this is not always a fruitful alliance as there are fundamental and irreconcilable differences between the two avenues of discourse analysis (Kendall and Wickham 2006:2). As Gavin Kendall and Gary Wickham argue, “Foucault was coopted to this programme because his emphasis on power – and on critique – gave a moral edge to what might otherwise be seen as a rather mechanical linguistic analysis” (2006:5). However, it is Foucault’s conceptualization of *power* that highlights the tensions between his methodologies and critical discourse analysis. Whereas critical discourse analysts see hegemonic power and dominance in discourse, Foucault reminds us that power is pervasive. For Foucault, power must be understood

as the multiplicity of force relations immanent in the sphere in which they operate and which constitute their own organization; as the process which, through ceaseless struggles and confrontations, transforms, strengthens, or reverses them; as the support which these force relations find in one another, thus forming a chain or a system, or on the contrary, the disjunctions and contradictions which isolate them from one another; and lastly, as the strategies in which they take effect... (1978:92).

Breaking free from top-down conceptualizations of ideology and power, Foucault further clarifies how power can be multi-directional: “power comes from below; that is, there is no binary and all-encompassing opposition between rulers and ruled at the root of power relations...” (1978:94). Furthermore, Foucault argues, “it is in discourse that power and knowledge are joined together. And for this very reason, we must conceive discourse as a series of discontinuous segments whose tactical function is neither uniform or stable” (1978:100). Therefore, by elaborating Foucault’s notion of power and by understanding discourse as non-unified linkages of power/knowledge, our analysis of discourse can expose multiple relations of force/power that do not always privilege social agendas, expected top-down hierarchies, or the power/ideology conflation that is often present in

critical discourse analysis. This overreliance on discursive exposures of ideology, morality and inequality comes far too close to embedding researcher agendas within discourse. These tensions become more apparent when we look to the intersection of theory and methodology in Foucault's work to understand the ways in which discourse plays a central role in shaping social meaning, subjectivities, *and* ideology.

Foucauldian Discourse Analysis

While critical discourse analysis exposes latent representations of ideology and inequality in language, it still postulates a relatively static understanding of discourse. Through the use of Foucauldian methodologies we are able to expose discursive formations to explore how discourses are actively productive in the constitution of subjectivities and social realities. Since Foucault did not explicitly outline a definitive set of practical methods for discursive analysis, the methodological work inspired by his writings varies greatly. One commonality that cuts across most Foucauldian inspired analyses is a primary concern with “how a set of [discursive] ‘statements’ comes to constitute objects and subjects” (Peräkylä 2005:871). This constitution of subjects and objects is understood within its social-historical context and can be examined through what Foucault calls *archaeology* and *genealogy*. Because these models for discursive analysis do not attempt to extricate text from practice or context, the use of Foucauldian methodology pushes the boundaries of how we conceptualize discourse and establishes the importance of discursive formations¹¹⁵ for examining the constitution of subjectivities and the relevant forms of governance that emerge.

¹¹⁵ Discursive formations will be discussed later in this chapter.

Using Foucault's thinking to shape methodology necessitates a move beyond a shallow understanding of discourse as simply text – a move that is consistent with the goals of this research. It requires a unique perspective on the scope of one's project and how objects of analyses are situated within a historical present. Overall, Foucault's historical methods are fundamentally about problematization (Kendall and Wickham 1999:22). For instance, in *Birth of the Clinic* (1994), Foucault is not interested in a descriptive snapshot of medicine in a certain time period; he instead asks how clinical medicine emerges as a dominant social practice; a question that inevitably requires a broader social-historical understanding of one's topic. This broader interest in discursive formations pushes beyond structural linguistic models of discourse analysis, allowing for a richer and more complete understanding of the emergence of ideas, practices, and the conditions and limits of knowledge.

Using this discourse-centric methodology inherently requires a better articulation of how we can conceptualize discourse in line with Foucault's work. Accordingly, "discourse can be seen basically as a group of statements which together have a certain 'modality of existence'; they 'belong to a single system of formation'...the signs of language do not form a statement; it is rather a 'function' which 'cuts across' such unities" (Carrette 2000:11). Thus, Foucauldian notions of discourse analysis are not confined to written or oral text; they interrogate the discursive statement that cuts across linguistic structures and mediums to make apparent the underlying rationales of government. More specifically, Foucault argues that discourses shape the subjectivity of the individual and ultimately function in the governance of the self (Carrette 2000). Therefore, "discourses are productive: medical discourses about 'folly' and 'unreason' produce the mentally ill

person, penological discourses produce the criminal, discourses on sex produce sexuality, and so on” (Kendall and Wickham 1999:34)¹¹⁶. This does not mean that before these subjects did not exist, rather discourse provides us with ways in which we can speak of these subject positions and those who fulfill them. Stuart Hall (1996) elucidates this by noting that Foucault

undertakes a radical historicization of the category of the subject. The subject is produced ‘as an effect’ through and within discourse, within specific discursive formations, and has no existence, and certainly no transcendental continuity or identity from one subject position to another...discourses construct subject positions through their rules of formation and ‘modalities of enunciation’” (Hall 1996: 10).

Therefore, any attempt at Foucauldian forms of discourse analysis must look beyond traditional forms of text and language to explore the ways in which discourses produce subjects and how these subjects are governed through these discursively constituted *subjectivities*. Given these assumptions, we are no longer examining discourse as a static representation of language but as dynamic, active, and constitutive. We examine the ways in which discourses coalesce to constitute subjects that are then in turn governed through discourse as well.

The concept of a *discursive formation* is not an easy idea to pin down in Foucauldian scholarship. While at times discursive formations may coalesce around the boundaries of a scientific discipline, this is not always the case. Broadly speaking, discursive formations can be thought of as boxes, in that they set the boundaries for what can and cannot be said about objects and subjects. These elements do not have to come

¹¹⁶ Likewise, mediated evangelist discourses about salvation and apocalyptic prophecy are active in the production of a *responsible saved Christian citizen* which I refer to as the *responsible evangelical subject*. This subjectivity will be discussed at length later in this chapter and throughout the analysis chapters (see Chapters 7 through 10) of this dissertation.

from the same time (or place) or say the same things, but rather their common ground is drawn from their articulation of a discursive object that in turn constitutes emergent ideas about related *subjects*. These ideas about what a subject may look like, think about, or do through action are referred to as *subjectivities*. No one type of discourse or discipline creates a discursive formation on its own; rather, the discursive formation is an intersection of a historical trajectory that is too big for most scholars to ever explore in its entirety¹¹⁷. Therefore, a Foucauldian understanding of discursive formations is about articulating unity and the ‘rules’ for the constitution of subjects and objects, without necessarily expressing continuity (sometimes referred to as coherence). For the purposes of this dissertation, I will briefly look to Foucault to help articulate the relations and regulations that he addresses in conceptualizing discursive formations.

As noted earlier, discursive formations are characterized by unity but not necessarily continuity or coherence. As Foucault argues,

the unity of discourses on madness would not be based upon the existence of the object of ‘madness’, or the constitution of a single horizon of objectivity; it would be the interplay of the rules that make possible the appearance of objects during a given period of time...and the interplay of rules that define the transformations of these different objects (1972:32-33).

Therefore, oppositional or conflicting discourses can exist within a discursive formation while the discursive formation is still characterized by heterogeneity around a certain discursive object. For instance, the discursive formation surrounding *sociology* may find unity in expressions of what constitutes *the social* but Marxist and Durkheimian theory can serve as examples of contradictory discourses held within the same discursive formation. Therefore, while discursive formations constitute a singular object, the ways in which this

¹¹⁷ See Said’s (1978) discussion of method in the introduction to *Orientalism* for a conversation about the practical necessities involved with examining parts of broader discursive formations.

object is constituted through the contained discursive statements can vary. The *regularity* or *unity* that Foucault speaks of does not come from ideas about the object or its material existence; it comes from the boundaries and regulations that allow for its formation. When one can identify regularity amongst a set of discursive statements, objects, concepts or themes, we are dealing with what Foucault identifies as a discursive formation. He argues that “when it is possible, in a group of statements, to register and describe *one* referential, *one* type of enunciative divergence, *one* theoretical network, *one* field of strategic possibilities, then one can be sure that they belong to what can be called a discursive formation” (Foucault 1998:321). In other words, we can identify a discursive formation when we find a *system of dispersion* where objects, modes of statements and concepts are subjected to *rules of formation* which are roughly equivalent to “conditions of existence (but also of coexistence, maintenance, modification, and disappearance...” (Foucault 1972:37-38). Discursive formations are systems that govern a set of statements (discourse) that make possible the formation of objects, subjectivities, concepts, and possibilities (Foucault 1972:116). Therefore, discursive formations represent the convergence of regularity surrounding an object, such as *madness* and draw the boundaries by which discursive practices can constitute subjectivities, such as the *mad person*. Likewise, discursive formations that represent the convergence of regularity surrounding *salvation* constitute subjectivities of the *saved person*¹¹⁸.

This kind of broad thinking about the field of discursive possibility inherent in any given object or subject of analysis makes Foucault’s methodologies appealing in many ways. As such, it has greatly influenced my analysis of mediated evangelist discourses. By

¹¹⁸ As noted, the ways in which these take shape in relation to mediated evangelism will be discussed later in this chapter and at length throughout the remainder of the dissertation.

focusing less on the linguistic structure of text and more so on how discourses are active in the construction of “truth” (McHoul and Grace 1997, Hook 2001, Carrette 2000), “Foucault’s conception of discourse is situated far more closely with knowledge, materiality and power than it is to language” (Hook 2001:542). Under these conditions, discourse encompasses more than just written text or spoken words; it involves all discursive elements of a modal statement and can be found in a variety of mediums (Carrette 2000:11). Furthermore, “Foucault’s conceptualization of discourse indispensably requires the role of historical contextualization” (Hook 2001:542). This understanding of discourse analysis allows us to see the forest beyond the trees and overcomes the linguistic limitations of more basic forms of discourse analysis. By interrogating discursive formations, we can push beyond content and text to expose the conditions and limits of knowledge construction to avoid privileging linguistic structure as the only possible or important object of analysis for discourse analysts.

Foucauldian methodology stands apart from many other qualitative methods in that they do not focus intently on the experience of the subject¹¹⁹, content, and linguistic structure of discourse (Silverman 1993, Hook 2001). Foucault does not seek to describe subject experience¹²⁰, but instead unearths the structural conditions of knowledge and truth, and the conditions that allow for the emergence of subjectivities – ideas about what a subject may look like, think about, or do through action. This allows us to make apparent

¹¹⁹ Ethnography, participant observation and intensive interviewing are the usual suspects for qualitative methodology classes. These methods focus on first hand interaction with research subjects (Marcus 1998, Scott 1991) and use subject experience as ‘evidence’ for interpretive findings and the construction of theory (Scott 1991).

¹²⁰ Foucault was not uninterested in the subject. Genealogy in particular is very much focused on how subjects are constituted through discourse while addressing relations of power. Therefore, Foucault’s methodologies allow us to explore the discursive constitution of subjects, but not the perspectives and everyday experiences of the actual subjects that other qualitative methods seek to examine.

the ways in which discourses also work to govern the subjectivities that emerge through these formations. By problematizing western modernity and its privilege of ‘reason’ (King 2001), Foucault’s methodologies are also appealing because of their fundamental concern with the idea of truth and the centralization of discursive statements¹²¹ over language symbols. This attention to conditions of knowledge and contextualization enables me to locate modern evangelical discourses within their broader social contexts while investigating discourses across text and medium in a holistic manner. Specifically, by allowing for an interrogation of the underlying forms of knowledge made apparent in a given discourse, Foucauldian methodologies allow for a greater understanding of evangelical ‘truths’ while exposing the prevailing discursive constitutions of evangelical subjectivities. Most importantly, Foucault’s work shows us how certain forms of knowledge becomes accepted as ‘truth’ and allows us to further understand and explore truth as socially and politically constructed (Potter 1996, Ahmed 2003, Beverley 2005), structurally influenced (Foucault 1972, 1973, 1994), temporally delimited (Stromquist 2000) and highly influential to how we do discourse analysis.

Through a Foucauldian lens, the study of discourse allows us to make apparent the conditions of knowledge that influence how we see ourselves, the limits of how we can understand the world around us, and how we are governed and govern ourselves through discourse. Before we can more fully understand what this means for my project, I need to further explore more specific critiques and conceptualizations of both *discourse* and *text* by focusing on how “the visual” and image influence our conceptual understandings of

¹²¹ I should note here that Foucauldian forms of discourse analysis (also known as post-structural discourse analysis) do not seek to ‘attain truth’ as their goal. The goal here is to show how “certain discourses operate as truthful” (Hook 2001) and to expose how these truths come to be accepted and legitimated.

both text and discourse in the data selected for this research. Once conceptual definitions are addressed, the remaining sections of this chapter explore the adaptation of Foucault's explicated methodologies of *archaeology* and *genealogy*, the epistemological assumptions of employing a Foucauldian inspired discourse analysis of mediated evangelical discourses, and conclude by offering a practical assessment of reading mediated evangelist discourses as data.

Text and Discourse

It is undeniable that text and discourse are related and that often 'texts' indeed form the content and data for any form of discursive analysis. Understanding what constitutes text and discourse for a project of this nature is essential to establishing methodological parameters; however, operationalizing both of these concepts is far from an easy task. Understanding the discursive constitution of evangelical subjectivities and the governing discursive structures of these apocalyptic belief systems requires a deeper and more complex methodology than is allowed for in more basic forms of discourse analysis. Although critical discourse analysis starts to move beyond the surface of text as simply language it also becomes entwined with ideology and focuses somewhat narrowly on exposing defined notions of top-down power structures and inequality. While this is not inherently problematic, it is not the goal for this analysis. Following Foucault, we see a more encompassing understanding of discourse that moves past rigid definitions of text and language to dig beneath the surface of any textual statement, symbol, or image. Through this conceptual lens, discourse becomes much more than words on a page or spoken sentences. By making broader historical and cultural connections across discourses,

Foucault moves away from a strictly linguistic understanding of what discourse *is* and what it *says* and toward an understanding of what discourses can *do*. By examining broader discursive statements that cut across language and text, Foucault allows us to expand our conceptualization of discourse as encompassing everything from words on a page, sub-textual meanings to broader connections between these and the social, political, and historical ties between discourses as parts of the same discursive formation. These emergent formations are limited only by the rules of formation or the conditions of their existence, where discourse can now be seen as active in the production and definition of subjectivities, as opposed to a more passive understanding of discourse as simply language or content.

When we begin to envision discourse as more than strictly language and symbols, we can then entertain a broader notion of what constitutes a *text*. While this may seem like a simplistic concern, it is important for establishing a more practical way in which to study discursive formations and subjectivities. Only by conceptualizing what constitutes a *text*, according to our methodological and theoretical framework, can we begin to understand the importance of a holistic analysis of the objects of analysis involved with this project. While this task may be relatively easy for researchers studying transcribed printed media texts, such as newspapers and books, my task is considerably more challenging because of the fluidity of image and sound that is present in both television and the internet. Understanding what constitutes a text and how to approach these texts in the context of my dataset requires a more comprehensive understanding of how to read texts as holistic multi-mediated objects of analysis. Most basic dictionary variety definitions of *text* typically restrict it to a written or printed record. For instance, an older version of *The Little Oxford*

Dictionary of Current English defines text as “wording of anything written or printed, esp. opp. To translation, commentary, etc.” (Ostler 1969:582), while a more recent online version of the *Oxford English Dictionary* primarily defines text as “the wording of anything written or printed; the structure formed by the words in their order; the very words, phrases, and sentences as written” (2016). These definitions point to a narrowly defined conception of text, restricted to written linguistic forms with an emphasis on some notion of primary originality. The more contemporary online entry goes on to specify other similar definitions before specifically listing “the words of a song” as their 6th definition. While this shift may indicate a more recent expansion of the concept to allow for the acceptance of auditory forms of text, it is still largely reliant on a strictly linguistic based notion of text that cannot account for the connected fluid forms of visual text included in this study. Because my research involves an analysis of mediated evangelist discourses, I need to reconceptualize what a *text* is in order to properly account for the visual and aural stimulation that is prevalent in the image saturated media texts of today. My operational definition therefore needs to account for language, image, and sound, as well as the underlying discursive and symbolic meanings that are embedded in all texts.

Here, we can rely heavily on the field of semiotics and our shared understandings of cultural meaning and symbols to further understand how visual elements can be read as text. Ferdinand de Saussure (1966) exposes semiotic definitions of text that incorporate elements of the visual to form a more comprehensive conceptualization of what a text encompasses. In his analysis of advertisements, Roland Barthes (1977) also argues that text and image work together to constitute a linguistic message that is not always unified. More importantly, Barthes also addresses the messy issue of audience perception by suggesting

that “all images are polysemous; they imply, underlying their signifiers, a ‘floating chain’ of signifieds, the reader able to choose some and ignore others” (1977:38-39). Thus, for Barthes, there are common cultural understandings of symbols and signifiers, but determining meaning to any degree of preciseness is an elusive task when we consider the variety of meanings and perceptions taken up by an individual reader of text and image. While the image is saturated by cultural code and systems of meaning, text helps *anchor* the image; “text *directs* the reader through the signifieds of the image” (Barthes 1977:40), thus narrowing down the field of possible interpretation. Therefore, a text encompasses both image and traditional forms of written or spoken text that work together to convey signified meaning to the reader. More recently, Charles A. Hill and Marguerite Helmers (2004) move another step forward by embracing image as a form of text instead of something separate from text – they argue that these “visual and verbal modes of communication work together” (2004:21). Following Barthes (1967, 1977), Hill and Helmers (2004) also illuminate the role of the receiver/viewer by arguing that we *read* images much in the same way that we read written text. From this perspective, readers become actively engaged in determining meaning based on cultural codes and signifiers. Images *as* text have their own ways of conveying meaning with no clear line of demarcation being drawn between *visual* and *verbal* texts (Hill & Helmers 2004:18-20). Therefore, the text becomes a complete package; image and words work together to form a holistic textual signified meaning.

Also moving beyond a basic understanding of text as both spoken and written language, Fairclough (1995) suggests that texts are both functional and representational as well as becoming increasingly visual in contemporary society. Fairclough, a proponent of

critical discourse analysis, argues that “the value of such a view of texts is that it makes it easier to connect the analysis of language with fundamental concerns of social analysis: questions of knowledge, belief and ideology...questions of social relationships and power, and questions of identity” (1995:17). Given that textual images are now thoroughly embedded within the mass media landscape, attention must be paid to the ways in which images convey textual meaning that is wrapped up in cultural codes of meaning. While symbolic cultural meanings and received perceptions can at times be contradictory or out of sync in various ways, this treatment of *image as text* is a more comprehensive model for this project’s needs. Starting from this point allows for a reading of mediated evangelist texts as interdependent and holistic packages of image, written text, and sound where all elements work together to convey meaning and help make apparent underlying discursive formations.

Of course, this is far from an easy task for discourse analysts, given that text is not simply produced, but is also actively consumed by the reader – whether written, visual, aural, or all three. Here we can look to Stuart Hall ([1980] 2010) who fully recognizes the complexity of televisual signs “that are constituted by the combination of two types of discourse, visual and aural” ([1980] 2010:48). He explains that we very seldom see instances “in which signs organized in a discourse signify *only* their ‘literal’ (that is, near-universally consensualized) meaning. In actual discourse most signs will combine both the denotive and the connotative aspects...it is at the connotative *level* of the sign that situational ideologies alter and transform signification” (Hall [1980] 2010:49)¹²². Thus,

¹²² Hall articulates the defined distinction between denotation and connotation earlier in this piece. For Hall, “the term ‘denotation’ is widely equated with the literal meaning of a sign: because this literal meaning is almost universally recognized, especially when visual discourse is being employed, ‘denotation’ has often been confused with a literal transcription of ‘reality’ in language – and thus with a ‘natural sign’, one

text and discourse are not simply neutral reflections of a material reality that achieve the same effect wherever they are received: “Hall argues that media texts are ‘polysemic’ – they can have multiple meanings in different social and cultural contexts – and that there is no necessary connection between the encoded meaning intended by the producer and the decoded meaning ultimately arrived at by the receiver” (Greer 2010:44). Likewise, media texts are not neutral conveyers of unshaped information. For Hall, “reality exists outside language, but is constantly mediated by and through language and what we know and say has to be produced in and through discourse. Discursive ‘knowledge’ is the product not of the transparent representation of the ‘real’ in language but of the articulation of language on real relations and conditions” ([1980] 2010:48). Therefore, for Hall, not only are discourses active but so too are the receivers/audiences in the defining of the shared social meaning derived through visual and aural text and discourse. Like Foucault, Hall sees discourse as active in defining limits and conditions for the possible ways in which we can constitute our social worlds.

Through this project I am aligning myself with scholars who argue against rigid definitions of what constitutes a *text* and aim to explore the “potential dialogic between images and words” (Hill & Helmers 2004:1-2). As interdisciplinary scholars, we need to better establish new conventions for the analysis of text that do not privilege the recorded word and feed into a historical ‘distrust’ of images in Western culture, where “images have often been placed in a secondary and subordinate relationship to written and verbal texts” (Hill & Helmers 2004:1-2). Exposing this deficit, communications scholars have now

produced without the intervention of a code. ‘Connotation’, on the other hand, is employed simply to refer to less fixed and therefore more conventionalized and changeable, associative meanings, which vary from instance to instance and therefore must depend on the intervention of codes” ([1980] 2010: 49).

established that image and language work together in holistic and interconnected ways that vary by medium and serve as a comprehensive form of text to be read and understood by the receiver (Deacon et al. 1999, Fairclough 1995, Hill & Helmers 2004). By taking up David Morgan's (2005) challenge to carve out space for visual evidence in our work, we can better understand how images contribute to and are shaped by situated knowledges; we can move beyond the content of the image itself to understand the social contexts through which it emerges¹²³. This more comprehensive conceptualization of text allows for a discursive analysis of mediated evangelist products that examines linguistic, visual, aural and symbolic elements of text as a whole.

By working from this foundational idea of text as words, sound, images, and discourse working together, we get closer to being able to conceptualize the broader discursive statements that Foucault is concerned with. This is especially important for my project given the prevalence of image-conveyed discursive meaning that is present throughout mediated evangelical programming. Given that both television and the internet rely heavily on visual cues that are laden with cultural meaning, more basic forms of linguistic analysis are not always capable of capturing a full analysis here. More importantly, the real-time interaction and continuous evolution of web 2.0¹²⁴ provides a

¹²³ Morgan's (2005) work on visual culture, visual practice, and *the scared gaze* is well-suited to broadening our understanding of the visual as an important site of analysis; one that is fully integrated into text, discourse, and social practice. For Morgan (2005), "*sacred gaze* is a term that designates the particular configurations of ideas, attitudes, and customs that informs a religious act of seeing as it occurs within a given cultural and historical setting. A scared gaze is the manner in which a way of seeing invests an image, a viewer, or an act of viewing with spiritual significance. The study of religious visual culture is therefore the study of images, but also the practices and habits that rely on images as well as the attitudes and preconceptions that inform vision as a cultural act" (2005:3). This approach to understanding the role of the visual in religious expression establishes visual networks as a "social act of looking." See Morgan (2005) for further discussion of the sacred gaze and the integration of images throughout religious visual culture.

¹²⁴ Web 2.0 is the coined term (typically attributed to Dale Dougherty of O'Reilly Media) for the evolutionary internet software platforms that have deeply influenced the ways in which we use the internet (see O'Reilly 2005). Although there is disagreement over exactly what constitutes 'web 2.0', generally web

much more fluid and active dimension to our understanding of text and discourse; thus, opening up these terms to even broader conceptual scrutiny. By exploring all components of discourse (written, visual, and aural) as a holistic textual package, a more nuanced understanding of broader discursive statements in mediated religious programming is possible.

The Tricky Matter of Truth(s)

Broadening the definitions of both text and discourse lays the groundwork for a discussion of the epistemological assumptions underlying Foucauldian methodologies, and allows for a more dynamic understanding of knowledge construction through active discursive formations. Thus far, my academic interests and research arch have been consistently linked and motivated by an interest in the constitution of knowledge and legitimating practices; however, it was not until my encounters with Foucault that I had the conceptual tools to articulate these concerns. What is common to all modes of knowledge is a capacity to claim some kind of truth and, in turn, legitimate this truth through various means of social practice. These legitimations are diverse. While the authority of ‘truths’ may rest on ‘divine’ inspiration, experiential knowledge, or ‘sound’ scientific fact, a commonality exists in the understanding that all knowledge claims are consistently limited by the conditions of the discursive formations through which they emerge. Therefore, any discussion of epistemology necessarily involves an exploration of how to understand the social construction of truth claims. This is where Foucault provides us with a conceptual

2.0 covers the more interactive spaces online where users control content, publish material and partake in real time interactions. These are spaces where users can actively create information online as opposed to simply receiving information. Wikipedia (2016), Facebook (2016), and YouTube (2016) are prime examples of the kinds of sites indicative of early web 2.0.

toolkit for understanding the limits of truth and knowledge. The following section takes up the epistemological issues involved with conducting this analysis of mediated evangelical discourses.

As noted, many shallow models of discourse analysis emerge from largely quantitative understandings of content analysis where basic instances of language are counted and categorized; where truth claims are unquestioned and subsequently valued as absolute and factual. It is evident by now that my project requires a more complex qualitative methodology to expose the various layers of discourse that take shape through and help to shape mediated evangelist programs. While qualitative research has certainly adapted to academic demands for increased rigor and reliability, it still postulates some fundamentally different epistemological assumptions than quantitative forms of analysis. It is these epistemologies that are more interesting, and perhaps more important, than even the methods themselves (Alvesson and Sköldbberg 2000:4). Through this project, I reject positivist assumptions that embrace quantification and the scientific method as the only means of ‘discovering’ an essential ‘truth’ that is just out there, waiting for us to stumble upon it. In line with Foucault, I am interested in the deconstruction of the conditions by which knowledges come to be understood as truths in a given temporal period and this project explores the social, cultural, and political discursive contexts that help shape any religious discourse.

The turn to qualitative research has been generally motivated by concerns with the shallowness of positivist, quantitative social science, but has not yet completely shed the tendency to privilege measures of generalizability, reliability, and ‘rigour’ as benchmarks of successful research. Qualitative researchers seek to understand underlying meanings and

contexts while recognizing the inherent values or perspectives that each of us bring to our research. Under this model of academic inquiry, truth becomes a much more complex, and at times elusive, concept as we come to dismiss essentialist notions of absolute truth and instead recognize truth as a social construct that is entangled with perspective, context, and other conditions of knowledge. From this vantage point, we can accept the possibility of multiple truths. While one could get lost for hours in a debate over realism and social constructivism, I am much more concerned with exploring our sociocultural notions of what constitutes ‘true knowledge’ and specifically, how American mediated evangelists construct truth based on an apocalyptic belief system that forms a governing structure for evangelical subjects. In other words, I am not interested in separating truth from fiction in evangelical discourses. Rather, my goal is to understand how evangelical discourses shape their truths, knowledges, and subjectivities in meaningful ways.

Because this dissertation explores these conditions and limits of knowledge construction, a secondary interest lies in how clashes between evangelical and modernist discourses result in an overarching clash of ontologies where there are schisms in secular and evangelical understandings of what constitutes truth. Here is where I find Foucault particularly useful in that he provides a theoretical and methodological framework for understanding how various epochs come to define knowledges as true and valid, thus providing the basis for understanding a clash of this sort and the simultaneous intersections of religious, political and modernist discourses. By briefly visiting Foucault’s methodological expressions of *Archaeology* and *Genealogy*, I hope to clarify some of the inherent epistemological assumptions regarding the nature of truth. Both archaeology and genealogy centralize the methodological importance of discourse, thus offering a good fit

for my project. Because they both offer a critique of the “foundational assumptions of Western modernity” (Scheurich and McKenzie 2005:851), they enable a theoretical methodology for exploring a Foucauldian perspective that accepts the concept of truth as socially, historically, and discursively dependent.

Archaeology is Foucault’s first articulated expression of methodology. Archaeology explores how objects of knowledge are constituted in ways that ‘experts’ can speak of them. It challenges the researcher to unearth or ‘excavate’ the different layers of discourse to look at how these constitute what becomes accepted as truth. Foucault’s archaeological method employs a variety of complex concepts, with *savoir* and *des connaissances* being the most important. Foucault addresses these two concepts in a discussion of archaeology:

By ‘archaeology, I would like to designate not exactly a discipline but a domain of research, which would be the following: in a society, different bodies of learning, philosophical ideas, everyday opinions, but also institutions, commercial practices and police activities, mores – all refer to a certain implicit knowledge [*savoir*] special to this society. This knowledge is profoundly different from the [formal] bodies of learning [*des connaissances*] that one can find in scientific books, philosophical theories, and religious justifications, but it [*savoir*] is what makes possible at a given moment the appearance of a theory, an opinion, a practice (1998:261).

More simply, *des connaissances* refers to the formal bodies of knowledge such as physics, medicine, or biology, while *savoir* refers to an underlying, implicit knowledge specific to a society, which may consist of both formal knowledge as well as a “less rational array of practices, policies, procedures, institutions, politics, everyday life, and so on” (Scheurich and McKenzie 2005:847). Thus, *savoir* “refers to the discursive conditions that are necessary for the development of *connaissance*” (Gutting 1989:251). For instance, I would argue that Enlightenment ideals of rationality and objectivity, and the rejection of divine

explanations are examples of *savoir* that helped make the emergence of sociology possible, as a form of *connaissance*. It is these underlying forms of knowledge (*savoir*) that are made apparent through a given discourse that Foucault finds most satisfying when examining the truths that come to dominate in a given culture or historical timeframe. Therefore, archaeology is focused on the study of the conditions of possibility for the emergence of formal knowledge; thus, archaeology is the study of *savoir*.

The strength of archaeology lies in its capacity to reveal relations between discursive formations and its ability to understand contemporary discourses within their broader historical and cultural contexts. Methodologically, archaeology provides a broad scope and complex model for discourse analysis, thus alleviating critiques that paint all forms of textual analysis as nothing more than a close, descriptive reading of text (Hook 2001:526) with little analytical power. Because Foucauldian method and theory are heavily interdependent, archaeology also provides a more comprehensive understanding of Foucauldian theoretical frameworks. By designing a study that interlaces Foucauldian theory and method together, I can better understand his conceptual definitions of discourse and avoid the pitfalls of studies that employ ‘cherry picked’ Foucauldian concepts alongside more shallow models of discourse analysis (Scheurich and McKenzie 2005:849).

Although archaeology is a powerful methodological tool, it does little to tell us of the subjectivities that I am interested in. A second Foucauldian methodology addresses these issues. Genealogy, at its most basic, explores the exposed subjugated knowledges of an archaeological analysis (the *savior*) and examines intersections of power and knowledge to look at how subjects are governed through discursively constituted ‘subjectivities’¹²⁵

¹²⁵ For example, contemporary Christian discourses constitute the ‘ethical Christian subject’ as a true believer that maintains a personal relationship with Jesus Christ and prescribes to religiously determined roles in

(Scheurich and McKenzie 2005). Thus, genealogy brings in relations of power by exploring programs and strategies of government. As such, this methodology allows us to interrogate discourse to make apparent these underlying rationales of government and differs most substantively from archaeology in its capacity to illuminate and explore subjectivities.

While some Foucauldian scholars believe genealogy to be the superior methodological successor to archaeology (Scheurich and McKenzie 2005:849), I am not inclined to make these categorical claims. David Howarth (2002) illuminates this alleged superiority by arguing that while archaeology “does provide a useful set of theoretical and methodological tools for the analysis and critique of concrete ideologies, it should not be taken as a free-standing approach. Instead, it needs to be supplemented by a genealogical approach to discursive practices...” (2002:132). Alongside Scheurich and McKenzie (2005), I disagree with Howarth (2002); Foucault did not simply abandon archaeology because it was not an effective methodological tool, nor is genealogy a ‘new and improved’ version of archaeology (Scheurich and McKenzie 2005:849). Foucault himself argues in later publications that one is not superior to the other, they simply answer different sorts of questions:

archaeology would be the appropriate methodology of this analysis of local discursivities, and genealogy would be the tactics whereby, on the basis of the descriptions of these local discursivities, the subjugated knowledges which were thus released would come into play (Foucault 1980:85)

Here Foucault emphasizes a point integral to social science research: that one’s choice of methodology is dependent on one’s sociological puzzle and research goal.

everyday life. According to Foucault, this ‘subjectivity’ is of course wrapped up in relations of power and knowledge and subject is governed in various ways through these relations (Scheurich and McKenzie 2005).

While both archaeology and genealogy have relevance for this project, I wish to push the boundaries a bit further by exploring the potential for multiple or fractured subjectivities and the discursive tensions that exist throughout contemporary mediated evangelist discourses. Archaeology and genealogy provide an excellent starting point for this qualitative discursive analysis. Genealogy, in particular, provides a strong foundation for understanding the discursive constitution of evangelical subjectivities because it explores how discourses are productive (Kendall and Wickham 1999) in the construction of subject positions. While we can do a lot with these methodologies, we also have to be careful of the ways in which subjectivities can be adopted, resisted, and mobilized as identities. As Hall (1996) notes, idealized subject positions are increasingly tied to how individuals construct and describe identity. He also contends here that discursive analyses (of any variety) have little power to understand how governed populations actually embrace or reject these identities. In other words, while archaeology and genealogy may illuminate emergent forms of discursively constituted subjectivities, they have little power to assess the ways in which people conform or resist these subject positions. One of the most well cited critiques of the governmentality field has been the inability of this Foucauldian inspired framework to deal with these so-called *messy actualities* of governance and social relations (O'Malley, Weir & Shearing 1997). We do not see much attention paid to the ways in which multiple or fractured subjectivities may coexist through discursive formations. This is important for understanding the complexities of governance in this research. As Foucault argues, "discourses are tactical elements or blocks operating in the field of force relations; there can exist different and even contradictory discourses within the same strategy" (1978:102). While the limits of a temporally and pragmatically

defined dissertation prevent me from addressing the first criticism at the individual level, I am very much interested in the ways in which overlapping discourses splinter and work together to produce discursive tensions that complicate the emergence of singular, multiple, or fractured subjectivities that may be aligned with or in tension with one another. Therefore, while the scope of this project may not directly address the ways in which acceptance and resistance to subjectivities may or may not occur, I can find meaningful ways to talk about how tension and resistance manifest at the discursive level and what potential impact this may have on the governance of evangelical subjects.

Foucault's theoretical and methodological framework for understanding truth as a dynamic concept is also particularly important for this project given the prevalent attention to online and remediated televised data in this analysis. It appears that we are again on the precipice of technological impacts that will shift our understandings of how truth is constructed in our broader mediated culture. According to Young (2007), the internet has undergone a vast transformation, even during its relatively short existence as a new digital medium. It has transformed from a space where we *look up* information to a space where we *create* knowledge. As such, web 2.0 and 'new social media' are further shaping the ways in which we think about truth and the authority of knowledge in our dynamic media landscape (Young 2007). While our modernist cultural fetish with enlightenment rationalities is still a prevalent condition for our privilege of scientifically validated and credentialed knowledge (Thomas 2006), a shift is also occurring through the collective generation of knowledge online as evidenced through the ease of user-generated publication or popular online encyclopedias such as Wikipedia that can be edited by anyone with internet access and an email address. In the context of this project, the advent of web

2.0 enables any amateur evangelist the means by which to easily create online sermons through YouTube and other social media channels. This further opens up the field of mediated evangelist discourse exponentially and allows for another possible reshaping of prevailing subjectivities¹²⁶. While this may or may not result in an epochal shift of *episteme*, we can certainly discuss the communal construction of knowledge in cyberspace as a site of resistance to the dominant ways in which ‘truth’ is generated and legitimated in today’s global society. Here, we see another instance of the *messy actualities* of discourse itself.

In short, Foucault gives us a lot to think about through his articulation of both archaeology and genealogy. While purist Foucauldian scholars believe that these methodologies cannot, and should not, be used to study a snapshot of the present, I wish to do just that given the practical requirements of completing a dissertation. By employing Foucauldian concepts of truth, discourse, subjectivity, and discursive formations alongside contemporary governmentality theories¹²⁷, I am content to establish a Foucauldian *inspired* analysis of contemporary religious/political mediated discourses. This has been no means an easy task given the critiques discussed, but through constant attention to unifying theoretical and methodological analysis, I have made every attempt to account for the seamless integration of discourse, text, and image within discursive formations with attention to the original spirit of archaeology and genealogy.

¹²⁶ As noted, during the course of this research project, social media sprung up as an engaging area of promising research. Although this doctoral research does not address social media directly, social media usage is common for a number of prominent televangelists and will likely be taken into consideration for future research projects as another extension of evangelical media packages.

¹²⁷ See Chapter 7: Apocalyptic Prophecy and the Responsibilization of Salvation for an extended discussion of governmentality and its theoretical application to this analysis.

Reading Discourse for Subjectivities

While the practical limits of the dissertation process cannot possibly allow for the full reading of any discursive formation in its entirety, it is my hope that this dataset and grounded subject knowledge can serve as a partial representation of the broader limits of the discursive formation from which these evangelical subjectivities emerge. The mediated evangelical discourses at play in this analysis can be seen as part of a broader discursive formation that constitutes *responsible salvation* as its referential (or object) and exposes an overarching subjectivity of *the saved person* – which I refer to as the *responsible evangelical subject*¹²⁸. There are many possibilities in the study of discursive formations but I have put my own spin on Foucault's methodologies and have immersed myself in this one particular subset of a much larger and more complex discursive formation. While I may not be able to make the large scale and rich claims that Foucault makes about a concept such as *madness*, I can make rich, informed claims about how this particular subset of the discursive formation constitutes the object of *responsible salvation* and subjectivities of *the responsible evangelical subject*¹²⁹. Looking at the ways in which these are rendered visible through apocalyptically informed televangelist discourses of salvation and modern forms of multi-media represents a unique contribution to a variety of scholarly fields, namely sociology, religious studies, and media studies.

This methodology is by no means an easy task, but it is a worthy challenge for establishing the importance of discourse analysis for the advancement of theoretical and

¹²⁸ See Chapter 7: Apocalyptic Prophecy and the Responsibilization of Salvation for an extended discussion of *responsible salvation* and the *responsible evangelical subject*. Chapters 7 through 10 also provide detailed analysis of the ways in which this discursive formation and subjectivity take shape throughout mediated evangelist programming.

¹²⁹ See Chapters 7 through 10 for detailed analysis of *responsible salvation* and the *responsible evangelical subject*.

methodological scholarship. This methodology allows us to more fully understand how evangelical discourses are active in the constitution of truth and subjectivities, while also helping us explore what impact this may or may not have on the ways in which evangelical subjects construct their own political and personal worlds. Unfortunately, there are no handbooks or step-by-step guides for projects of this nature and the qualitative work required by this type of methodology is largely intuitive. While I reject a common tendency to embrace quantitative tenets of scientific method as a means to enhancing the quality and rigour of qualitative methodology, I do recognize the importance of transparency in discussions of research process. While much of the following discussion concerning ‘the results’ of this study comes from total immersion in this data and intuitive understandings of subject material and discursive connections, I will try to illuminate in the following section the so-called ‘how to’ of this analysis of mediated evangelism.

As noted in the previous chapter, this analysis examines a broader selection of data before focusing more intently on a smaller sample for core analysis. This allows for a more in-depth understanding of mediated evangelist discourses while also accounting for the more practical constraints of producing a dissertation (such as lack of unlimited time and resources). Through this analysis of media packages, I have taken on what I have termed, a *three reading model*. The *first reading* of the entire dataset involves a general run through for topical content, while the second and third readings utilize only the smaller, core sample. The *second reading* focuses on the ways in which image and non-verbal cues work in conjunction with the aural or the written text to speak as a cohesive statement. The final *third reading* attempts to look for emergent knowledge claims and the broader discursive statements at play. This is by far the most difficult part of the process and involves the in-

depth knowledge garnered by the first two readings. It is this third stage of analysis where connections become apparent and understanding of the limits and conditions of discursive knowledge start to shine through. This is also the stage where we can piece together subjectivities and understand potential impacts on broader social, political, and religious landscapes. Qualitative latent coding of televised and online data occurs at each stage to highlight conceptual categories, discursive statements, legitimating practices, and topical subject matter. While I have transcribed pieces of this data in a written document, it has been my goal from the beginning to keep these texts holistic, fluid, and as they were intended to be viewed or consumed. The discussions that follow are informed by many hours of immersion in these discursive texts and represent a data-centric and theoretically informed approach to the study of discourse.

Conclusion

The goal of this expanded two-chapter discussion of method and methodology has been to reinforce a qualitative trend that sees discourse as a holistic object of analysis, deserving of our scholarly attention. Contemporary critics of discourse analysis and other studies of text and cultural artefacts may be less common today but are still prevalent in the social and so-called hard sciences. Unfortunately, they tend to work from outdated assumptions about the nature of *text* and *discourse* that neglect the influence that both have in shaping and reproducing social realities, subjectivities, identities, and worldviews. While there are certainly limits to what discourse analysis can do, they are no more problematic than the limitations of any other quantitative, qualitative, or mixed methods approach to the study of our social worlds. Using discourse as my object of analysis, like

Foucault, my objective for this project has always been to explore the “different modes by which, in our culture, human beings are made subjects” (Dreyfus, Rabinow & Foucault 1983:208). By integrating theory and sound methodological design and practice, this chapter has offered up a discussion of discourse analysis that alleviates critiques and pushes the boundaries of what traditional textual analysis *can* and *should* do.

Chapter 5: Deconstructing Evangelicalism in America

Introduction

Although we are starting to see a shift in academic attention, relatively little scholarly work has seriously addressed the contemporary relevance of televangelism since the 1990s. The American mediated evangelists of today are a professional product of a complex historical trajectory that reflects key developments in both media and American religion, as well as the discursive constructions of identity, beliefs, and practices that take shape through their televised and online programming. By briefly exploring the roots of mediated evangelism, we can situate the messages put forth by Robertson, Hagee, and the Van Impes to better understand their roles in contemporary American evangelism. The next two chapters serve as a brief socio-historical exploration of televangelism. This first chapter serves as a deconstruction of what is meant by the ‘evangelical’ label and what types of groups are largely subsumed under this umbrella term in North America¹³⁰. The latter sections of this chapter also examine several important trends that are reshaping evangelical populations in the United States, including the restructuring of American religion, fundamentalism, megachurches, and demographic realities. The following chapter traces the mediated facets of televangelism’s history by locating its origins in revival, radio, television, and early communication policies. This chapter also illuminates popular

¹³⁰ I fully accept that exhaustively defining what beliefs, values, and practices constitute evangelicalism and evangelical identity are well debated across several scholarly disciplines and amongst religious thinkers. This chapter will briefly address contemporary usage of the term ‘evangelical’ in North America. For more comprehensive discussions of the history of evangelicalism, please refer to both volumes of Brint & Reith Schroedel (2009), Kyle (2006), Reimer (2003), Boyer (1992), and Bebbington (1989). For more comprehensive debates over the defining characteristics of evangelicalism more broadly, and the diversity of evangelical groups within North America, see Bean (2014), Smidt (2013), Wellman (2008), Ammerman (2006, 1987), Ingersoll (2009, 2003), Beaman (1999), Manning (1999), Dayton & Johnston (1991), and Warner (1988), to name a few.

thematic trends in evangelist content and genre before briefly exploring the ways in which Robertson, Hagee, and Van Impe are situated within the field.

Defining Evangelicalism

As suggested earlier, the notion of an American culture war still pits a religious right, led by politically active Christian evangelicals, and ‘liberal secular humanists’ (see Hunter 1991, Halton 2007, Hedges 2007) against one another in religious and other public discourses. Regardless of how one envisions a culture war, we do know that the political, social, and academic mainstream are now paying attention to the potential influence of evangelical groups in American politics, and broader society. We no longer dismiss evangelicals and their governing belief systems as a fringe faith, backwards, marginal, or irrelevant, and we certainly cannot ignore the ambitious political engagement and cultural influence of these faith groups. Their potential for political influence is undeniable in contemporary American politics where religion is a key issue in any electoral campaign. The prominent involvement of evangelicals in mainstream media and popular culture serves as further legitimation for their cultural significance and faith based forays into the political arena. In order to explore the ways in which evangelicals participate in the public and political spheres through both secular and faith-centered media, a better understanding of what is meant by the term ‘evangelical’ is necessary.

According to Pew’s most recent *Religious Landscape Study*, evangelical Protestants make up the most populated religious demographic in the United States, at 25.4% of the population (Pew Research Center 2014). While the term ‘evangelism’ can be widely applied to all generic forms of Protestant proselytizing (Harding 2000:xvi), the label

is more complex when applied to contemporary American evangelicals and mediated evangelists. Broadly speaking, evangelicalism refers to a diverse collection of Protestant groups who espouse conservative Christian beliefs and values (Walton 2011). Despite Pew's best efforts at determining the evangelical population, Steven Brint and Seth Abrutyn (2010) note that determining the adult evangelical population in the United States is complicated and can vary greatly depending on definition and survey design. While self-identification models estimate the population at fewer than twenty percent, definitions drawn from core belief identification or denominational affiliation estimate the adult evangelical population between twenty-five to thirty percent of the American population (Brint and Abrutyn 2010:334). This variation and the broader debates referenced earlier show us that contemporary usage of the evangelical label is far from consistent. While evangelical groupings cluster around a variety of key tenets, they also diverge greatly around certain values and political issues, with notable divisions along age, gender, race, and socio-economic lines. Furthermore, we also see an increasingly prevalent, but contested, conflation between evangelicalism and fundamentalism. The televangelists considered in this dissertation typically correspond to a category of 'born-again' Christian evangelicals. They espouse similar doctrinal beliefs regarding conversion and biblical centrality, particularly with regard to apocalyptic end time prophecy and the inerrancy of literal biblical text. The remainder of this chapter examines these key histories, tenets, values, and belief systems as related to evangelicals in North America.

Exploring American Religion from above the 49th Parallel

In exploring the commonly held tenets of evangelical subcultures, I have examined both American and Canadian sources in order to further assess the relevance of my project for the Canadian evangelical landscape. I cannot begin to articulate the complexity of Canada's relationship with the United States in the space allocated for this dissertation; however, attention should be briefly given to the reality of studying largely American evangelists and their cultural products through my eyes as a distinctly Canadian scholar. Early critiques of this dissertation questioned the relevance of an entirely American sample for a largely Canadian academic audience; however, as I have already established, the fluidity of geographic borders has shifted in the landscape of mediated religion. I make no claims to the generalization of my findings to wider Canadian or American populations – general or evangelical. This dissertation is foremost concerned with the discursive formations of evangelical subjectivities and convergent discourses. In this respect, it knows no geo-political boundaries. While I recognize that Canada and the United States exhibit distinctive cultural and religious landscapes, it is the similarities, not the differences that are most relevant for this research. While neither group should be assumed to be monolithic in characteristics, beliefs, and values, according to Sam Reimer (2003) and David Haskell (2009), Canadian and American evangelicals share more in common with their transnational counterparts than they may with others sharing their nationality. It is these similarities that speak to a broader justification for this analysis of American evangelists. By examining the common and divergent characteristics amongst North American

evangelicals, we can better understand the theological and cultural background of the televangelists considered in this research¹³¹.

As noted, pinning down an exact definition of evangelicalism can be challenging. As Robert Johnston (1991) succinctly suggests, “there is [an evangelical] whole, even if sometimes it is difficult to define precisely” (1991:257). One of the main purposes for categorizing populations as evangelicals is to distinguish between two noteworthy traditions in American Protestantism – evangelicals and mainline Protestants. While both traditions share many similarities, Brint and Abrutyn (2010) highlight the key differences between the two traditions:

the mainline traditions are more likely to be critical of selfishness and understand religious duty as keeping the well-being of others in mind. They see the Bible as containing important truths, as well as ancient myths and legends, and rarely consider the Bible to be the literal word of God. By contrast, most evangelicals are less interested in helping the needy and more interested in saving souls. Their view of social reform focuses on the correction of individual moral failings. Moreover, evangelical denominations attribute religious authority to the Bible alone and accept it as the literal word of God (2010:333)¹³².

While identifying divergences is important, evangelicals cannot be fully understood based solely on elementary contrasts with more mainline Protestant groups. According to Lyman Kellstedt and Corwin Smidt (1991), despite scholarly debate over precise definitions, “there is general agreement that evangelicals share a commitment to the authority of the

¹³¹ While Canada is spatially and culturally proximate to the United States, it should be noted that it is certainly not the only country that has experienced the influx of American dominated televangelist program – this is truly a global phenomenon. See Thomas and Lee (2012) for a comprehensive assessment of the ways in which American evangelism has influenced a whole host of evolving local and global evangelist phenomena around the world.

¹³² Some may argue that Brint and Abrutyn (2010) do not offer a generous definition of evangelicals here, but I use their distinction to note a tradition of defining evangelicals in opposition to mainline Protestantism, a tendency that is still popular in the academic literature. They (like myself) are not claiming that evangelicals are individually less generous in their charitable giving, but rather that evangelicals often express opposition to structural reform as a means of alleviating poverty through social benefits programs. These claims have also been exemplified in Bean’s (2014) research and will be discussed in relation to my data throughout the analysis chapters of this dissertation.

Bible, adherence to salvation through faith in Jesus Christ, and a passion for evangelism and missions” (1991:260). In addition to these core beliefs, they also follow James Davison Hunter (1983:6) in noting that commonalities also exist in group affiliation. Accordingly, five major religious/theological traditions can be identified: Baptist, Holiness-Pentecostal, Anabaptist, Reformed-Confessional, and “the Independent-Fundamentalist tradition with its non-denominational ecclesiology and its dispensational, premillennialist eschatology” (Kellstedt and Smidt 1991:260). Brint and Abrutyn (2010) echo this praise for the inclusion of denominational identification in the defining of evangelical groups. They argue that the lack of conceptual clarity for social scientists and the lack of reliable survey data regarding core beliefs present challenges for operationalization. In their line of thinking, considerable overlap exists between those who internalize core evangelical beliefs and those who affiliate with an evangelical denomination or tradition. They state, “members of evangelical denominations tend to be theologically conservative; they typically read the Bible literally; and emphasize the capacity of individuals to change their lives on the basis of accepting Jesus Christ as their personal savior” (Brint and Abrutyn 2010:334). While denominational affiliations may be easier to identify for the purposes of operationalization in quantitative analysis, they do not always account for the core beliefs already identified. Given that the televangelists considered in this research reach across evangelical denominations, a more in-depth understanding of core evangelical beliefs is more relevant to this dissertation.

Sam Reiner’s (2003) work on American and Canadian evangelical identities, beliefs, moral boundaries, and social attitudes sheds light on the complexities of conceptualizing a holistic definition for contemporary evangelicalism. Reimer (2003)

seeks to understand the core beliefs and practices that exemplify what it means to be an evangelical, regardless of nationality or regional identity. Despite Reimer's acknowledgment of a slight level of variance on 'peripheral issues' for Canadian and American evangelicals¹³³ (2003:38), he strongly argues that evangelicals, of either nationality, are unlikely to significantly depart from the 'key tenets' of evangelical faith. According to Reimer, *Active* or *Core evangelicals* are those who "are actively involved in the evangelical subculture and committed to the basic tenets of evangelicalism" (2003:6). Here, Reimer's work reinforces David Bebbington's (1989) identification of four key tenets of evangelical faith and identity: "*conversionism*, the belief that lives need to be changed [through the rebirth of conversion]; *activism*, the expression of the gospel in effort [through evangelism]; *biblicism*, a particular regard for the [authority of the] Bible; and what may be called *crucicentrism*, a stress on the sacrifice of Christ on the cross" (1989:3), and the centrality of Christ as the ultimate savior. Although Bebbington (1989) and Reimer (2003) are content to settle on these four characteristics, David Haskell's (2009) list of key tenets of evangelical faith includes the importance of a 'high tension eschatology'; in other words, the centrality of belief in apocalypse or some sort of end times scenario as foretold in scripture¹³⁴. Furthermore, it is the presence of these criteria that distinguishes an evangelical from 'mainline' Protestants (and other non-Protestants) where the term 'evangelical' becomes synonymous with 'Christian' as a self-reported marker of religious identity. For most core evangelicals, identity as a 'Christian' and as an 'evangelical' go

¹³³ These minimal differences will be discussed below and largely appear in differing perspectives on political roles and attitudes, the valuation of congruity between a leader's sermons and actions, perceptions of national differences and values concerning tolerance (Reimer 2003:119).

¹³⁴ The inclusion of this fifth characteristic is especially important to this dissertation. See [Chapters 9 and 10](#) for further discussion of the importance of apocalyptic discourse in constituting political evangelical subjectivities.

hand in hand; without the presence of these four characteristics, one is not truly accepted as a Christian, regardless of denomination or self-identified affiliation.

Given the strong levels of commitment to these key tenets of evangelical identity, Reimer concludes “that there exists a transdenominational transnational evangelical subculture in North America” (2003:21). This clear demarcation of subcultural boundaries contributes to the ‘social encapsulation’ (Stark and Bainbridge 1985:60) of many evangelicals where increasing tension with their broader national cultures leads to increasingly insular interactions within evangelical populations (Reimer 2003:53). In some ways, we can see evidence of a distinctive subculture where “those who are active in it maintain a clear sense of identity, a clear understanding of subcultural boundaries, and a strong knowledge of the norms and values associated with it” (2003:21). Furthermore, Reimer (2003) maintains that American and Canadian evangelicals demonstrate minimal significant variance in religiosity, values, orthodoxy, or orthopraxy¹³⁵. While Reimer’s assertions of overt unity may be somewhat overstated, they give us a way to frame the similarities that exist in North American evangelical populations¹³⁶. Therefore, understanding American evangelical culture can also shed light on Canadian evangelicals, given their tendencies to actively resist the ‘outside’ influences of broader non-evangelical cultures by developing their own faith-centered interactions, institutions, and products. While this doctoral research is ultimately a study of American evangelist discourses, the

¹³⁵ Reimer does outline four main areas where minimal differences exist between American and Canadian evangelicals. These include: incongruity, national perceptions, political alignment, and irenicism (2003:119).

¹³⁶ That said, Reimer’s (2003) work does less to address the differences and the complexities of national context. We certainly cannot ignore this context and should recognize that evangelicalism, like any other cultural identity, is not a monolithic category. Canadian and Americans may often share common tenets of faith but they also express unique social histories that influence their religious-cultural identity as evangelicals. See Bean (2014) and Steensland and Wright (2014) for further discussion of notable differences for American and Canadian evangelicals, notably in their political orientations.

close cultural and spatial proximity of the two countries and shared evangelical culture make it clear that the findings have relevance across national boundaries.

In addition to religious identity, Reimer also suggests that the global availability and promotion of American evangelical media products (domestically and abroad) is another possible explanation for this increasing convergence of evangelical cultures in North America. As a result of the global reach of evangelical programming, cinema, music, and the vast array of other faith-based media products produced by this group, evangelical subcultures are now international in scope, where national and regional boundaries may be losing their significance (Reimer 2003:160). Given these conditions, as well as the relative scarcity of practicing Canadian televangelists on our public airwaves today, it can be safely assumed that if a Canadian evangelical is engaging with these programs, it is highly likely that they would be making use of an American media product. Alongside the transnational evangelical subculture, outlined by Reimer (2003), the global reach and convergence of evangelical culture, as well as the American saturation of Canadian television networks, makes an exploration of popular American evangelical media not only warranted, but nearly impossible to avoid in Canada. Therefore, while this my dataset may not specifically examine Canadian produced evangelical programming as a comparison model, it does examine part of the evangelist programming that is widely available to Canadian and global audiences. In this case, discursive formations are unlikely to be constrained by temporal or geographic boundaries, so by exploring American mediated discourses, this dissertation is also relevant to understanding how discursive formations and emergent evangelical subjectivities take shape throughout not just the United States and Canada, but also internationally through global Christian broadcast networks.

Contemporary Evangelical Trends

As part of the ongoing ‘restructuring of America religion’ since the 1960s and 1970s (Wuthnow 1988)¹³⁷, evangelicalism has become the popularized image of Protestantism in the United States. According to Richard Kyle (2006), “currently, evangelicalism may be the most Americanized and dynamic brand of religion in the United States. While its roots can be found in Europe, if evangelicalism were a garment its label would read: ‘Made in America’” (2006:ix). Long gone are the days when evangelical groups disengaged from so-called secular society as a thoroughly marginalized subculture. Before further examining mediated evangelism in the next chapter, a brief discussion of this shift is necessary. To this end, the remaining sections of this chapter briefly explore three relevant trends to help further understand the ways in which evangelical identities are constructed: the relationship between *evangelicalism and fundamentalism*, the relationship between *evangelicalism and megachurches*, and a very brief assessment of *diversity* in evangelical congregations. A better understanding of these contemporary evangelical trends allows for a more thorough analysis of the ways in which evangelical subjectivities are constructed, legitimated, and mobilized through mediated discourses.

Fundamentalism

Common usage of the term ‘evangelicalism’ is often conflated with popular understandings of ‘fundamentalism’ where little attention is paid to defining characteristics

¹³⁷ Wuthnow’s (1988) influential work in this area engaged an entire field concerning the restructuring of religion in America since the 1960s onward. Using a variety of national data sources, Wuthnow was crucial in identifying new trends in the changing American religious landscape, including: a declining significance in denominational affiliation, an increasing intensification of a polarity between liberal and conservative religious groups, and a decline in civil religion and laissez-faire religious ideology.

of either¹³⁸. According to Kellstedt and Smidt, “all fundamentalists are evangelicals, but not all evangelicals are fundamentalists” (1991:260). Therefore, while evangelicals and fundamentalists share a great deal of similarities, there are also notable differences. Today’s diverse array of evangelical identities are the result of a broad spectrum of intersecting religious histories and traditions. As George Marsden (2006) notes, one of these traditions emerges from the American fundamentalists of the 1920s. Marsden (2006) argues that, in many respects, modern evangelicalism is a direct descendent of fundamentalist movements that are grounded in militant anti-modernism. These movements have been heavily influenced by both theological and cultural changes brought forth by modernism in general. Therefore, we see fundamentalism arise as a distinctly modern response to processes of secularization (Ruthven 2004). For these reasons, fundamentalists are often viewed as excessively traditional and reluctant to give up on a dying way of life, resulting in the maintenance of a longstanding cultural stigma amongst broader American society (Ellis 1981, Marsden 2006).

While evangelicals may share elements of these fundamentalist belief systems, notable differences exist in the ways in which these groups interact with the broader (and allegedly more) secularized society. Fundamentalists are more likely to self-identify and form small religious group affiliations instead of large denominational affiliations (Kellstedt and Smidt 1991:260). Fundamentalist groups are also much more likely than evangelicals to lead separatist lifestyles. According to Brint and Abrutyn (2010), “where fundamentalists focused on in-group solidarity in opposition to the broader society, evangelical denominations encourage their congregants to participate fully in the larger

¹³⁸ It should be noted that this discussion pertains to American fundamentalism and evangelicalism. Global instances of each differ in many respects but this discussion is beyond the scope of this dissertation.

society and to bear witness to their religious convictions” (2010:333). In other words, while fundamentalists and evangelicals share in their lament over the moral decay of secular society, their approaches to integration can be starkly different. Fundamentalists withdraw to the margins while now most evangelicals look at tension with secular society as an opportunity to reach the ‘unchurched’ through evangelism and conversion.

Another defining characteristic of fundamentalism and evangelicalism concerns a belief in biblical literalism and prophetic interpretation (Marsden 2006, Kellstedt and Smidt 1991), alongside a fervent skepticism of scholarship and science (Harris 2008). In some respects, fundamentalism also appears to emerge from a grounding in premillennialism, a subset of biblical prophecy interpretation that predicts the second coming of Christ¹³⁹ (Marsden 2006). Kellstedt and Smidt (1991) elaborate this argument:

as a sub-group within evangelicalism, fundamentalists accept biblical authority, salvation through Christ, and a commitment to spreading the faith. They defend these beliefs militantly. Yet, in comparison to other evangelicals, fundamentalists are more likely to interpret the Bible literally and to accept a dispensational, premillennialist eschatology (1991:260).

While belief in biblical inerrancy and skepticism over modern science are often listed as defining characteristics of both fundamentalism and evangelicalism, there is considerable debate over mobilizing these characteristics in definitional frameworks. James Barr (1977) and Harriet A. Harris (2008) both question the weight attributed to all of these characteristics, arguing that while biblical authority is central to defining fundamentalists or evangelicals, the other characteristics are considerably less stable, especially with regard to self-identification. Therefore, our understandings of fundamentalism and evangelicalism can differ considerably as a result. Historical understandings of fundamentalist group

¹³⁹ Biblical prophecy and premillennialism will be discussed at length throughout the remaining chapters of this dissertation.

identities (see Marsden 2006) are constructed differently than those who seek to understand fundamentalism as a lifestyle or way of thinking (see Barr 1977, Harris 2008) where many of these defining characteristics are afforded varying degrees of primacy across these debates.

For the reasons noted above, separating fundamentalism from evangelicalism is somewhat of a futile task, both in theory and in practice. For the purposes of this dissertation, I am content to agree with Kellstedt and Smidt (1991), who argue that “these sketches of evangelicals and fundamentalism, however, are relative to time and place. They do not constitute stable, permanent categories. Rather, they suggest tendencies that are rooted in history and are subject to change” (1991:261). Therefore, fundamentalism and evangelicalism as definitional categories are historically and culturally dependent and exhibit a great degree of overlap. Each of the televangelists considered in this research exhibits characteristics of both. While they are in many ways oppositional to the theological and cultural changes brought about by modernism, they have wholeheartedly embraced other modern changes, most notably modern media technology. They embrace biblical literalism, prophecy belief, and are often skeptical of modern science, yet engage in religious scholarship and encourage interaction with secular society. Understanding the historical treatment of fundamentalism is important because of the shared history with contemporary evangelicalism; however, the limits of categorization do not enhance our understanding of the televangelists considered here, who undoubtedly represent a modern mix of both fundamentalist and evangelical beliefs and practices.

Megachurches

Alongside the restructuring of American religion (Wuthnow 1988), two of the most important trends in American evangelicalism concern the increasing growth and success of the electronic church and megachurches (Kyle 2006). The so-called electronic church has already been addressed as pertinent to discussions of mediated religion and religious community¹⁴⁰ and will play a key role in the analysis of mediated evangelism throughout the dissertation. This section will briefly address the growing trend of megachurches in the United States, as well as their relationship to American evangelicalism and media ministries.

Megachurches have become a growing trend in the United States since the 1970s¹⁴¹ (Ellingson 2007, 2009). As of 2005, over twelve-hundred megachurches populated the American religious landscape, indicating a substantial growth since 1970 where only fifty churches claimed megachurch status¹⁴². According to Stephen Ellingson (2010), “a megachurch is customarily defined as a Protestant church that has at least 2,000 weekly attendees. The majority self-identify as conservative and often combine orthodox evangelical theology with practical, therapeutic religious messages” (2010:247). Like many other televangelist congregations, Hagee’s Cornerstone Church in San Antonio, Texas would easily qualify under this population based conceptualization of ‘megachurch’ with a self-reported membership of twenty-thousand active members (JHM 2016a). Megachurches are not simply large churches with massive congregations though; they

¹⁴⁰ See Chapter 2: *Theorizing Mediated Religion* for further discussion.

¹⁴¹ While megachurches originated in the United States and are predominantly located in North America, they also maintain a presence in other parts of the world, notably South Korea and Southeast Asia (Ellingson 2010).

¹⁴² Slightly more recent estimates from the *Hartford Institute for Religion Research* suggests that the 2005 estimate has grown but they do not know by how much (Thumma et al. 2005). Based on these initial estimates, it is still safe to conclude that megachurches are a notable trend.

extend beyond the spiritual needs of their congregations to offer a full service package of religious and interpersonal services and activities. According to Kyle (2006), megachurches reach beyond the normal activities of sermon services and small prayer groups. They often include a wide variety of programs aimed at sports and physical fitness, music, entertainment, and how-to seminars. Megachurches also offer other specialized services within the walls of their massive, convenient suburban locations. These may include informational kiosks, greeters, bookstores, childcare facilities, valet visitor parking, and cafes or food services reminiscent of your local shopping mall (Ellingson 2007, 2009, 2010, Kyle 2006). No matter what your spiritual or interpersonal want or need may be, it is likely met through the modern American megachurch.

Aside from all the bells and whistles in the lobby, megachurch services have also evolved. Several scholars note that this as the inevitable result of increased consumerism in America (see Ellingson 2007, 2009, 2010, Kyle 2006). Under this model of marketplace religion, the believer takes on the role of religious consumer, seeking out churches that meet their needs. This new model of ‘supply-side spirituality’ (Kyle 2006:226) means that religious organizations have to work for their market-share of believers. Kyle notes that “church leaders did not set out to make religion a commodity in a market economy...they had to market their faith. Denominations that successfully did so grew; while those who failed to do so declined” (Kyle 2006:226). As a result, religion as a consumer product had to be repackaged. Many seminary schools have responded by adding management training to their curriculum, while successful megachurch pastors have been likened to CEOs, commanding a paid staff and overseeing spiritual and interpersonal operations (Kyle 2006:227-228). Worship services have also been repackaged to respond to consumer

demands. For instance, many megachurches practice ‘structured diversity’ (Thumma and Travis 2007:141-142). According to Ellingson (2009), structured diversity “refers to the effort by churches to meet the interests and needs of different sub-populations by offering multiple worship services in different formats or styles, and by providing a wide variety of fellowship groups that appeal to different age groups, lifestyle and interest cohorts” (2009:19). By catering to a variety of populations, megachurches offer a form of ‘entertainment evangelism’, breaking free from traditional and often boring service styles. Mainstream influenced music styles and the use of audio-visual imagery are common during worship services, seeking resonance with a popular culture already familiar to congregants (Ellingson 2009, 2010). All of these responses to declining attendance and denominational affiliation indicate a more dynamic approach for participant organizations where religious ‘seekers’ and their needs are centralized. As such, the success and growth of market driven megachurches appears to be a result of their willingness to adapt and “reinforce the existing religious and cultural inclinations of their constituencies” (Kyle 2006:221).

Examining this trend is relevant to this research because a substantial proportion of megachurches are evangelical congregations similar to those embraced by the televangelists considered in this study. According to Ellingson (2010), “about two-thirds of megachurches are formally affiliated with a denomination and the other third are explicitly non-denominational. Most are affiliated with evangelical and conservative Protestant denominations. Only 11 percent of megachurches are affiliated with one of the mainline denominations...” (2010:249). In a 2005 study, fifty-six percent of megachurches described their theological identity as evangelical and over fifty percent described their

perceived political outlook as conservative (Thumma et.al. 2005:6-7). According to the same study, “all but 5% of megachurches claimed to have some emphasis on evangelism and recruitment activities with 58% reporting it to be a key activity...” (Thumma et.al. 2005:12). This evangelistic approach has likely contributed to the growth and success of megachurches across America, further shifting the balance of Protestant identity toward an evangelical hegemony where decreasing tensions between evangelical groups and broader American culture are shaping new religious norms for Protestantism more broadly.

While the majority of megachurches across America may share an umbrella evangelical identity, notable differences exist in approaches to worship style, use of mass media, architecture, denominational ties, and constituencies (Ellingson 2009, 2010). According to Scott Thumma and Dave Travis (2007), megachurches can be classified as one of four categories based on these differences: *Old Line/Program-based churches*, *Seeker churches*, *Charismatic/Pastor-focused churches*, and *New Wave/Re-envisioned/New Paradigm churches*. Briefly, *Old Line* congregations are older, more formally denominational, offer more traditional services, and are typically found in downtown or urban suburbs. These congregations represent roughly thirty percent of all megachurches while another thirty percent of megachurches can be classified as *Seeker churches* (Ellingson 2009:20). Seeker churches tend to minimize denominational affiliations, offer a wide range of personalized services, and exhibit a strong tendency toward evangelism. Seeker churches “eschew tradition, and intentionally minimize the distance between the outside world and the church by showing how Christianity is relevant to the world of middle class suburbanites” (Ellingson 2009:20). An additional twenty-five percent of megachurches are *Charismatic* in nature, meaning they rely on the charisma of

their senior pastor to ensure the successful growth of their often ethnically diverse congregations (Ellingson 2009:21). Charismatic megachurches are also more likely to house teleministries (Ellingson 2009:21). Lastly, *New Paradigm* churches are the youngest of the four categories and represent a more orthodox approach. While these post-modern congregations embrace more traditional service styles, symbols, and practices, they also embrace new technologies and audio-visual elements in their services while attracting younger constituencies than other megachurches (Ellingson 2009:21).

While *Old Line* and *New Paradigm* congregations are an interesting subset of megachurches in America, *Seeker* and *Charismatic* models are more relevant to this dissertation. For instance, Hagee's own *Cornerstone Church* in San Antonio, Texas represents a convergence of Seeker and Charismatic megachurches. *Cornerstone Church* is formally non-denominational, offers a wide array of religious and interpersonal service options, relies heavily on evangelism, but also sponsors a successful mediated ministry that centralizes the charisma of Hagee as the church's founder and senior pastor. While the categories put forth by Thumma and Travis (2007) can be helpful in framing exploratory discussions of megachurches, when applied to teleministries in practice, much overlap still occurs¹⁴³. While the literature concerning American megachurches is still evolving, it does help to shed light on the dynamic nature of evangelical congregations and their relationships to both religion and mainstream culture.

¹⁴³ Furthermore, it is unclear throughout the literature whether or not 'electronic congregants' (congregants who engage in only mediated services) are considered in the determination of megachurch status. Further studies are necessary to determine the full scope of megachurches in America when electronic and traditional congregations are accounted for.

Demographic Diversity

Although gender and ethnicity are not an overarching object of analysis for this dissertation, a brief look at demographics in contemporary evangelicalism is necessary for situating the televangelists included in this study¹⁴⁴. There has traditionally been a notable absence of gender and race analysis in studies of evangelicalism, fundamentalism, and megachurches; however, this literature has been shifting of late. While there appears to be a recent surge in gender and race research, especially concerning ‘black religion’ in televangelism and megachurches¹⁴⁵, few fully intersectional studies exist¹⁴⁶. The following section briefly addresses various inequalities that have been made apparent through membership and leadership demographics for contemporary evangelical populations.

As Michael O. Emerson and Christian Smith (2000) note, the United States is a racialized society, in that “race matters profoundly for differences in life experiences, life opportunities, and social relationships” (2000:7). Recognizing a traditional neglect of studies concerning the role of religion in racialized divisions and inequalities, Emerson and Smith’s (2000) work represents a noteworthy investigation of the ways in which evangelicals often seek to challenge these divisions but largely still fall short of breaking down barriers. While religion (and by extension, evangelicalism) can serve as a powerful mechanism for social change, it can also serve to deeply reinforce historical divisions and also create new ones. Through their comprehensive study of secondary research, structural assessment of American race relations, a national survey, and face-to-face interviews with

¹⁴⁴ It should be noted that this research does not neglect issues of race, gender, and sexuality. While intersectional analysis is not within the scope of this project, each of these topics will be highlighted when pertinent to the analysis of discursively constituted subjectivities. See Chapter 3: Addressing Method for further discussion of sources that address race, gender, and evangelicalism in more depth.

¹⁴⁵ See Walton (2009), Tucker-Worgs (2011).

¹⁴⁶ While there is still a deficit here, fully intersectional analyses have started to take shape since the preliminary stages of my research project. These have been noted in Chapter 3: Addressing Method.

evangelicals and other Americans, Emerson and Smith (2000) ultimately conclude that “evangelicals desire to end racial division and inequality, and attempt to think and act accordingly. But, in the process, they likely do more to perpetuate the racial divide more than they do to tear it down” (2000:ix).

More recent research also confirms that significant disparity exists when comparing the gendered and racial composition between evangelical congregations and their pastoral leadership. The most recent *U.S. Religious Landscape Survey* takes account of population demographics at a national level and across various religious affiliations. According to their data, seventy-six percent of all evangelical church members are White, eleven percent are Latino (previously categorized as Hispanic in other surveys), six percent are Black and the remaining seven percent is dispersed across an “Asian” category and a generic ‘other’ category (Pew Research Center 2014c)¹⁴⁷. While it has already been noted that Charismatic megachurches are particularly diverse in terms of congregational membership, a 2005 representative study also noted that general membership amongst megachurches in America tends to be ‘multi-racial’ and “fifty-six percent of those surveyed said they were making efforts to become intentionally multi-ethnic” (Thumma et.al. 2005:8). Despite the ethnic diversity of evangelical constituencies, the same study shows that eighty-nine percent of senior pastors are Caucasian and the average megachurch pastor is Caucasian, roughly fifty years old, and well educated (Thumma et.al. 2005:10).

To further enhance our understanding of evangelical demographics, we must also take account of the rise of ‘black megachurches’ and ‘black televangelism’, a popular topic

¹⁴⁷ According to the last wave of the survey, eighty-one percent of all evangelical church members were White, seven percent were Hispanic, six percent were Black, with the remaining six percent shared between Asian populations and a generic ‘other/mixed’ category (Pew Research Center 2014c) so slight population shifts have occurred in terms of ethnic diversity.

for religious scholarship at the time of writing. According to Jonathan Walton (2009), African-American participation in religious broadcasting is not a new phenomenon, yet it has been typically neglected as an important area of concern in the study of American evangelicals. Walton argues that “the history of evangelicalism and religious broadcasting in America extends beyond the narrow confines of white Christian conservatism” (2009:45), noting that black televangelism exhibits stylistic features and promotes cultural myths similar to and also distinct from their Caucasian counterparts. Walton’s (2009) phenomenological account of contemporary black televangelists addresses this ‘racial invisibility’ in evangelical studies¹⁴⁸.

Tamelyn Tucker-Worgs (2011) addresses another gap in evangelical studies by taking account of the recent emergence of the ‘black megachurch’. She argues that “these churches fulfill a religious niche created by the 1980s-1990s black suburban migrants. The megachurches offer this transplanted population a religious experience that is accessible, professional, and relevant to their everyday lives” (2011:5). From 1980 to 2007, 149 black megachurches have sprung up across the United States, most in close proximity to African-American suburban populations in major metropolitan areas (Tucker-Worgs 2011:5,24). Like most megachurches, these examples have anywhere from two-thousand to seventeen-thousand congregants attending weekly Sunday services and exhibit ministries, services, and activities in line with those discussed earlier in this chapter (Tucker-Worgs 2011:6-7). Tucker-Worgs’ (2011) account of black megachurches and their engagement with public life also attempts to address the academic neglect of contemporary evangelical trends while

¹⁴⁸ In fact, most Pew Research surveys now distinguish ‘white evangelical Protestants’ as a category without identifying other racialized groups of evangelicals. The Religious Landscape Study is a notable exception where a variety of detailed demographics are available for analysis (Pew Research Center 2014c).

adding to an emergent literature concerning ethnicity, evangelicals, and political engagement.

We also see disparity when comparing the gendered composition of congregation membership and senior pastoral leadership¹⁴⁹. As expected, the gender composition across evangelical congregations is roughly equal with slightly higher female-to-male ratios, with males representing forty-five percent of the membership and females slightly higher at fifty-five percent¹⁵⁰ (Pew Research Center 2014d). Megachurches show a similar gender composition with eighty-eight percent of surveyed organizations reporting their female membership somewhere between forty-one and sixty percent of the total congregation (Thumma et.al. 2005:22). Despite the relative gender balance amongst evangelical congregations, relatively few women advance to a senior pastoral role within their congregation. According to analysis of *National Congregations Study* (NCS) data from 1998, only five percent of evangelical congregations who report an identifiable leader were headed by a female senior pastor (Konieczny and Chaves 2000:263). Konieczny and Chaves also note that “women pastors are most prevalent among the smallest congregations, and their numbers steadily diminish as congregations increase in size” and no congregations with membership over one thousand members were led by a female pastor (2000:265)¹⁵¹. That said, some progress has been made here. The 2012 wave of the same survey shows that 11.4% of congregations surveyed were led by female clergy but

¹⁴⁹ See Ellingson (2007), Thumma and Travis (2007), Kyle (2006) for further discussion.

¹⁵⁰ Again this has shifted slightly since the last wave of data, where forty-seven percent of evangelicals were male and fifty-three percent were female.

¹⁵¹ It should be noted that while Konieczny and Chaves (2000:269) found that predominantly African-American congregations were significantly more likely to be pastored by a female leader, a more recent piece on black megachurches suggests that “predominately black churches are more likely than predominately white churches to have a female pastor...” (Tucker-Worgs 2011:145); however, this difference is only slight.

does not break down this information by denomination (NCS 2012). Despite this progress, the implications of these statistics do not suggest a rosy future for female pastoral leadership in evangelical churches given the wide gap between female membership and senior roles. If evangelical congregations continue to restructure toward the megachurch norm, it is clear that leadership roles for female evangelicals are unlikely to reach parity anytime soon, thus further reinforcing an already substantial gender inequality between congregational composition and pastoral leadership.

While evangelical congregations are almost always headed by a male senior pastor, regardless of ethnic composition, women are present in other ministerial and associate pastoral roles. According to Tucker-Worgs (2011), women often minister to other women, head small church groups, and take on associate pastor positions amongst male dominated ministerial staff. The most prestigious of feminine roles undoubtedly belongs to the senior pastor's wife who may also be referred to as the first lady of the church (Tucker-Worgs 2011:146). While the senior pastor's wife may also hold a title of co-pastor or co-founder, how this title translates to authority and leadership duties varies across congregation. While some pastors' wives may take on legitimate ministerial responsibilities, many also hold this title in name alone making it apparent that there is "a hierarchy inconsistent with the parity that the 'co' in co-pastor implies" (Tucker-Worgs 2011:146). Therefore, options for sole female leadership remain limited and any authority or responsibilities that women do take on through co-pastoral roles are often only a result of their marital status in the church. No matter which title women in leadership positions hold, it is evident that gender inequality continues to be a mainstay through evangelical congregations across America.

Conclusion

In summary, understanding common tenets of evangelicalism in North America exposes a complex religious identity. As discussed in chapter two, I use the term ‘mediated evangelism’ to collectively refer to televangelism and online evangelism, as well as any other mediated product produced by the evangelists under study. By deconstructing common definitions of evangelicalism, we can then better understand how these discourses shape the messages put forth by contemporary televangelists through their media packages. As noted, evangelical identity is varied and complex. It can also differ dramatically from mainline Protestant groups in terms of individual views on social reform, conversion, salvation, the inerrancy of the Bible, and prophecy interpretation. For these reasons, many evangelicals across North American express high degrees of similarity with their global religious counterparts. Evangelicals also may or may not see themselves as fundamentalists. Lastly, evangelical churches, particularly through the form of the megachurch, are increasingly becoming the norm across the United States. Despite their often expressed desire to eradicate racial inequalities, the composition of diverse congregations versus rather homogeneous elite positions within these groups often reflect gender and racial inequalities that are present within the broader social stratification of American society. Robertson, Hagee, and Van Impe all espouse many of evangelical tenets assessed throughout this chapter¹⁵² and while some may classify them as ‘fundamentalists’, this is not a label that is easily applied. While they each lament the moral failings of their nation, none expresses a separatist mentality or anti-modern militancy. They also reflect

¹⁵² Based on this analysis, it can be argued that ‘political engagement’ may become a new tenet of evangelicalism for some that claim this identity. See Chapters 8 through 10 for analysis of discursive expectations for political engagement.

racial and gendered inequalities. While each of these men has been chosen for this sample based on their popularity, variance of style, and expressed apocalyptic theology¹⁵³, this sample is by no means representative in terms of broader North American race or gender demographics. That said, it is in many ways representative of a field of televangelism that privileges and popularizes white men. Now that we have reached a broad understanding of evangelical identities, the next chapter further explores the social trajectory of mediated evangelism as it exists today, while the remainder of this dissertation further examines how evangelical mediated discourses contribute to the unique evangelical subjectivities that emerge around these clusters of core beliefs, tenets, values, messages, and perspectives.

¹⁵³ See Chapter 3: Addressing Method for further discussion of sampling.

Chapter 6: Situating Contemporary Televangelists

Introduction

Mediated evangelism is a culturally significant religious phenomenon that now reaches across religious traditions and across the globe (Thomas and Lee 2012). According to William Fore, one of the key factors in understanding “the increasing role of religion in American life, and in particular, its political life...[is] the use of the mass media by televangelists” (Fore 2007:45). This chapter traces the trajectory of Christian mediated evangelism in the United States across media and content, placing emphasis on the emergence of televised and online evangelism as the central focus of this dissertation. First, this chapter provides an overview of mediated evangelism from a communications standpoint by identifying early and contemporary influences in American religious broadcasting. More specifically, this overview explores the ways in which evangelism cuts across radio, television, and internet to reimagine the ways in which religious broadcasting has been shaped by both technology and culture. After briefly addressing the continual evangelical dominance across the so-called *electronic church*, the next section establishes *mediated evangelism* as an organizing concept more suitable for assessing the media-saturated and cross-promoted packages produced by mediated ministries today. Understanding the impacts of this trajectory of mediated evangelism, allows for a seamless transition into the concluding sections of this chapter where I will further review the landscape of mediated evangelism with regard to content and genre. By briefly exploring significant discursive divisions within mediated evangelism today, I will conclude by situating Hagee, Van Impe, and Robertson, and their unique ‘brands’ of evangelism, within the broader field of American religious broadcasting.

Tracing the trajectory of mediated evangelism

The advent of the printing press in the fifteenth century served as the first serious disruption of church hierarchy through media, breaking down a long held monopoly by religious elites on scriptural interpretation (O’Leary 1996:789). In line with this unprecedented impact on religious and social histories, the emergence of radio, television, and internet have, in turn, made their own mark on the ways in which we express religious belief and practice. By examining the ways in which evangelical preachers have readily embraced radio, television, and internet while other mainline religious groups have historically exercised trepidation with new forms of media, we can start to better understand the evangelical dominance that has taken hold of American religious broadcasting, as well as the potential implications of this reality.

While we can trace the organizational roots of mediated evangelism to eighteenth and nineteenth century parachurches, revival meetings, and the Great Awakening of the American colonies (Hadden & Shupe 1988:43-46), the mass mediated evangelism of today more recently locates its origins in the early days of radio¹⁵⁴. The first religious radio broadcast in the United States occurred on January 2nd, 1921 and was conducted by Episcopalian Reverend Edwin Van Etten of Pittsburgh (Hill 1983). Because early American evangelists focused on experiential preaching over education in theology, and took seriously their call to spread their message to all who would listen, radio was quickly embraced as a new means to spread the gospel to the masses. As Jeffrey K. Hadden and Charles E. Swann (1981) note, radio programming was seen “as a way to extend what took

¹⁵⁴ Given that the focus of this dissertation is television and online evangelism, only a brief sketch of early radio evangelism is covered here in order to locate the mediated evangelism of today within its origins. For a much more thorough social history of radio evangelism, see Hadden and Swann (1981), Hadden and Shupe (1988), and Hangen (2002).

place in the meeting or the church to people who could not or would not attend” (1981:75). Through radio, and then television in later years, evangelists sought to replicate the experience of the traditional face-to-face sermon through available communications technology. This eagerness to experiment was often in direct opposition to early religious critics who argued that religious broadcasting would draw people away from the pews of traditional churches and isolate their congregations within their homes. Despite these prevalent fears, early radio evangelism flourished as the first incarnation of *the electronic church*.

While not the earliest practitioner of radio ministry, Ben Armstrong is typically given credit for coining the term *electric church*, now more commonly referred to as *the electronic church* (Hadden and Swann 1981:75). The electronic church can be understood today as any expression of religious programming made available through some form of technological medium. For this reason, the electronic church is not just a religious phenomenon; it is firmly grounded in the broader popular culture of America (Frankl 1987:14). It is also no longer confined to Christianity, nor is it only available through radio and television. While global, multi-faith evangelism has yet to develop a substantial academic literature¹⁵⁵, in the United States, the electronic church has often come to be equated with the conservative evangelical preachers taken up in this research. According to Richard Kyle (2006), the electronic church

refers to a variety of religious broadcasting methods and organizations, including both radio and television. By the 1980s, the term *electronic church* came to refer to the television programs produced by evangelicals, fundamentalists, and Pentecostals. While mainline Protestants and even Catholics were active in the early years of television, in the last thirty years or so it has been the domain of evangelicals (2006:240).

¹⁵⁵ The first meaningful attempt to bridge this gap can be found in an edited collection by Pradip Ninan Thomas and Philip Lee (2012).

Therefore, the electronic church is in some ways synonymous with what I refer to as mediated religion. The remainder of this chapter will describe the intermingled trajectories of radio and television that led to this evangelical media stronghold and explore the ways in which the internet, remediation, and digital convergence have pushed the boundaries of our early understandings of the electronic church and mediated religion.

As noted, the histories of radio and televised evangelism converge in several respects that have led to evangelical dominance in the American religious mediascape. Early religious radio and television broadcasting initially served to reinforce the division between mainstream Protestantism and evangelicals, with the former enjoying privilege. This created a scenario where entrepreneurial acquisition of radio time was the only possible avenue for evangelical groups wishing to use these forums. According to Fore (2007),

in 1934, the U.S. Congress passed the Communications Act which authorized the Federal Communication Commission (FCC) to grant broadcast licenses. The Congress asserted that the electromagnetic spectrum is a national resource that cannot be owned by any one person or corporation, but that it can only be licensed for a specific period of time (2007:45).

As a result of these early broadcasting policies, stipulations for early licensing included a responsibility to broadcast public interest programming where religious broadcasting quickly became a popular means of meeting this obligation. This key relationship between public interest requirements, the *Federal Communication Commission (FCC)*, and religious organizations is pivotal to understanding how evangelical empires have come to populate the contemporary American media landscape.

In the early days of radio, before the creation of the *FCC*, it was relatively easy to secure a broadcast license. In these times, religious broadcasting was described as frenzied

and controversial. Following a 1927 ruling from the *Federal Radio Commission*¹⁵⁶ (*FRC*), this shifted considerably as increased broadcast regulations enabled mainline religious programming to become the new norm (Walton 2009:21). In the period immediately following this landmark policy shift, the *Federal Council of Churches* were charged with the responsibility of governing access to air time for religious groups¹⁵⁷. These organizations were to set the tone for religious broadcasts, with the aim of providing airtime to religious figures who would speak on behalf of the major religious denominations of the time (Fore 2007). As a result of these early policies, evangelical groups were largely shut out from the free access granted to other mainline Catholic, Protestant, and Jewish groups for public interest programming.

By the time television was widely available in the United States, this privilege of mainline religious messaging was longstanding. Although there is some debate over when religious telecasting began, it is evident that religious broadcasting also quickly flourished in the world of television. According to Kyle (2006:241), the first religious television program was broadcast on ABC in 1949, while Hadden and Swann have (1981:81) suggested that religious telecasts originated almost a decade earlier in 1940. Regardless of when telecasts began, the trend of mainline control over religious programming was repeated, and the three representative groups discussed above were again allocated free access to Sunday airtime for their religious telecasts. During this time period, in the name of public interest, airtime and production costs for religious programming were also accounted for by radio and television networks. Under these circumstances, mainline

¹⁵⁶ The *FRC* is the predecessor to the *FCC*.

¹⁵⁷ Along with the *Council for Catholic Bishops* and a ‘consortium’ of national Jewish organizations (Fore 2007).

religious media flourished while evangelical groups were left in a precarious position, on the margins of a shifting media landscape.

As a result of their marginalization, evangelical groups vying for a radio and/or television presence were forced to purchase airtime, thus necessitating creative fundraising strategies to develop audience-supported programming (Walton 2009:23). When stations and networks needed money, they sold time to evangelists. When evangelists needed money, they relied on pleas to their traditional and electronic congregations for financial donations in order to stay on the air. Under these conditions, the enduring relationship between money, media, and salvation took hold. In 1960, another key policy shift from the *FCC* changed the course of American religious programming. At this time, “the FCC ruled that local stations could sell airtime for religious programs and still get public interest credit” (Fore 2007:45-56). Evangelical groups clamored to purchase airtime and the result of this ruling was disastrous for the mainline religions that had previously dominated public interest programming by enjoying free air time and reduced operating costs. According to Jonathan Walton (2009), this shift became advantageous for evangelical groups: “with networks no longer having any reason to afford free airtime to any particular religious groups, an ecclesiastical bidding war erupted in which conservative evangelicals were much more adept at fundraising, religious creativity, and energizing their local bases” (2009:23). As such, by the time free airtime for religious groups was no longer a reality, evangelical groups had been quietly amassing airtime and stations as commercial ventures for years, leaving them dominant in the field of radio and television, a trend that continues to this day (Hadden and Swann 1981:76-83). By 1977, ninety-two percent of religious

broadcasting alone became paid programming, with conservative evangelical groups controlling the majority of the market (Walton 2009:23).

In 1980, with evangelical President Ronald Reagan at the helm of the United States, another important policy shift all but cemented the evangelical stronghold over American religious programming. By weakening the *FCC* through the deregulation of radio and television, control over television and radio were now determined by the marketplace instead of public policy. This resulted in a further centralization of power where whole networks of radio, television, cable, and satellite were rapidly commercialized and purchased by a handful of corporations (Fore 2007). Again, the evangelicals were in a prime position to enhance their market share over mainline groups where “aggressive and legal fund-raising on the air made possible the creation of huge distribution systems for the televangelists, all with the bonus of being tax free as religious organizations” (Fore 2007:46). Through this complex process of changing *FCC* policy and deregulation, control over religious broadcasting shifted away from largely mainline religious groups as a result of the necessary and purposefully acquired entrepreneurial prowess of conservative evangelical groups.

As of 2011, it is estimated that approximately twenty-four hundred Christian radio stations and over one-hundred ‘full power’ Christian television stations are in operation in the United States (Hamaker 2011). The *National Religious Broadcasters (NRB)* website also claims to be comprised of “over 1400 member organizations representing millions of viewers, listeners, and readers” (NRB 2016). When we begin to account for online Christian content, the media presence of evangelicals grows even further. According to Kyle, “the evangelical tendency to accommodate itself to society and create ‘Christian’

alternatives has deep roots” (2006:270); cyberspace has been no exception to this rule. Evangelicals are active internet users (Swanson 2008:34), making televangelism’s move into cyberspace a seamless transition. Therefore, today’s evangelicals have access to televangelist programming day and night, every day of the year, through various online content, podcasting, social media, televised time-shifting, and digital recording devices. According to Douglas Swanson (2008), “this provides unlimited opportunities for the faithful to interact with a ministry, individually yet collectively, through a Web site or podcast. Users can seek spiritual comfort at their own pace, in their own way, using information they find most relevant” (2008:34). The impact of the internet on televangelism is undeniable. The advent of the world wide web and the evolution of web 2.0 has dramatically shifted the means by which religious programming is consumed and has resulted in an extremely user-friendly approach where television is no longer the sole site for the consumption of televangelism. Televangelism is now readily available through *all* forms of mass communication technologies.

Given that televangelism is no longer sequestered to local radio and television, its potential reach is global. A relatively novel implication of the globalization of mass communications technology is that televangelism is also no longer contained by American geo-political borders. As such, televangelism has also popped up all over the world and through other religious traditions. While American televangelism is widely available around the world, local variants of Christian, Islamic, and Hindu televangelism have now also populated the global media landscape (Thomas & Lee 2012). According to Thomas and Lee (2012),

the practice of televangelism is very different from what it was three decades ago. The reality of digital convergence, the marketing of religion, and branding in the

context of the globalization of religions have resulted in multiple platforms for the mediation of religion. However, it would seem that, in spite of some competition from these platforms, televangelism continues to be a pre-eminent space and source for religious identification and religious storytelling (2012:2).

Despite all of these transitions in policy and technological change, the preacher remains a central ‘enduring figure’ across all forms of televangelism (Thomas and Lee 2012). From the early days of revival meetings and radio programming to the global reach of television and online evangelism, the charismatic evangelical preacher remains essential to the study of religious media. By taking evangelical preachers as a starting point for analysis, the remainder of this dissertation will explore the full spectrum of mediated subjectivities made apparent through the media packages of Pat Robertson, John Hagee, and Jack Van Impe. This work starts in the next section of this chapter where I survey several popular themes in early and contemporary mediated evangelism.

Prevailing Themes in Contemporary Mediated Evangelism

In 1952, Rex Humbard became the first evangelist to broadcast a weekly religious television program and in 1958, Humbard’s five thousand seat *Cathedral of Tomorrow* church in Ohio became “the first church ever designed specifically for the requirements of television” (Hadden and Swann 1981:25). In the decades following Humbard’s innovative move into television, mediated evangelism became a religious force in the United States. In many ways, mediated evangelism has changed dramatically since Humbard’s pioneering program, yet key elements remain consistent and, we can trace elements of Humbard’s ‘soul saving, devil hating, sin killing’ message in contemporary evangelism. Like this eminent early evangelist, the TV preachers of today sell their products during their programs, reach out to their physically present and electronic congregants, and preach a

message of salvation, prophecy, and prosperity. Before examining the ways in which subjectivities are constructed through mediated evangelist discourses, a general exploration of shifting and consistent themes, messages, and genre is necessary.

Having explored common understandings of evangelicalism and the communication histories of radio and televised evangelism, this section moves toward an explanation of prevailing themes in contemporary mediated evangelism, in both content and genre¹⁵⁸. While a multitude of religious and secularized discourses fuse together throughout American evangelism, the central focus of this dissertation concerns apocalyptic belief systems, prophecy interpretation, responsible salvation, and prosperity discourses. Mediated evangelism also takes on many forms in terms of style and presentation. The concluding section of this chapter overviews popular evangelist genres, such as the *televised sermon*, the *variety talk show*, and the *interpretive newscast* by linking to a general overview of how Robertson, Hagee, and Van Impe are situated within this field.

The book of Mathew is often cited by evangelists as the divine motivation behind their call to spread their message in anticipation of the end of days, especially this verse: “*and this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come*” (NIV: Mathew 24:14). By embracing radio, television, and the internet, evangelicals have taken serious this call to preach the gospel to all ends of the world in order to hasten the ‘end of days’ and the second coming of Christ. We can see here a direct lineage of this apocalyptic theme from televangelist pioneer Rex

¹⁵⁸ This chapter provides a brief and general overview of popular content and form. For more specific discussions of how these themes are taken up by Robertson, Hagee, and Van Impe, please see Chapters 7 through 10.

Humbard to John Hagee. We can see evidence of this during an opening sequence for Humbard's television program:

on this planet earth, there are more people living today than have lived and died since Adam and Eve. Think of it. Think of the challenge God has placed before us in reaching these millions upon millions of people with the saving message of Jesus Christ. It is to meeting this challenge that the Rex Humbard World Outreach Ministry is dedicated (Humbard 1973).

Hagee's program introduction and website logo contains similar phrasing: "All the Gospel, To all the World, And to all Generations" (JHM 2016¹⁵⁹). Likewise, the introduction to his broadcast program, *John Hagee Today*, reinforces this message by announcing that the program is "going to all the world. Making Disciples. Teaching believers the uncompromising message of Jesus Christ" (JHT 2009-2010). Therefore, from the early days of religious broadcasting to the complex media packages of today's evangelists, we can see a consistent effort to fulfill a biblically prescribed mission of proselytization. Mediated evangelism shares this common thread amidst a Christian gospel that has been reshaped and altered in subtle and dramatic ways since the early days of religious broadcasting. While the key players, stories, enemies, and gospels may shift with the cultural and political climates of the day, the common goals and themes of mediated evangelists often remain the same. The next section of this chapter explores a sample of prevalent themes in contemporary mediated evangelism¹⁶⁰, such as apocalypse and prophecy interpretation, the prosperity gospel, responsible salvation, and political values issues.

¹⁵⁹ The upper left hand corner of the *John Hagee Ministries* official website shows a visual of their logo where this mission statement is clearly displayed (JHM 2016). At one time, the ministry website also contained a social media graphic that decried *All the Gospel to all the Blogosphere* (JHM 2015e).

¹⁶⁰ The popular discourses discussed in this section should not be considered an exhaustive assessment of prevailing themes in contemporary televangelism. This brief discussion is meant to serve as a general survey of prominent discourses that will be addressed in more detail throughout the analysis sections of this dissertation.

The Return of the King of Kings

Apocalyptic prophecy interpretation is well represented in collective discourses of religious and secular origins (Boyer 1992). The interpretation and spreading of this belief system is also a central theme that emanates from the mediated evangelists of today. While proponents apply their own interpretive framing to the timelines and content of their literal readings of the same texts, there is some consensus regarding the presence of many key elements – notably, the rapture, tribulation, Armageddon¹⁶¹, and the second coming of Christ. In general, biblical prophecy and the belief in an apocalyptic end to our world most notably stems from several key chapters of the Bible, including the books of Ezekiel, Daniel, Mathew, and Revelation. For many evangelicals, this apocalyptic belief system, known as dispensationalism, is tantamount to biblical truth (Kyle 2006:89) and representative of their worldview regarding the nature of reality, as foretold through biblical scripture. The most popular eschatological theology made visible through contemporary American media and televangelism is known as *premillennial dispensationalism*, a body of thinking that was largely formulated by John Darby in nineteenth century Britain and popularized through American evangelicalism (Boyer 2005:108). Darby's assemblage of the prophetic and apocalyptic passages found in the King James Bible shows a series of events leading up to an eventual battle between good and evil, ending in a righteous victory of Christ and his believers.

While most contemporary conservative evangelicals are premillennialist (Ingersoll 2009, Brint & Reith Schroedel 2009a), dispensationalism is not the only variant of premillennialism that is popular amongst American evangelicals. Other variants are

¹⁶¹ Pat Robertson suggests that 'Armageddon' and 'Jerusalem' are interchangeable throughout scripture and therefore this battle is set to take place in Jerusalem (Robertson 2016b).

referred to by a variety of names, including historic(al) premillennialism, amillennialism, postmillennialism, and reform premillennialism, to name a few. According to Timothy P. Weber (1991, 2009), one of the main distinctions between the variants is drawn between dispensationalism and historic premillennialism. He distinguishes the two traditions by noting that “early on, dispensationalism competed with ‘historic premillennialism,’ as it did not separate Israel and the church so strictly or teach the pretribulation rapture” (Weber 1991:15). Weber goes on to argue that the assumed dominance of dispensationalism and/or historic(al) premillennialism have waxed and waned, depending on the time period. He concludes that advocates of both varieties have each ‘grappled’ with their system and this has resulted in modifications and reshaping throughout the last few decades. He notes that “a lively debate has ensued within dispensational circles over the essence of their eschatological system and the limits of doctrinal development. As a result, the lines separating dispensationalism and other kinds of premillennialism are starting to blur” (Weber 1991:16). That said, despite an “intellectual resurgence” of historic(al) premillennialist discussions since the 1970s, Weber (2009) argues more recently that “historic premillennialism has never been as popular in American culture as dispensationalism¹⁶². While historic premillennialism represents another notable form of prophecy interpretation, the cultural significance of dispensationalism is undeniable and it forms the basis for the prophecy interpretations that take shape through the evangelist discourses considered here.

Briefly, premillennial dispensationalist systems interpret a prophetic series of events foretold in the Bible that signify the approaching end of the current epoch, otherwise

¹⁶² See also Rossinow (2015), Brint & Reith Schroedel (2009a), Ingersoll (2009, 1998), Weber (2009, 1991), and Harding (1994) for further discussion.

known as a dispensation. These signs include rampant anti-Christian sentiment, widespread immorality and wickedness, large scale wars, increased disease and sickness, and strange natural phenomena, such as storms and earthquakes, that occur all over the world. Another significant sign concerns the return of the Jewish people to their ancient homeland (Israel), an expansion of this land, and the restoration of the biblical Jewish temple to await Christ's return. After these events have occurred, prophecy will be fulfilled and our current dispensation will end with the onset of the Rapture, an event where all true Christians will be instantaneously removed from earth and brought to Heaven, leaving a wake of panic and chaos for all those left behind. Seven years of Tribulation will follow, where the rise and reign of the antichrist will take place. The antichrist, initially under the guise of peace, will unite the world's religious, legal, and economic systems and become a global political leader before revealing his true identity mid-way through the Tribulation. The antichrist will also exterminate two-thirds of the global Jewish population during his reign and kill all those who will not assume the 'mark of the beast,' as represented through the number '666'. The hell of the Tribulation comes to an end at the battle of Armageddon where Jesus Christ, accompanied by his army of raptured saints, defeats the antichrist once and for all. After Christ rules on earth for a thousand-year peaceful reign, the final judgment occurs and every person who has ever lived on earth will be assigned their fate of heavenly paradise or eternal damnation. Human history, as foretold in the Bible, comes to its conclusion here as the earth is destroyed and a new heaven and earth will be created.

In many ways, prophecy interpretation is the bread and butter of contemporary mediated evangelism and forms a core point of analysis for this dissertation. Since Darby first popularized premillennial dispensationalism, many evangelists have taken up the task

of interpreting how world events fit in with this prophetic timeline to predict an always ‘rapidly approaching’ end time scenario. Dispensationalism has been popularized through all mass communication mediums, including print, radio, television, and the internet. Popular examples of printed prophecy interpretation include Hal Lindsey’s *The Late Great Planet Earth* and the wildly popular *Left Behind* series, written by Tim LaHaye and Jerry B. Jenkins¹⁶³. Feature films, television programs, and pop cultural kitsch are also all prominent avenues for apocalyptic themed consumer products. Most importantly, each of the evangelists considered in this study articulates key elements of this belief system through their theology, assessment of current events, their television and internet programming, relevant literature, and consumer products. While prophecy interpretation continues to be reshaped and influenced by cultural, historical, and political climates, and each evangelist has a unique interpretation of how world events align with biblical prophecy, this thematic undercurrent remains a steady fixture throughout American mediated evangelism. The ways in which apocalyptic beliefs and prophecy interpretation coalesce with salvation discourses and contribute to the shaping of evangelical subjectivities will be discussed at length throughout the remaining chapters of this dissertation.

To Health and Wealth

The popular association between mediated evangelists and aggressive opulence is by no means a new phenomenon. Since the early scandals of Jimmy Swaggart, Jim and Tammy Faye Bakker, electronic ministries have often been under scrutiny regarding their

¹⁶³ The *Left Behind* (2008) book series has also been replicated in both film and video game formats.

tax exempt status as religious organizations and the extravagant lifestyles led by their head pastors. While promises of health and financial prosperity are ever present features of the American religious landscape, the *prosperity gospel*, as we know it today has been growing in size and influence in American evangelicalism since the 1980s (Hladky 2012:82)¹⁶⁴. The prosperity gospel is known by many other names, including the faith movement, the gospel of wealth and health, prosperity theology, name it and claim it, seed faith, word of faith, abundant life, blab it and grab it (Hladky 2012:82), new folk theology, deliverance theology, and the gospel of success (Barnhart 1990:159)¹⁶⁵. Generally speaking, prosperity gospels embrace the belief that God will bless all true Christians with prosperity in finances and health in accordance with biblical promises.

According to Kyle, “this movement proclaims that physical health and material prosperity are the rights of every Christian if they will claim them by faith. The secret for acquiring these blessings is an unwavering faith” (2006:287). Based on her work concerning the Pentecostal Faith movement, Kathleen Hladky argues that two teachings are relevant here: “first, God grants all his faithful followers physical health and financial prosperity; second, believers claim their divine rights to wealth and health through positive confession, financial offerings, and the persistent faith that God must fulfill his promises” (Hladky 2012:83). In short, prosperity believers argue that there is scriptural evidence for God’s promises of health and wealth. Proponents may differ slightly in details, but generally their logic follows a similar sequence. According to Barnhart’s (1990) synopsis of these types of arguments, since God has power over everything, including Satan, and

¹⁶⁴ See Chapter 8: Health, Wealth & Prosperity for a more detailed discussion of how prosperity discourses help shape the evangelical subjectivities considered in this analysis.

¹⁶⁵ Please note that this list is a brief sampling of popular associated names for prosperity theologies, it is by no means meant to be exhaustive.

Satan is responsible for sickness and economic hardship, God is capable of overcoming the demonic presence of sickness and economic hardship. By developing a proper relationship with God, believers can be healed and their finances can flourish (Barnhart 1990:160). Therefore, healing and economic prosperity are wholly dependent on unwavering Christian faith, a strong personal relationship with God, the principle of positive confession, and ongoing tithing (a scriptural requirement to give ten percent of what you have to the church¹⁶⁶).

Enmeshed with mediated evangelism and megachurches, prosperity gospels have informed an important form of evangelical discourse and are increasingly popular amongst American Christians (Swanson 2008). A 2006 *Time* poll revealed that sixty-one percent of Christian respondents believed that God wants them to be financially prosperous while thirty-one percent believe that God will reward them if they give money to God (Van Biema and Chu 2006). While some have argued that the popularity of prosperity gospels correlates with periods of economic downturn (Rosin 2009), it appears that the mediated evangelists of today have learned that prosperity teachings can be key for church fundraising, as well as pivotal in legitimating a lavish lifestyle. This can be particularly true if congregants fully internalize biblical interpretations that suggest wealth and health are material evidence of the fulfillment of scripturally mandated promises. According to Walton (2009), prosperity theology ensures “the luxurious lifestyles of many evangelists are socially accepted and, for some, theologically expected as the material rewards of a life committed to spiritual discipleship” (2009:xi). Prosperity teachings are also central themes for each of the evangelists considered here and while prosperity gospels may fall in and

¹⁶⁶ See [Chapter 8: Health, Wealth & Prosperity](#) for a more detailed discussion of prosperity gospels and tithing.

out of favor according to shifting religious, political, and economic climates, their current popularity is well accounted for in my dataset.

Saving Yourself

The common thread between both apocalyptic and prosperity discourses lies in their shared premise that salvation is ultimately a result of individual choice¹⁶⁷. With books titled *Become a Better You: 7 Keys to Improving Your Life Every Day* (Osteen 2010), *Winning in Troubled Times: God's Solutions for Victory Over Life's Toughest Challenges* (Dollar 2010), and *The Seven Secrets: Unlocking Genuine Greatness* (Hagee 2005), televangelist literature is in many ways indistinguishable from the more secular self-help books found on the shelves of popular bookstores. Here we can see fractured secular and religious discourses woven together to form a believer-centric version of *self-help Christianity*. Both apocalyptic and prosperity discourses are strikingly reminiscent of underlying neoliberal rationalities, where discursive strategies of individualization and responsabilization are common. The individualized contemporary evangelical subject is imbued with responsibility in ascertaining their salvation. While this is not necessarily a new feature of Protestant salvation discourses, the ways in which it is discursively linked to expectations for political engagement, and articulated through modern media platforms are unique to this era¹⁶⁸. By reinforcing final judgments, health, financial reward, and general happiness as promises from God that can be actively sought out through our beliefs, practices, thoughts, and actions, salvation is constructed as a choice rather than an automatic divine

¹⁶⁷ See [Chapter 7: Apocalyptic Prophecy and the Responsibilization of Salvation](#) for a more detailed discussion of responsible salvation and [Chapters 7 through 10](#) for detailed analysis of this discursive formation.

¹⁶⁸ See [Chapters 7 through 10](#) for further discussion.

right; a choice that is entirely under one's control through the total acceptance of Christ as savior.

This overarching evangelical message emphatically reinforces the individual acceptance of Jesus Christ as savior as the only means to achieving one's goals in prosperous and troubled times. According to Walton, "the prosperity gospel asserts that everyone has the capacity to be a millionaire and never get sick. Divine health and wealth not only are the fruits of the higher life but are synonymous with the higher life. Thus one's faith in Christ can be measured by one's prosperity because faith and prosperity are directly proportional" (2009:95). Likewise, the most popular apocalyptic belief structures emphasize a pre-tribulation rapture where truly righteous believers are guaranteed heavenly salvation and spared the atrocities of the seven years of tribulation. We see here that both prosperity and apocalyptic discourses centralize the importance of true belief as a means of achieving earthly and heavenly rewards. The overwhelming message here is that both salvation and prosperity are available to all true believers. The flipside to this prevalent theme constructs deficits in these areas as a result of individual moral and religious failings. Throughout the field, mediated evangelists regularly remind their viewers of these reciprocal messages, often utilizing memorized scriptural evidence for their claims. By linking prosperity to salvation, the evangelist discourses under study here greatly influence the discursively constituted subjectivities that will be discussed at length in the remaining chapters of this dissertation.

Politics and Values

Part of the evangelical movement from the margins to the mainstream necessarily involved increased interaction with a *secular* public and political sphere that was thought by many to be morally bankrupt and highly antithetical to a Christian lifestyle. This interaction represents a major cultural shift for mediated evangelists and their congregations. By embracing new levels of participation in politics and mainstream culture by way of so-called *values* issues, evangelicals took an active stance in bringing attention to issues they deemed problematic for American society. By attempting to bring America *back to its Christian roots*, mediated evangelists and their congregations have been directly, and indirectly, influential in shifting policy at several levels of government with regard to values issues such as abortion, marriage, and education.

Until the late 1970s, televangelists and other evangelical leaders were largely absent from political undertakings (Hadden and Swann 1981, Belton 2010). Both Jerry Falwell and Pat Robertson were adamantly against political involvement in their early careers. In the mid-1960s, Falwell told his congregants that it was a minister's job to preach instead of getting caught up in worldly concerns such as politics, civil rights, and anti-communism movements. In regards to political engagement, Robertson himself said that "these were temporal things and we were dealing with eternal things" (Belton 2010). However, during this timeframe, evangelicals also witnessed American involvement in the Vietnam War, and the emergence of what they perceived to be a secular sex-fueled, drug-induced, hippie counterculture that threatened traditional Christian family values. In order to prevent their children from being exposed to these 'increasingly troubling' secular worldviews, evangelicals were forced to take a more active position in American politics.

While Falwell and Robertson are often credited with advancing the shift toward an increased evangelical presence in the political arena, few recognize the importance of American theologian Francis Schaeffer, as an intellectual and theological influence on both men. During the 1970s, through a series of books, films, and speaking tours, Schaeffer and his family “devoted themselves to convincing the many evangelicals who were troubled by the social and moral problems of the times that uncompromising biblical inerrancy was not only intellectually respectable but also the only true Christian position” (Harding 2000:130). Featuring interviews with prominent evangelical leaders and religious scholars, the *Frontline* documentary series, *God in America* (Belton 2010), suggests that Schaeffer, and his vehement stance against secular humanism, was an intellectual catalyst for the evangelical move into politics and that it was he who first convinced Falwell that opposition to abortion was a theological obligation. Five years after the historical *Roe v. Wade* decision, Falwell preached his first anti-abortion sermon in 1978, arguing that “abortion is not a Roman Catholic issue, it is a moral issue, it is a theological issue...” (Belton 2010). These events marked the beginning of an evangelical *pro-life gospel*, and sparked a Christian outcry that continues to run strong throughout the mediated evangelism of today¹⁶⁹.

Since the late seventies we have also seen decisive evangelical migration into the political sphere. Falwell’s designation of the *Moral Majority* in 1979 was a turning point in evangelical politics. According to Susan Harding, “the extent of the organization’s

¹⁶⁹ Despite the popularity of anti-abortion rhetoric, little in-depth attention was paid to the issue during my sample. Abortion was often mentioned but generally it was brought up only as part of a lengthy running list of the moral failings leading to the decline of a Christian America. See Chapters 9: A National Politics of Salvation for further discussion of the national political values issues that were dominant within my sample.

effects on elections and legislatures during the 1980s has been debated, but its effect on public perceptions, while even harder to measure, was indisputable” (2000:20). Falwell and his *Moral Majority* (eventually joined by Robertson and other prominent evangelists) were eager for political representation for their worldviews; they found their candidate in Ronald Reagan. With his victory in the 1980 American general election, Ronald Reagan became the first political success story for American evangelicals. Since Reagan’s victory, evangelical political engagement has reached peaks and valleys. We have seen the dissolution of the *Moral Majority*, Robertson’s own failed attempt at the Republican nomination in 1988, the controversial election and presidential reign of the blatantly evangelical George W. Bush, and the subsequent Republican defeat by the now sitting president, Barrack Obama. While evangelical influence on electoral results may be difficult to accurately assess, evangelical leaders (mediated or otherwise) continue to ride the ebbs and flows of political engagement. Each of the mediated evangelists considered in this research centralizes the importance of political action in accordance with solid Christian values. While there may be debate over the extent of realized political influence, there is certainly no debate concerning intent.

Popular Formats in Contemporary Mediated Evangelism

The ways in which today’s mediated evangelists incorporate prevailing religious and secular discourses to advance their apocalyptic, prosperity, and salvation gospels are now incredibly varied; they have come a long way from Humbard’s black and white sermons of early telecasting. While the content and entertainment styles of early televangelism can still be found today, much has changed in the world of mediated

evangelism. This section offers a brief assessment of early televangelist formatting, before exploring several more contemporary variants.

According to Hadden and Swann (1981), television is synonymous with entertainment. While early televangelists benefitted from the novelty of a new medium, it would be some time before they fully embraced the potential of what television could offer. Rex Humbard's pioneering program offered variety through sermons, entertaining music, images, and narration, but this early example was still relatively simplistic in terms of both style and programming. By the 1980s, televangelists had fully realized that they were in direct competition with secular, mainline, and other televangelist programs (Hadden and Swann 1981:18-19). Here we see a more diverse array of programming, video techniques, and preacher style start to take hold of the religious broadcasting landscape.

In their 1981 survey of American televangelism, Hadden and Swann offer up seven categories for then popular and up-and-coming stars of the *video vicarage* (1981:20-45). These categories included *the supersavers*, *the mainliner*, *the talkies*, *the entertainers*, *the teachers*, *the rising stars*, and *the unconventional*. According to Hadden and Swann, *the Supersavers* are the "elder statesmen of fundamentalist religious telecasting" (1981:20) and include the most established preachers in the field, such as Billy Graham, Rex Humbard, Oral Roberts, and Jerry Falwell. The *Mainliner* category describes religious broadcasters from mainline Protestant or Catholic groups who do not espouse evangelical belief systems. The sole preacher in this category was Robert Schuller, founding pastor of the now bankrupt *Crystal Cathedral*¹⁷⁰ in California and the television program *The Hour of Power*. Jim and Tammy Faye Bakker, Pat Robertson, and Paul Crouch were categorized as

¹⁷⁰ The building was sold to the Catholic Diocese of Orange, California following the bankruptcy (Banks 2012). Robert Schuller is now deceased.

the Talkies. These televangelists hosted popular versions of religious talk shows, inspired by the success of Johnny Carson's *Tonight Show*. *The Entertainers* included Jimmy Swaggart, Ross Bagley, and the *Gospel Singing Jubilee* program. These musical variety programs featured revival meeting singers, as well as entertainment industry influences from both Hollywood and Nashville. These programs rejected the somber hymns and choral anthems of more mainline programming in favour of more upbeat musical performances. Frank Pollard, Richard De Haan, and Paul Van Gorder were categorized as *the Teachers*. These televangelists were less concerned with preaching sermons and more inclined to teach their viewers Bible or lifestyle lessons from living-room style sets with minimal entertainment production. Lastly we have *the Unconventional* and *the Rising Stars*. While *the Unconventional* category seems to be a catch-all description for preacher Ernest Angley, who was described as the 'lunatic fringe' of religious broadcasting, the youthful *Rising Stars* of the 1980s are the prominent televangelists of today. James Robison's *Life Today*, Kenneth Copeland's *Believers Voice of Victory*, and *Jack Van Impe Presents* all continue to air today in North America, internationally, and through cyberspace.

Today, some evidence of Hadden and Swann's (1981) categories is still present in American mediated evangelism. While content and formatting have not dramatically changed since the early days of televangelism, they have certainly evolved with the emergence of available technologies. The evangelists of today program across media technology to cross-promote their commentary, sermons, charitable and political organizations, and consumer products. While each of the evangelists considered in this study fulfills some aspects of the categories put forth by Hadden and Swann (1981),

updates to this spectrum are necessary. The remainder of this section offers a general overview of the televangelist genres represented through Robertson, Hagee, and Van Impe.

As noted earlier, the official website for *the 700 Club* describes Robertson's program as "a news/magazine program that has the variety and pacing of a morning show with live guests, special features, music, prayer and ministry. It also features in-depth investigative reporting by the CBN News team" (CBN 2016a). While Hadden and Swann (1981), described Robertson as a *talkie*, I would argue that *the 700 Club* of today is less influenced by a *Tonight Show* style of program and more akin to the secular lifestyle talk shows or morning news and variety shows that characterize daytime programming. *The 700 Club* features a variety of co-hosts who participate in religious and secular interviews, activities, and commentaries alongside Robertson himself. *The 700 Club* segments feature wide ranging subject matter, including news and current events, health and fitness, personal stories of tribulation and triumph, spiritual healing, and stories of prosperity through charitable tithing. While there is a consistent theme of Christianity and evangelism, *the 700 Club* also regularly engages entertainment, current events, and other popular cultural phenomena. Because of this breadth of programming, I would argue that Robertson's *700 Club* should be conceptualized more in line with their own self-assessment. Therefore, I refer to this genre as the *variety talk show* style of mediated evangelism.

Alternatively, Hagee's genre is representative of a much more prevalent and traditional style of mediated evangelism, as his televised and web-based programs are recorded and edited versions of his weekly sermons from *Cornerstone Church* in San Antonio, Texas. These sermons feature common elements of traditional 'bricks and mortar' church services: where the choir sings, the congregants shout words of praise and lift their

hands in prayer, and Hagee rules the pulpit, armed only with little more than his Bible and plenty of charisma. Hagee is also a proponent of elaborate sermon series' which feature anywhere from three to seven separate weekly sermons on one organizing Christian topic. These series' cover a variety of topics that range from biblical self-help in gaining prosperity, health, or successful marriages, to his most prevalent topics concerning prophecy interpretation and the end of the world. Occasionally, Hagee breaks from this model to feature a more *teacher* (Hadden and Swann 1981) style of programming where he interviews experts or family members about popular issues, charitable undertakings, or personal stories of triumph. If Hagee had been on the scene to this extent during their analysis, Hadden and Swann (1981) might categorize him as a *supersaver*; however, their lack of conceptual description for this categorization leads me in another, simpler direction. Throughout the remainder of this dissertation, I refer to Hagee's genre as the *televised sermon* style of mediated evangelism.

Jack Van Impe Presents is by far the most formulaic of the three programs. Hadden and Swann's (1981) early assessment of Van Impe as a *rising star* did little to conceptualize the style employed in his television program. Today, Van Impe's program still remains true to its early mandate to educate viewers in prophecy interpretation. Jack, with the support of his wife Rexella, highlights relevant news headlines from across the world and contextualizes them through an apocalyptic lens. Rexella first shares the headlines with the viewers by grouping them into categories that correspond to the current events of the week. She then takes on the role of an interviewer by asking Jack to further explain how these events are indicative of the fulfillment of biblical prophecy. *Jack Van Impe Presents* is rather unique in the field of mediated evangelism in that it offers news and scriptural

interpretation without traditional sermon or entertainment segments. The categories put forth by Hadden and Swann do not account for this genre of televangelism. I refer to this genre as the *interpretative newscast* style of mediated evangelism.

Conclusion

American televangelism, as a cultural phenomenon, has been widely influential in reshaping evangelicalism since its origins in early American revivalism. By connecting contemporary mediated evangelists to their roots in early radio and television, we can see how the presence of Robertson, Hagee, Van Impe, and other stars of the electronic church owe a great deal of their success and media presence to the persistence of early radio and TV preachers. Without their creative fundraising strategies, entrepreneurial aptitude, and a series of regulatory rulings, the face of mediated evangelism today may reflect a very different message – one largely grounded in mainline theology. More recently, several contemporary innovations are converging in ways that suggest that mediated evangelism is again undergoing transformation. Today, televangelism is by no means limited to either American Christianity or television as a medium. Contemporary televangelism can now be understood as a multi-faith, local, and global cultural phenomenon that cuts across all forms of digital and social media. The American Christian evangelists of today wholeheartedly embrace a global reach for fully packaged and cross-promoted products through print, radio, television, cyberspace, podcasts, social media, and fictional pop culture. Because contemporary televangelism is no longer sequestered to any particular medium, the concept of *mediated evangelism* now better encapsulates the new reality of religious broadcasting

more appropriately than *televangelism* or *the electronic church*; it is a much better fit as an organizing concept for this dissertation.

While the content and format of early televangelism have stayed true to its origins in many respects, contemporary mediated evangelism has also evolved into a unique global, technologically savvy, culturally significant, and politically driven force in American religious and secular subcultures. The prevailing themes of apocalypse, prosperity, responsible salvation, and family values, may not necessarily be new, but the ways in which they have been reimagined and legitimated are culturally and historically situated in the current events, and religious and political climates of our day. Mediated evangelism offers a diverse array of popular programming, but the recorded *televised sermon* style still represents the dominant model for contemporary televised religious broadcasting. Regardless of content or format, mediated evangelists today share more similarities than differences. The call to proselytize by all available means has been taken seriously since the early days of religious broadcasting and contemporary evangelists continue to compete for airtime as they expand their global mediated empires through radio, print, television, and now the internet. Having explored the background of American evangelicalism, the socio-historical development of religious broadcasting, and the prevailing themes and formats of contemporary evangelism (specifically those of Robertson, Hagee, and Van Impe), the remainder of this dissertation is concerned with the analysis of emergent subjectivities in mediated evangelist discourses. In the chapters that follow, I examine the discursive formations that take shape surrounding *salvation* as an apocalyptically informed governing belief system that contributes to a particular form of

evangelical subjectivity and works to responsabilize *the saved subject*¹⁷¹. Here, I take up the general themes explored in these background chapters to examine in greater detail the messages emanating from Robertson, Hagee, and the Van Impes.

¹⁷¹ See Chapter 4: Theorizing Methodology for further discussion of discursive formations and subjectivities. See Chapters 7 through 10 for more detailed discussions of the discursive formations that inform this research.

Chapter 7: Apocalyptic Prophecy and the Responsibilization of Salvation

Introduction

Like all discursive forms, understanding religious discourse is about understanding the ways in which truth is constructed, conveyed, and legitimated. This is no small task. We often take for granted the very idea that *truth exists*. For many of us, we only become aware of issues surrounding truth when confronted with lies, misrepresentations, or other transgressions of this constructed concept, yet truth is one of the most controversial and perplexing terms available through our sociological toolkit. As researchers, we interrogate the concept of truth and its role in the research process regularly. How do we know truth, or better yet, *can* we know truth? How do transgressions of truth impact our perceptions and how do perceptions of truth impact our research? What truths do we privilege collectively, culturally, and as social researchers? Is truth an objective reality that we discover or is it something that is *felt* or socially constructed? As sociologists, it is our task to explore the ways in which truths of all varieties are shaped and mobilized. In doing so, we can better understand how these constructions influence both subjectivity and governance. What is common to all modes of knowledge is their capacity to claim some kind of truth and make an effort to legitimate this truth. Religious discourse is no exception to this rule. We cannot separate religion from the domain of power/knowledge (Asad 1993) that is exercised through belief, practice, politics, lived experience, and discursive formations. The evangelical discourses analyzed throughout this dissertation are cultural evidence of the manners in which truth is constructed, legitimated, and mobilized in the production of subjectivities. The remainder of the dissertation is devoted to better understanding how this takes shape.

Religion provides meaning and comfort for its adherents in a variety of ways, but much like the sciences, religions also lay claim to truth about the nature and reality of knowledge, as well as the broader world around us and beyond us. One of the most fundamental debates brought forth by Enlightenment thinking concerns the modern conflict between notions of scientific progress and religious authority – a clash of epistemological and ontological realities where the construction and mobilization of truth claims is played out over and over again. This dissertation makes little to no headway in resolving this meta-debate; however, an exploration of subjectivities necessitates a conversation about the discursive mobilization of truth. For evangelicals, truth is a concrete fact as evidenced through their centralization of biblical literalism and scriptural authority. Increasingly, evangelicals stand ready to mobilize these concrete truths throughout the public and political arenas of contemporary North America. As noted by Simon Coleman (2008), “conservative evangelicals occupy public discourse – have become a political religion – not only in classical arenas of fieldwork but also in contemporary American political arenas...” (2008:41). This engagement across discursive fields complicates modernity’s polarization of science and religion while creating tension for secularization proponents¹⁷². The evangelical presence within public discourse may indicate a cultural shift away from self-imposed marginalization but as Coleman notes, “we simply cannot assume that engagement in ‘conversation’ implies common understandings of the rules and meanings of what is going on” (2008:45). While the assumptions each of us makes about meaning, truth, and the authority of knowledge can vary immensely, conservative

¹⁷² This is often played out through American ‘culture wars.’ See [Chapter 1: Introduction to the Dissertation](#) for further discussion of this concept and the fluid boundaries between the religious and the secular.

evangelicals frame their belief system as a universal truth that can be oppositional to mainstream America¹⁷³. To complicate matters further, we are also starting to see evangelical framing seeping into and coopting mainstream mediated messaging, particularly with respect to apocalyptic discourses (Chapman 2013). No longer confined to the sidelines of public debate, the evangelical discourses studied here portray civic engagement as a religious duty and mobilize a brand of biblical truth as legitimacy for political action¹⁷⁴.

This chapter unearths discursively constituted varieties of evangelical truth by exploring the ways in which salvation and apocalyptic prophecy are mobilized in the governance of evangelical subjects, throughout the mediated evangelist programs that form the data for this project. This chapter explores prominent contemporary features of the discursive formation surrounding *responsible salvation*, an apocalyptically informed construction of salvation as an active and ongoing choice that must be taken up as part of one's religious duty as an evangelical believer¹⁷⁵. In doing so, the chapter also introduces

¹⁷³ I am not making the claim here that an insurmountable divide exists between *the religious* and *the secular* in American society; that is a task for a different project. That said, the evangelists under study here do frame this divide as critical and see the world in much more rigid terms where saved evangelical Christians are positioned against the unsaved (both secular and non-evangelicals). The latter is held largely responsible for the perceived moral decline of America.

¹⁷⁴ One of the first examples of this engagement can be evidenced in the 1925 'Scopes Trial' (*The State of Tennessee v. John Thomas Scopes aka The Monkey Trial*) where John Scopes was accused and tried for teaching human evolution in violation of the Butler Act. Following the trial, "theologically conservative evangelicals largely withdrew from the public sphere but others tried to reach an accommodation with modern society" (Brint & Reith Schroedel 2009a:6). It wasn't until the upsurge in evangelical affiliation in the 1960s and 1970s that we started to see more of an evangelical presence in the public, and then political, sphere. According to Steven Brint and Jean Reith Schroedel (2009a), "to a large extent, the liberal-conservative divide that occurred 100 years ago continues to shape contemporary divisions among Protestants" (2009a:6).

¹⁷⁵ As discussed in Chapter 4: Theorizing Methodology, most discursive formations are enormous and therefore, cannot be studied in their entirety (Said 1978). *Responsible salvation* is undoubtedly shaped by a long history of religious, political, and cultural discourses, notably those located within Protestant ideas of salvation and the saved subject more broadly. I recognize that responsible salvation is not entirely a new discursive formation specific to mediated evangelism and have designed this chapter as one that draws together the various contours of responsible salvation as articulated through the evangelist discourses considered here. In doing so, this chapter frames an understanding of responsible salvation as evidenced

what I call *the responsible evangelical subject*; a discursively constituted true believer who embraces a personal relationship with Jesus Christ and prescribes to apocalyptically informed notions of salvation (as a choice) that imbue the subject with responsibility while also serving as a guide for religiously determined expectations for conduct in everyday life¹⁷⁶. This chapter also sets the framework for the remainder of this analysis, which focuses more narrowly on describing key contemporary components of this politicized evangelical subjectivity¹⁷⁷. In the chapters that follow, I provide a detailed, original, data-centric analysis of how the mediated evangelists considered here mobilize both unique and reshaped apocalyptically informed salvation narratives that, in turn, contribute to a religious-political subjectivity that is rich with expectations for political conduct regarding a variety of issues.

Salvation and Apocalyptic Prophecy

Understanding the role of salvation and apocalyptic prophecy in evangelist discourses is crucial to understanding emergent evangelical subjectivities. The attainment of salvation and the construction of apocalyptic timelines as rapidly approaching realities help to constitute organizing strategies for the governance of everyday life, civic

through my data and examines the discursive constitution of a related subjectivity. This is done to prepare the reader for the analysis chapters that explore the unique ways in which apocalyptic narratives and expectations for political conduct are linked to responsible salvation and are made visible through modern media. Here, I follow Edward Said (1978) and envision this analysis as only part of an ongoing conversation that neither starts nor ends with this specific project of the present.

¹⁷⁶ True to Foucauldian theory and method, when describing *the responsible evangelical subject*, I am not identifying a category of evangelicals that necessarily exists within the broader population. Rather, *the responsible evangelical subject* describes how ideas about what an ideal evangelical subject looks like, does, and thinks are made visible through these present-day mediated discourses. See [Chapter 11: Conclusion](#) for further discussion of the limits of this methodology and ideas for future projects that would be able to explore how these subjectivities are taken up or resisted by actual evangelicals or their communities.

¹⁷⁷ See [Chapter 4: Theorizing Methodology](#) for a detailed discussion of the Foucauldian discourse analysis that underlies these findings.

participation, and an afterlife experience. Previous discussions of evangelical tenets have shed light on common values for adherents. As noted, both Sam Reimer (2003) and David Bebbington (1989) identify four key tenets of evangelical faith and identity: *conversionism, activism, biblicism, crucicentrism*¹⁷⁸. In turn, David Haskell (2009) argues that the importance of a ‘high tension eschatology’ must be included as another key tenet of evangelical faith. Boyer (2005a) also notes that premillennial dispensationalism in particular holds a ‘powerful grip’ over evangelicals. This centrality of apocalyptic prophecy is directly related to evangelical biblicism and stems from a literal reading of biblical scripture as inerrant truth. Understanding the relationship between salvation and apocalyptic prophecy is therefore central to understanding the construction of evangelical truths. The remainder of this chapter is devoted to teasing out the ways in which salvation and apocalyptic discourses shape techniques of government for evangelical subjects.

Salvation is at the heart of this discussion as it frames almost all of what passes as Christian religious discourse and is particularly prevalent throughout evangelical varieties. The Oxford English Dictionary (2016) offers several relevant definitions here for salvation as an organizing concept:

- a. The action of saving or delivering; the state or fact of being saved.
- b. The saving of the soul; the deliverance from sin and its consequences, and admission to eternal bliss, wrought for man by the atonement of Christ.

Salvation is therefore the ultimate goal for believers; one of which requires both action and emotional commitment. For evangelical subjects, salvation guarantees eternal bliss in the afterlife but requires ongoing attention throughout one’s worldly existence. All three of the

¹⁷⁸ For further discussion, see [Chapter 5: Deconstructing Evangelicals in America](#).

evangelists studied here reinforce this narrative throughout their media packages. Hagee highlights the wonders of salvation regularly, while also making note of the ongoing work required of this ‘gift’:

Salvation is a promise...the gift from God is eternal life (JHT: Wednesday, January 20th, 2010).

Salvation, to most Christians means, I’ve confessed my sins, Jesus is my savior. I’m going to heaven, I’ve joined the church, Whoopee, that’s the end of it. Wrong...[Salvation] means deliverance, it means wholeness. It means health. It means healing. It means the favor of God... (JHT: Monday, March 8th, 2010).

Say this with me again, winning is a choice. Winning is a choice. You are not born to win, you have to choose to win. The most critical step to becoming a winner in life is choosing Jesus Christ as savior and lord...you must be born again, there is no option. (JHT: Wednesday, December 9th, 2009).

By mobilizing salvation in a way that requires constant attention, all thoughts and actions must inevitably feed into this ultimate goal. Robertson and his *700 Club* hosts also attempt to alleviate the complexity of this endeavor by repeatedly offering their viewers a variety of easily accessible and rewarding ways to engage in salvation through the repentance of sin:

Following a segment featuring a marriage that survived a husband’s ‘pornography addiction’, Robertson speaks directly to the camera: He will set you free. Drugs. Alcohol. Sex. Pornography. Abusive relationships. You name it, he’ll forgive it all and he’ll change you. But you’ve got to want it. And if you want change as this new year begins, I want to lead you in prayer and I’m gonna ask you to pray with me. Stop playing games and get real...for those who prayed with me just then, I have some booklets I’d like to give you... (700 Club: Tuesday, January 12th, 2010).

Lastly, the Van Impes also express the simplicity and importance of choosing salvation:

Jack: You’ve got to get ready. Pray this from your heart. Lord Jesus, the only savior of the world, no other way. And I trust in your way Jesus. Thank you for what you did on the cross. What love. Oh what compassion. Lord Jesus, every drop of blood was to wash my sin away and I accept it and I accept you. Lord Jesus, come into my heart today. Be mine. I pray it in your name. Amen.

Rexella: Amen. You know, you just made the most important decision in your whole life. To open you heart to the lord. Oh, he died for you to be your savior and I trust that you accepted him, (JVIP: Sunday, January 3rd, 2010).

Salvation discourses are thus pivotal to understanding the governance of evangelical subjects as they provide insight into how expectations for conduct are constituted and governed through these discussions¹⁷⁹. In mobilizing salvation as a choice that anyone can make by actively accepting Jesus Christ as savior, the evangelists also provide an actionable plan for lived everyday existence that forms the governing structure for evangelical conduct – in other words, options are made readily available, one simply has to choose to take advantage of them. In conversation with a history of Protestant discourses and converging with American dream cultural mythologies, secular self-help literature, and corporate mantras for achieving success, these evangelists prioritize salvation as an active and knowledgeable choice, that subjects can make; it is easy to attain when one is willing to put the spiritual work in through ongoing attention to thought, action, and practice. The evangelist discourses considered here position salvation as the goal by which subjects frame all further aspects of their lives. By doing so in a way that also constructs salvation as a choice to be made, subjects are empowered, but also imbued with responsibility. Thus, for the responsible evangelical subject, salvation underlies all of their actions, thoughts, and decisions, from the spiritual to the mundane.

¹⁷⁹ For instance, in her ethnographic research into the politics of evangelical identities in American and Canadian local congregations, Lydia Bean (2014) found that perspectives on paths to salvation were often deployed as a measure of authenticity and as a means to “police their subcultural boundaries” (2014:46). Bean (2014) was often asked to offer her personal testimony about whether or not there were multiple paths to salvation. She concluded that this line of questioning was meant to establish whether or not she was an evangelical insider, a non-evangelical Christian, or perhaps an atheist. Her participants were often delighted to find out that she was in fact a Christian, and not an atheist. They subsequently interacted with her as a blurred sort of insider-outsider to their community.

While choosing salvation may require constant attention to all of one's thoughts and deeds, ultimately, salvation is truly achieved through one path alone: the deliberate and authentic acceptance of Jesus Christ and his teachings. This acceptance, in turn, informs all aspects of the ways in which subjects then live out their everyday lives. While the ultimate outcome of salvation is the riches of a heavenly afterlife, *born-again* subjects are those who have been saved by meaningful and continual repentance of sin during their lives on earth. In 2012, Hagee's ministry website illustrated this position on salvation: "we believe all men are born with a sinful nature and that the work of the Cross was to redeem man from the power of sin. We believe that this salvation is available to all who will receive it" (JHM 2012). Each of the evangelists considered in this study espouse this core tenet of evangelical faith and identity. The specific ways in which salvation is framed and mobilized as a technique of government will be discussed throughout the remaining chapters. What is common to each of these frames is the construction of salvation as a choice; it is a reward that is freely available, yet only possible for those who actively seek it through authentic belief, practice, active attention to repentance, and the ongoing acceptance of Christ as savior. Salvation is the central overarching goal that governs daily life for evangelical subjects. It guides all aspects of life choices, from religious expression, to civic engagement, to health, finance, and intimacy. As such, it is intimately connected to their conceptualization of biblical truth and the mobilization of scriptural evidence as the ultimate authority in resolving individual, national, and global problems.

Salvation transcends the space between worldly existence and the afterlife and as such, is intimately connected to evangelical belief systems that emphasize apocalyptic prophecy interpretation. Of course, apocalyptic discourses cut across *the religious* and *the*

secular through media, popular culture, literature, belief, and practice; and are by no means limited to American culture, yet are well articulated through it (Boyer 1992). As noted above, evangelicals reflect one of the most prevalent sets of apocalyptic beliefs found in the United States today; a belief system that is heavily informed through a biblical lens but undoubtedly influenced by secular apocalyptic influences¹⁸⁰. By linking apocalyptic beliefs to salvation, the evangelists here create a sense of moral religious order and meaning for subjects, something that Daniel Wojcik (1997) argues is lacking in secular apocalyptic worldviews. In an effort to prepare for the always rapidly approaching apocalypse (as evidenced through literal scriptural support), the evangelists considered here take seriously their mission¹⁸¹ to save as many souls as possible prior to the impending reign of the antichrist on earth. While the time and date of the apocalypse are of far less consequence than the cold hard reality of these prophetic events, all three evangelists are certain that we are indeed living in the end times and will see biblical prophecy realized within their lifetimes. Therefore, understanding how salvation is positioned as a necessary condition for being rapture-ready sheds light on how apocalyptic prophecy interpretation feeds into this discursive formation and helps to shape our understanding of evangelical subjectivities and governance.

¹⁸⁰ As discussed earlier in this dissertation, the convergence of religion and popular culture is a popular theme for scholarly attention. Bruce David Forbes (2005) has edited a collection of general pieces that assess the relationship between religion and popular culture in America while others have focused more narrowly on the relationship between evangelicalism and popular culture. Likewise, Amy Johnson Frykholm argues that “the narrative of the rapture, drawn from the tradition of Christian fundamentalist apocalypticism, has achieved unprecedented popularity through a recent series of evangelical adventure novels called *Left Behind*” (2004:3).

¹⁸¹ Again, often attributed to NIV: Matthew 24:14 – *And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come.* NIV: Matthew 28:18-20 is also often cited as evidence for the need for evangelism in all parts of the world but is only slightly less overt in its apocalyptic reference – *Then Jesus came to them and said, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.*

Of course, evangelicals are not alone in their prophetic interpretation of apocalyptic ‘end of time’ scenarios. In many ways, separating the discursive overlap between religious, secular, pop cultural, and political discourses is largely a futile task. According to Paul Boyer (1992), “prophecy belief is far more central in American thought than intellectual and cultural historians have recognized” (1992:9). More importantly, Boyer argues that premillennial dispensationalism¹⁸², a strain of apocalyptic prophecy often shared by evangelicals, has helped shape a wide range of public and political attitudes in the United States since World War II (Boyer 1992, 2005). While earlier studies and recent Gallup (2016a) polling reported that close to forty percent of Americans identify themselves as an evangelical or ‘born-again’ Christian (Boyer 2005, Newport and Carroll 2005:81), a 2014 Pew study found that roughly twenty-five percent of the population identify as evangelical Protestant¹⁸³ (Pew Research Center 2014c). While this is not a majority, evangelical Christians certainly represent a significant segment of the population. In support of Boyer’s claims (1992, 2005), biblical prophecy belief has also remained pervasive in the United States. Although dated, a 2004 national survey reported that thirty-six percent of respondents believe that the apocalyptic end of the world as predicted in Revelation is true prophecy, while seventeen percent believe that the end of the world will occur in their lifetime (Gates et al. 2004). An earlier poll also suggests that of the roughly forty percent of adults who believe the world will end, forty-eight percent believe that the antichrist is on earth now (Newsweek 1999). More recent data suggests that apocalyptic belief amongst

¹⁸² Also known as dispensational premillennialism.

¹⁸³ It is not surprising that there is great regional variance in evangelical populations. For instance, roughly fifty percent of adults in Alabama (49%), Arkansas (46%), Kentucky (49%), Oklahoma (47%), and Tennessee (52%) identify as evangelical while less than ten percent of adults in District of Columbia (8%), Massachusetts (9%), and Utah (7%) do so (Pew Research Center 2014c).

evangelical populations is even more pronounced. A 2010 Pew study reported that fifty-eight percent of white evangelicals believed that Jesus Christ would definitely or probably return to earth¹⁸⁴ by 2050 (Pew Research Center 2010b). Another more recent global survey of evangelical Protestant leaders found that “slightly more than half (52%) say they believe that Jesus probably or definitely will return in their lifetimes” (Pew Research Center 2011)¹⁸⁵. While precise estimates of dispensationalist populations have been difficult to determine, the collective data and scholarly analyses suggest that apocalyptic narratives and prophetic belief continue to remain a significant feature of American evangelicalism.

Despite the prevalence of apocalyptic belief systems throughout North America, many of us are only acquainted with apocalyptic scenarios through the popularized fictional representations of entertainment media and mainstream news media (Chapman 2013:39). In her work on news coverage concerning California radio preacher and rapture prophet Harold Camping¹⁸⁶, Jennie Chapman (2013) argues that news reporting of Camping’s 2011 predictions “registers a shift in the way in which the ‘religious mainstream’ is understood in official discourses” (2013:40). It is my contention that the evangelists considered in this study also contribute to this discursive shift, albeit through differentiated means and with greater attention to a constructed authority for their

¹⁸⁴ Jesus Christ’s eventual return to earth is considered a key event for prophetic timelines. While belief in the second coming of Christ does not necessarily guarantee a corresponding belief in premillennial dispensationalism amongst American evangelical populations, the two beliefs are regularly treated as one in the same by the apocalyptic evangelists considered here.

¹⁸⁵ It should be noted that surveys of apocalyptic and prophecy beliefs rarely control for which variant of premillennialism individual respondents embrace.

¹⁸⁶ In May 2011, Harold Camping, president of Family Radio (Family Stations, Inc. 2016), rose from relative obscurity to immense popularity in mainstream American media as a result of his prophetic claims that “the rapture of true Christians to heaven would take place on the 21st of that month” (Chapman 2013:39).

interpretations. While all three often appear as controversial news headlines themselves, and have also been featured as ‘experts’ in news reports, their primary mechanisms for mobilizing prophecy interpretation take shape through their various televised programs which also advance a common goal: “to locate the premillennial perspective within, rather than outside of, the media construction of acceptable normal religion” (Chapman 2013:43). This push to normalize apocalyptic discourse throughout the media landscape serves as a legitimizing mechanism for end time messages. By marginalizing ‘date-setting’ preachers like Camping to the so-called religious fringe, Chapman (2013) argues that a symbolic othering takes place here while reinforcing our normative boundaries of acceptable religious beliefs concerning the second coming of Christ. The evangelists considered here further reinforce these boundaries by mobilizing their own brand of religious truth as the only acceptable mechanism for salvation, thereby denouncing alternative doctrines or preachers as simply ‘false Christs’ (Van Impe), cults (Robertson), or ‘Counterfeit Christianity’ (Hagee).

Hagee, Van Impe, and Robertson each walk a fine line between date-setting preachers like Camping, and the more mainline religious experts who regularly appear in American news segments. All three construct authority and legitimacy for their own brand of apocalyptic interpretation through various mechanisms. Although end time scenarios are represented in varying ways throughout their media packages, it becomes evident that the interpretation of biblical prophecy is a pressing concern for Hagee, Van Impe, and Robertson. While Hagee and Van Impe regularly engage in open prophecy interpretation during their television programming, Robertson’s talk show style *700 Club* rarely assesses apocalyptic prophecy or end time scenarios as directly throughout this sample. However,

when Robertson and his co-hosts do locate contemporary issues in an apocalyptic context, they do so with as much of a no-nonsense, factual manner as the other two preachers:

On Israel, Russia, and a nuclear Iran: You know, we talked about the Bible prophecy and ladies and gentleman, I do think that you need to take your Bibles and look at the old testament, the book of the prophet Ezekiel, and get into the 38th chapter of what Ezekiel had to say and he speaks of what's going to happen in the last days to a nation that is re-gathered from the nations of the earth, ...[Israel]...and living at peace in the land and suddenly there is a coalition that comes against it...and this coalition in the later days is supposed to come against Israel and they are going to cover the land and its going to be devastating and God himself is going to fight and destroy that coalition. Now, its setting up that way... (700 Club: Monday, February 15th, 2010).

Robertson also actively engages in prophecy interpretation through his official personal website, *www.patrobobertson.com*:

There is a cryptic verse found in the Book of the prophet Isaiah, and many people have read that and wondered exactly what it means... We need to tell Syria you are not going to be lobbing shells through your surrogates Hezbollah into northern Israel, but make peace. Then all of a sudden Egypt has a peace treaty with Israel, and now Syria and Iraq would come together under the United States influence. What a wonderful thing this can be and what a fulfillment of Bible prophecy! (Robertson 2016c).

Ladies and gentlemen, the United States took a profound move yesterday in the Security Council of the United Nations. The United States proposed a resolution that would grant a state of Palestine and would take East Jerusalem away from Jerusalem and give it to the Palestinians. This has profound significance prophetically (Robertson 2016d).

Like Hagee and Van Impe, Robertson aligns contemporary events and issues alongside biblical scripture to legitimate an approaching end time scenario by outlining where we are on an apocalyptic timeline. Here, they mobilize their theological expertise and employ a no-nonsense approach to establishing what they see as clear, factual, and indisputable links between current events and biblical scripture to construct further authority for their interpretations.

As noted, both Hagee and Van Impe regularly engage in much more outspoken prophecy interpretation through their televised programming and other mediated ventures, with the bulk of Van Impe's ministry devoted to the topic. In addition to their television programming, both evangelists also offer a plethora of prophetic Bibles, books, pamphlets, and videos for audience consumption. Before their website overhaul in 2015, the official website for Jack Van Impe Ministries (JVIM 2016) had decreed itself as *The Bible Prophecy Portal of the Internet* on its main page. Through an online section of the site entitled *Bible Prophecy and You*, Van Impe reminds his audience that,

The Book of Revelation, the last book of the Bible, is the point at which all the prophecies of the ages converge and find their ultimate fulfillment. Within its pages are specific details concerning the return of the Lord Jesus Christ to earth, the establishment of His Millennial kingdom, and finally, the eternal state of both the saved and the lost. Other books of the Bible also contain important prophecies relevant to these exciting last days in which we live (JVIM 2016¹⁸⁷)

More notably, his television program, *Jack Van Impe Presents*, is almost entirely devoted to prophecy interpretation. For example, in one representative episode, Rexella reads obvious headlines regarding the Mayan apocalypse, NASA, and economic troubles on Wall Street before suggesting that her husband is going to help us “find out how this connects to the Bible and the end of the world” (JVIM: Sunday, November 29th, 2009). Van Impe then takes up these headlines by spinning his own interpretation of a premillennial end time scenario that suggests the world's physical end is a misinterpretation: “a number of churches teach that the world is going to end based on six misunderstandings of verses. I don't teach that, Christ is coming to reign for one-thousand years so the world won't

¹⁸⁷ The Jack Van Impe Ministries website underwent a dramatic transformation in 2015. While the site is now ultimately easier to navigate, several passages that have been referenced throughout this dissertation are now impossible to find through their new site. It will be noted when this occurs and the former titles of the lost pages will be provided in the footnotes. The former web page title for this passage was *Bible Prophecy and You*.

end...” (JVIP: Sunday, November 29th, 2009). This longstanding cornerstone interaction between the Van Impes consistently features wife Rexella reading contemporary global news headlines while deferring interpretation to husband Jack, who enthusiastically offers up scriptural evidence to support his interpretation¹⁸⁸ of the prophetic events described in the news headlines.

While Hagee’s more traditional televised sermon style approach to evangelism covers a wide range of topics, each sermon series that aired during this sample is either fully or partially devoted to salvation, prophecy, and end time scenarios. The advertisements featured during this sample of *John Hagee Today* also regularly illuminate prophetic themes, including advertisements for prophecy conferences in various American cities, Hagee’s own prophecy specific sermon series’ such as ‘The Magnificent Seven’ or ‘Prophetic Mysteries Revealed’, a feature length post-rapture film entitled *In the Blink of an Eye*, and a *Prophecy Study Bible* “edited by Pastor John Hagee [that] will help you understand the prophetic message as you study the Word” (JHM 2015d)¹⁸⁹. Information for each of the products or events featured in these advertisements is also available through

¹⁸⁸ In line with their core belief in biblical literalism, it should be noted that any reference to ‘interpretation’ is language of my own. The evangelists considered here mobilize a language of certainty in scriptural inerrancy; a paramount religious truth. Apocalyptic prophecy, for them, is thus a matter of fact, not interpretation.

¹⁸⁹ As noted above, Jack Van Impe also has many of his own consumer products available for purchase, including several editions of a *Prophecy Study Bible*. These products are also featured in advertisements throughout his televised program and are available for purchase through phone-in offers and through his online catalog (JVIM 2016b). These types of informative pamphlets and consumer products are also regularly offered during *700 Club* broadcasts and commercial breaks but offer more variety in their content and are notably less directly concerned with apocalyptic prophecy. In addition to these offerings, the *700 Club* website also offers free recipes and other lifestyle pamphlets (through the general CBN website) alongside their more strictly religious documents (CBN 2016d). Robertson’s *700 Club* also regularly features commercial advertisements for companies that are not obviously religious in nature but may align with evangelical belief systems. For instance, commercials for companies that enable private purchases of gold (i.e. Swiss America 2016) were popular during the sample. While commercials are not a focal point of this analysis, the theme of these advertisements often reinforced that gold was a valuable commodity that could withstand economic collapse because owners could possess it without relying on electronic banking and credit systems. Given that total global economic collapse is a key event for end times scenarios, I can see how these advertisements can be seen as a good fit with Robertson’s *700 Club* programming.

the John Hagee Ministries website (www.jhm.org) yet unlike Robertson's usage of the *700 Club*, Hagee's televised sermons serve as his primary mechanism for conveying and constructing legitimacy for prophecy interpretation. Hagee regularly preaches about prophecy interpretation; underlining his unwavering faith in the inerrancy of scripture:

The one unique feature of Bible prophecy is that it predicts the future with absolute accuracy. In my book, *The Beginning of the End*, I gave eighty-eight Bible reasons why Jesus Christ of Nazareth was the only man, dead or alive who could possibly be the son of God and messiah...When the Bible was written, twenty-five percent of it was prophetic, twenty-five percent. No other religion on the face of the earth has a Bible that even attempts to do prophecy (meaning to tell the future) because only God knows the end from the beginning. Why? Because God almighty is the only one as he says in Isaiah 46, who can declare the end from the beginning. From Genesis 1, God knew what was going to happen throughout all of time and eternity (JHT: Monday, January 11th, 2010).

While Van Impe's television program and website are also overwhelmingly devoted to prophecy interpretation, Hagee's commitment to advancing this agenda cuts across his entire media package almost seamlessly. His ministry includes traditional, televised and virtual sermons, books, videos, compact discs, conferences, charities, political lobby events, podcasting, and a music production company to name just some of his efforts at mobilizing apocalyptic beliefs through mediated evangelism. Of the three evangelists considered here, his direct engagement in mobilizing salvation-based prophecy interpretation is certainly the most comprehensive.

More important to the framing of this analysis, it should be noted that these evangelical apocalyptic discourses are intimately linked to the discursive formation of what I term *responsible salvation*. For the purposes of this dissertation, I am using the concept of responsible salvation to organize my thinking around the construction of salvation as an apocalyptically informed active, ongoing choice; a theme that is overwhelmingly present

within this sample¹⁹⁰. The construction of salvation as a choice is central to understanding key elements of evangelical subjectivities, apocalyptic prophecy, and the responsabilization of Christian citizen subjects. The *final judgments* are depicted throughout various forms of premillennialist prophecy interpretations as an end time scenario where every human who has ever lived and/or died throughout history will be held accountable for their thoughts, deeds, and beliefs. The final judgments are therefore portrayed as the end point for attaining salvation – a period where everyone must answer to God and accept their fate as a lost sinner in eternal hellfire or in eternal bliss as a repentant and saved Christian subject. While salvation is at stake during the final judgments, it is not up for debate when the judgments occur. Each individual’s lifetime of choices has sealed their fate long before this scenario plays out. Through the interpretation of biblical prophecy surrounding end time scenarios, the evangelists here weave a complex mix of religious and secular discourses regarding current politics, events, and scriptural evidence to encourage congregants to take action in determining their everlasting fate and ultimate salvation. Salvation is thus constructed as an active and continuous choice to be taken up with constant attention to the rapidly approaching apocalyptic timeline where individual and national salvation are key to creating a rapture-ready evangelical citizenry. By constructing salvation as a choice that is available to all subjects willing to embrace it, subjects are imbued with a sense of

¹⁹⁰ Another Oxford English Dictionary definition for salvation emphasizes that to ‘work out’ salvation is “to be independent or self-reliant in striving towards one’s goal” (2016). Again, we see how discourses overlap to inform our understanding of what it entails to achieve salvation. While many secular discourses also express similarity in the construction of success as something that must be achieved, responsible salvation explores the contours of how evangelical apocalyptic beliefs inform salvation discourses to constitute specific forms of evangelical subjectivity that are inevitably also influenced by discursive overlap. Elements of the discursive formation that surrounds responsible salvation will be taken up later in this chapter and analyzed in detail throughout the remaining chapters of this dissertation.

responsibility and empowerment in taking control of their own worldly and eventual afterlife experiences.

Not only does apocalyptic prophecy, and its entanglement with responsible salvation, represent a strong cultural and religious narrative for American evangelicals, this discursive formation also contextualizes a governing belief system that guides both historical and everyday individual experience. As Boyer (2005) notes: “the apocalyptic mindset reinforces a longstanding tendency among Americans to view their history and the nation’s world role in religious terms” (2005:118). As such, the apocalyptic beliefs that inform responsible salvation, in turn provide a governing structure for individual actions, They also reflect visions for America as a Christian nation, where the ultimate goal would be the establishment of Christianity as a state religion¹⁹¹. All three evangelists are emphatic in their instance that American governments and citizens are integral to the fulfillment of biblical prophecy and outline the consequences and rewards that result from the choices subjects make. As such, the moral and political compass of the nation is of the utmost concern for them¹⁹² and all evangelical subjects have an important role to play in defining America as a saved nation.

None of these evangelists sees national salvation as an automatic guarantee for their country and outline the consequences for rejecting active salvation and the historical move

¹⁹¹ Gallup (2016a) recently reported that seventy-five percent of Americans believe that the United States would be a better society if more people were religious but unfortunately does not break down their analysis by religious affiliation. While this poll may not be able to directly support a claim that Americans would prefer the establishment of a Christian theocracy, it does suggest that a majority of Americans are dissatisfied by the current role of religion in society. Given that most Americans who identify a religious identity identify a Christian one (Pew Research Center 2014) (debates over syncretism, belief without belonging, and spirituality without religiosity acknowledged), it is plausible that Americans may prefer a society that were more Christian in character. The ways in which national salvation is mobilized as an actionable plan for evangelical subjects are discussed further in [Chapter 9: A National Politics of Salvation](#).

¹⁹² For further discussion, see [Chapter 9: A National Politics of Salvation](#), and [Chapter 10: Apocalyptic Governance of International Relations](#).

away from what they envision as the Christian roots of early America. Each evangelist regularly laments a perceived decline in American morality and frequently pleads with Americans and government officials to correct their course in order to stay aligned with Christian values and ready themselves for preordained end time scenarios:

Robertson on Israel: I pray, I pray that we won't get crosswise with the prophecy of God. But it looks like we're heading down the so-called road map as hard as we can go, driven by the Arabs, driven by the Russians, driven by the Europeans, driven by the United Nations, all saying, "Let's put the squeeze on tiny, little Israel." And God, Himself, is going to fight for Israel (Robertson 2016b).

Dan Diker (Jerusalem Center for Public Affairs)¹⁹³: When Israel is delegitimized and assaulted it is a precursor to what is to come for the rest of the 'free' world.

CBN News Correspondent Chris Mitchell: This could mean American officers battling Al Qaeda in Iraq or the Taliban in Afghanistan might find themselves accused of war crimes, if they're responsible for unintended civilian casualties (700 Club: Thursday, March 25th, 2010).

Hagee on anti-Christian sentiment: Which of the following happened in America? A man is fired for displaying Bible verses in his workplace. High school students are trained to roam the halls, listening for, quote (gestures 'air quotations' with his hand) verbal offences, that would be prayer, to report to law enforcement officials. Thirdly, a pastor faces a prison sentence for reading from the Bible. All of those three things have recently happened in the United States of America. But here's God's position, he says if you reject me, I'll reject you. All nations that forget God, the Bible says, are turned into hell...even Americans. Therefore, its time to wake up. To stand up. To speak up. To recognize that our freedoms are being systematically destroyed. (JHT: Monday, November 9th, 2009)

Rexella on American political corruption: Oh how our country needs our prayers. How our country needs our help. Certainly Jack, the headlines here express pretty much all of it. Where do you think the United States is going? (JVIP: Sunday, January 24th, 2010).

Van Impe on signs of end times: But look at so many of our people today, they're drinking booze, they're on drugs, they go to the gambling casinos and the dancehalls, they lie, they cheat, they swindle. You can't find much morality today, even in the church of the Lord Jesus Christ. And when you talk about sex, that's another story...be careful! (JVIP: Sunday, December 13th, 2009).

¹⁹³ Dan Diker of the Jerusalem Center for Public Affairs (JCPA 2016) appears during this episode in an extended news segment concerning Israel.

Under this belief system, whether it is a matter of foreign policy or individual financial decision-making, all choices for government and citizens are framed through a Christian lens and often located along a prophetic timeline. Therefore, regaining Christian morality for both individual and nation becomes a key component of responsible salvation. As such, this organizing concept of responsible salvation constitutes the discursive benchmark for guiding everyday Christian decision-making where subjects are imbued with responsibility, not just for their own individual salvation, but also for their nation. The remainder of this chapter examines the ways in which governmentality can be used as a framework for understanding the ways in which responsible salvation contextualizes the governance of subjects. The chapter concludes by highlighting the ways in which forthcoming chapters explore the mechanisms by which prophecy and salvation frame prevailing evangelical subjectivities.

Governmentality

Throughout the remaining chapters, I examine the evangelical, religious, and secular techniques of governance and strategies for legitimation that are present in my data to further understand how evangelical subjectivities are discursively constituted and governed throughout mediated evangelism. To aid in the exploration of this convergence of religion, media and politics, Foucault's concept of governmentality is useful as a framing lens to allow us to better understand the integration of responsible salvation and apocalyptic prophecy within evangelical subjectivities.

Foucault introduced the concept of governmentality during his lectures at the Collège de France in the late 1970s. Since this introduction of governmentality, we have

seen a flood of multidisciplinary scholarship on a wide range of governmental formations where religion has been surprisingly under-analyzed. Foucault understands governmentality to be “the techniques and procedures for directing human behaviour. Government of children, government of souls and consciences, government of a household, of a state, or of oneself” (Foucault 1997:82); governmentality is then the so-called ‘conduct of conduct’¹⁹⁴. Therefore, as Nikolas Rose, Pat O’Malley and Mariana Valverde (2006) note, any analysis of governmentalities identifies

...different styles of thought, their conditions of formation, the principles and knowledges that they borrow from and generate, the practices that they consist of, how they are carried out, their constellations and alliances with other arts of governing...thus, the governed are, variously, members of a flock to be nurtured or culled, juridical subjects whose conduct is to be limited by law, individuals to be disciplined, or, indeed, people to be freed (2006:84-85).

As such, by exploring the ways in which evangelical subjectivities are discursively constituted, this analysis inherently offers insight into the governance of evangelical citizen subjects given that mediated evangelical discourses set the conditions by which emergent subjectivities are constituted as governable subjects. In doing so, these discourses do more than just define subjects; they become active in the production of knowledge, truth, and modes of governance, while setting forth the boundaries of acceptable and unacceptable conduct. By articulating the contours of responsible salvation and locating its apocalyptic influence, we then gain insight into how evangelical subjectivities are shaped and what constitutes expected conduct for responsible evangelical subjects.

An analysis of governmentalities is therefore not limited to forms of state government as its namesake may imply. This perspective engages governance of all sorts,

¹⁹⁴ While there is some disagreement over the exact origins of this widely cited phrase and the exactitude of its direct French to English translation (Crampton 2007) it has become mobilized by more senior scholars as essential to understanding governmentality as an analytic (Rose, O’Malley and Valverde 2006).

by authorities in multiple sites, thus providing an apt framework for understanding the strategies and technologies of government employed through mediated evangelist discourses. Accordingly, Rose, O'Malley and Valverde (2006) outline a list of questions that need answering through this analytical framework. They suggest that such a perspective investigates how a particular 'art of government' embodies an answer to such questions as: "Who or what is to be governed? Why should they be governed? How should they be governed? To what ends should they be governed?" (2006:84-85). As an analytical perspective capable of empirically investigating evangelical forms of governance, governmentality informs the foundational analysis of this project. In addition to the forms of inquiry listed above, this project is also concerned with a second set of questions outlined by Rose, O'Malley and Valverde (2006): "Who governs what? According to what logics? With what techniques? Toward what ends?" (2006:85). By laying out these tangible lines of questioning, governmentality perspectives create a framework for practical empirical inquiry that can help shed light on how techniques of governance are mobilized and legitimated, and to what ends. For the evangelists at hand, the short answer to each of these questions is embedded in the ongoing pursuit of national and personal salvation for all true Christian believers. The evangelical subject is thus at the centre of a discursive formation where salvation and apocalyptic belief serve as an organizing technique of governance. Throughout the remaining chapters, I will examine the ways in which this occurs through mediated evangelism in greater detail, and further explore the means by which authority is reinforced through various techniques of governance.

Employing governmentality as an additional theoretical framework for analysis enables a better understanding of how discursive practices 'organize and constitute' forms

of knowledge by “studying the techniques and procedures by which one sets about conducting the conduct of others” (Foucault 2010:4). To this end, developing an understanding of particular subjects’ modes of being is a task taken up throughout the remainder of this dissertation. For Foucault, subjects are not simply docile recipients of ideal typologies. In reference to understanding “the constitution of the subject’s mode of being”, Foucault notes, “here, instead of referring to a theory of the subject, it seemed to me that one should try to analyze the different forms by which the individual is led to constitute him or herself as subject...once again, this involved a shift from the question of the subject to the analysis of forms of subjectivation...” (2010:4-5). In other words, subjects are active participants in the constitution of subjectivities (Knights & McCabe 2000, Skinner 2012), reflecting and reshaping the same processes of subjectivation that act upon them through discursive practices and material realities. The discursive formations articulated through mediated evangelism are thus informed by evangelical subjects themselves – mediated evangelist and congregant. Hagee, Robertson, and Van Impe not only articulate a process of subjectivation through various technologies, programs, and rationalities of government, they are also subjects themselves; bound to the same codes of conduct and socially constructed realities as their congregants. The constituted subjectivities are thus emergent and reflected at the same time.

The Responsibilization of Salvation

While governmentality as an analytic is not without its problems¹⁹⁵, I believe that it provides a valuable perspective for analyzing the contemporary intersections of

¹⁹⁵ Amongst other reproaches, governmentality is often critiqued for neglecting the ‘messy actualities’ of governance and social relations (O’Malley et al. 1997), meaning that it could be neglectful of explorations

American evangelism, politics, and media packages. My aim here is to challenge the boundaries of conventional governmentality studies by exploring the emergence of a discursive formation that highlights the responsabilization of salvation at an intersection of multiple discourses (notably socio-political neoliberal and religious discourses) that do not always reflect coherent techniques of government and strategies for legitimation. Contemporary mediated evangelism, like other ‘arts of governing’, is dependent upon a Foucauldian understanding of *ethics*. Accordingly, “ethics, here, was understood in terms of technologies of the self – ways in which human beings come to understand and act upon themselves within certain regimes of authority and knowledge, and by means of certain techniques directed to self-improvement” (Rose, O’Malley & Valverde 2006:90). It is through such technologies that the process of subjectivation manifests and discursively constituted subjectivities become actualized in our social and material realities. Yet to fully understand the concept of responsible salvation, we need to explore how evangelical discourses concerning freedom, choice, and the autonomous subject coalesce and overlap with traditional neoliberal and conservative discourses of similar kind. The rise of neoliberalism as an art of government built on the fundamental principle of freedom gave rise to a whole “range of techniques that would enable the state to divest itself of many of its obligations, devolving those to quasi-autonomous entities that would be governed at a distance... technologies that were both autonomizing and responsabilizing” (Rose, O’Malley & Valverde 2006:91). Here, we also see that the very concept of choice is

of how constituted subjectivities play out on the ground. For instance, governmentality analyses are not often capable of assessing how subjects actively accept, adopt, or resist subjectivities. My previous work on hybrid formations of expertise allowed me to challenge this limitation of governmentality by exploring how Atkins dieters manifested neoliberal subjectivities of responsibility and individuality while also resisting dominant medical knowledge of healthiness (Thomas 2006). Despite its well elaborated limitations, governmentality studies continue to flourish in multi-disciplinary settings. For a more thorough discussion of criticisms and correctives, see Rose, O’Malley & Valverde (2006:97-101).

dependent on the assumption of freedom and necessitates a subject that embodies both. Here, we can see that evangelical subjectivities are shaped through understandings of freedom, choice, personal responsibility, and consequences that run rampant throughout contemporary American narratives more broadly¹⁹⁶. As such, responsible salvation represents a confluence of evangelical and neoliberal discourses, and conservative framing, where causal relationships are indeterminate, but rather the discourses work to influence and enhance each other. Through the responsabilization of salvation as an active program for governing, we see here the emergence of a modern evangelical subjectivity that enlists the subject as an active religious citizen and free political participant at the same time.

As noted above, apocalyptic prophecy and salvation are intimately linked in the construction of evangelical discourses and subjectivities. While apocalyptic scenarios are preordained, salvation is by no means a guarantee under this system of belief. Each of the evangelists considered in this study approach the interpretation of end time scenarios in a variety of ways; each reinforcing free individual choice as a primary strategy for salvation. While Hagee and Van Impe devote much more on-air time to biblical prophecy interpretation than Robertson, what unites the three is that each regularly celebrates the power of repentance for salvation as an active responsibility that each Christian subject has the capacity to control. Robertson's *700 Club* regularly features segments that share the

¹⁹⁶ Bean (2014) also found similar intersections being espoused by research participants where economic, religious, and political influences are evident in assessments of the role of the welfare state. One participant exuded the influence of conservative frames and laissez-faire economics in his ideas about individual choice, responsibility, and salvation when he likened the 'invisible hand' of the market to the hand of God. Bean concluded that for this participant, "it was wrong to spare people from the stress of economic insecurity. Poverty played a redemptive role, by bringing people to their knees. When people were subjected to the discipline of the market, they were forced to rely on God to help them feed their family. But when people felt financially secure and entitled to a government check, they no longer felt their need for God. Brian associated moral decline with the growth of the welfare state" (Bean 2014:161). See Chapter 8: Health, Wealth & Prosperity and Chapter 9: A National Politics of Salvation for further discussion of similar themes that are present in my sample.

stories of triumphant viewers whose lives were changed through the power of responsible salvation. More often than not, these viewers emphasize that they were *saved* through their participation in *700 Club* prayer requests such as this exemplar spoken by Robertson himself:

Following a segment on conversion: (Robertson speaks directly to the camera, exuding sincerity and conviction) Speak to me and I will hear your voice. Some of you right now are like Kamal, you may be Muslim, you may be Atheist, you may be nothing (pause) religiously. But God says I love you. I love you. and Jesus Christ died for you...Would you like to experience the glory of God? Would you like to experience salvation? Would you like to experience the wonders of the world to come in the presence of the God who made you? ...well, if you want that I want you to say a simple prayer with me but I want you to mean it in your heart. Wherever your or whatever background religiously you find yourself in or no background I want you to pray this prayer and mean it in your heart....reveal yourself to me Jesus and from this moment on I will serve you. Come into my heart lord Jesus... (700 Club: Thursday, May 20th, 2010).

Hagee invites similar participation in salvation prayer as a choice while making it unequivocally clear that congregants shoulder responsibility here:

Listen. The initiative rest with you. What you bind, God will bind. What you release, God will release. Its time for you to stop praying oh God, when are you going to do something and its time for you to take the initiative in prayer to release God to get it done (JHT: Tuesday, November 10th, 2009).

I want you to understand, its your initiative, not God's...God does nothing until you ask him! As powerful as God is, he can do absolutely nothing, until you start praying. That's why prayer is the most powerful weapon you will ever know in this life. Asking is not an option. If you don't ask, you get nothing (JHT: Monday, December 21st, 2009).

Hagee on 'Counterfeit Christianity': The fact is if you don't confess your sin, you cannot be forgiven of your sin, even God will not forgive you. Because you have to ask forgiveness. You have to come to the point, I am a sinner and I need salvation through the blood of the cross. You're not going to heaven until your sins are washed in the blood of Jesus Christ. I can't say that any simpler than that...get out of that church. God's not in that church. That's the apostate church. That's the church that is going to follow the antichrist... (JHT: Monday, January 12th, 2010).

Van Impe also stresses the importance of autonomous choice by leaning more toward general discussions of Jesus Christ as ultimate savior; however, implicit in his pleas for salvation is active participation in prayer and repentance:

Jack: Look at me. There's only one way, his name is Jesus. His name shall be called Jesus for he shall save his people from their sins and he alone can do it, no one else. No one else. So look at me, and from your heart pray this (JVIP: Sunday, June 6th, 2010).

Jack: I don't care if you're a president, a senator, a congressman, a governor, a mayor or hold any office. I don't care if you're a CEO, I don't care if you're a high class sinner or you've hit bottom. The blood of Jesus Christ, God's son, will cleanse from all sin...but you have to pray a prayer from your heart and mean it. Say it after me... (JVIP: Sunday, January 24th, 2010).

Jack: Oh Rexella, that moved my heart, was your heart moved when you heard Rexella singing? But was your heart also moved as you saw Jesus, hanging on that cross to save you? What do you have to do? Just ask him to come into your heart. Will you do it now? What a Christmas would be. Lord Jesus, pray it, savior of the world, only savior...

Rexella: Amen. The best time of the year to open your heart to the lord, the savior of the world. If you made that decision, you prayed that prayer with Jack, write to me... (JVIP: Sunday, December 20th, 2009).

Once again, while salvation is granted only through authentic acceptance of Jesus Christ as savior, the free subject is imbued with complete responsibility for the ongoing maintenance of this decision. In other words, while the power of Christian salvation is only granted through acceptance of Christ as 'the one true savior', it is also conditional upon awareness. Salvation may only occur when a subject knowingly seeks it out and consciously invites it into their lives. These conditions of salvation work to individualize, responsabilize, and also empower evangelical subjects in a manner that both influences and is influenced by other historical, religious, and seemingly secular self-help, market-based, corporate, conservative, and neoliberal mentalities of government. Through their total mobilization of choice as the only mechanism to obtain true salvation, the evangelists

considered here are active participants in a discursive formation that conceives of technologies and rationalities that seek to govern through freedom (Rose, O'Malley & Valverde 2006:92). The construction of an easily achieved actionable plan for favorable otherworldly outcomes, grounded in both religious and other responsabilizing discourses, makes for a powerful technology of the self, one of which the evangelical congregant is of course free to take on or resist; an inherent consequence of free subjectivities.

Conclusion

As evangelists continue to inhabit public mediated spaces, these evangelical discourses demonstrate that personal and political action is not just a religious duty but a biblical imperative where the ultimate consequence for one's wrong decision (or indecision) is God's promised wrath of eternal hellfire. Through an overarching emphasis on salvation and apocalyptic prophecy, each evangelist considered here relies on the centrality of biblical literalism to construct authority for their narratives and to mobilize their own unique brand of religious truth, thus further legitimating moral and political strategies for action in accordance with their values. The discursive result of these emphatic pleas is the construction of a subjectivity that utilizes salvation as the ultimate ends by which subjects are governed. The possibility of any other path is portrayed as unacceptable, with the consequences of resistance being too great for any 'true' Christian believer to bear. By consistently emphasizing a divide between actively saved Christians and what Hagee terms *Counterfeit Christians*¹⁹⁷, the evangelists further reinforce the importance of one's

¹⁹⁷ Hagee uses this term to refer to a variety of what he likely sees as non-evangelical Christians who may identify a Christian identity but do not act accordingly. He also uses this term regularly in discussions of pastors or congregants who believe the Bible is an interpretation rather than literal, and to Christians who pick and choose what parts of the Bible they will adhere to.

choice to accept Jesus Christ as savior. By doing so, subjects can ensure they are rapture-ready and commence with their mission to save as many souls as possible before the rapidly approaching end times. By providing evangelical subjects with easily accessible ‘actionable plans’ for ensuring salvation through active decision-making, the responsabilization of Christian citizen subjects becomes a primary technique of governance; one that is manifested as biblical advice for living a truly Christian lifestyle. Strategies for managing personal and national finances, staying healthy, voting, lobbying, educating others, and charitable engagement are some of the more important elements of subjectivation and evangelical governance. To conclude, responsible salvation and apocalyptic prophecy thus form a governing belief system for action, thought, and morality in all areas of one’s life. Therefore, this prevailing subjectivity of a responsabilized evangelical subject carries with it expectations for financial giving, wellbeing, voting, civic engagement, and even diet and weight loss. The ways in which these emergent subjectivities are shaped through these actionable plans for salvation are described in detail throughout the remaining chapters of this dissertation. The following chapter examines the relationship between prosperity discourses (concerning health and wealth) and responsible salvation, while the remaining two substantive chapters examine a politics of salvation in regard to American and international political issues.

Chapter 8: Health, Wealth & Prosperity

*Give generously to them and do so without a grudging heart;
then because of this the Lord your God will bless you in all your work
and in everything you put your hand to (NIV: Deuteronomy 15:10).*

*Until now you have not asked for anything in my name.
Ask and you will receive, and your joy will be complete (NIV: John 16:24).*

Introduction

Religion and money have never stood far apart (Bowler 2013) in religious or scholarly discourses¹⁹⁸. The so-called prosperity gospel is a popular, controversial, and complex system of Christian beliefs and scriptural interpretations that cut across denominational affiliation where evangelicals are no exception¹⁹⁹. In many respects, ‘prosperity’ as a doctrine becomes synonymous with the divine promise of plentiful blessings in terms of health, wealth, and overall well-being. As such, “believers trust that culture holds no political, social, or economic impediment to faith, and no circumstance can stop believers from living in total victory here on earth” (Bowler 2013:7). Promises of health, healing, wealth, and financial stability abound in contemporary mediated evangelism to the extent that they are inseparable from the discursive formation

¹⁹⁸ As Kate Bowler (2013) notes, many scholars have examined the ways in which Christianity contributes to understandings of money, prosperity, and salvation, starting with Max Weber’s ([1905] 2001) influential work in *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*. This lengthy and expansive history of sociological engagement with Weber’s work is in many ways beyond the scope of this research but is important to acknowledge. As Bowler (2013) notes, modern prosperity believers share similarities with Weber’s Puritans, “whose religious insecurity about their post-mortem fate transmuted into capitalist virtues” (2013:227) but do not always align with a rejection of extravagance. Ultimately, my research question sets different boundaries for this project. Like Bowler (2013), I have tackled a narrower genealogical puzzle concerning the discursive relationship between evangelical prosperity gospels and salvation. In doing so, this chapter explores the ways in which apocalyptically informed salvation discourses constitute subjectivities and expectations of conduct for the responsible evangelical subject, rather than following Weber ([1905] 2001) into a comprehensive structural analysis of the ways in which Christian thinking contributes to a religiously guided growth of a Protestant work ethic alongside the development of modern capitalism.

¹⁹⁹ See [Chapter 6: Situating Contemporary Televangelists](#) for further discussion of prosperity discourses.

surrounding responsible salvation. This chapter explores the ways in which elements of prosperity discourses are made apparent through the programs of Robertson, Hagee, and Van Impe while acknowledging that this does not always happen with complete unity; discursive tensions are noted where evident. In this next section, I will briefly explore the contested field of definitions²⁰⁰ that seek to understand prosperity gospels from a scholarly perspective. In the remaining sections of this chapter, I turn to my data to better understand how prosperity discourses influence mediated evangelist constructions of salvation-based health and financial well-being, respectively.

While today's popular usage of 'prosperity gospel' tends toward a catch-all umbrella term for a wide variety of religious discourses that promote divine intervention in matters of health and wealth, most contemporary scholars locate the origins of this *movement*²⁰¹ in mid-twentieth century American charismatic and neo-Pentecostal collectivities more broadly referred to as the Faith Movement (Hunt 2000, Schieman & Jung 2012). Based on their overview of prosperity gospel definitions, Scott Schieman & Jong Hyun Jung (2012) conclude that,

the prosperity gospel embodies a specific form of the more generalized belief in divine influence that explicitly identifies God's causal agency in two highly personal – and highly practical – domains of peoples' lives: *money and health*. People who believe in the prosperity gospel have faith that God will grant material prosperity or good health to those with sufficient faith [Pew Research Center 2006]; these rewards may be reaped by "faith alone" (Brouwer, Gifford, and Rose 1996). Similarly, financial strains or poor health may be perceived as divine punishment for sin or inadequate devotion (Mora 2008) (Schieman & Jung 2012:739).

²⁰⁰ This chapter is not meant to serve as a complete assessment of all varieties and definitions of what constitutes a prosperity gospel or practitioner. In the pages that follow, I will briefly highlight several commonly used scholarly and theological definitions (and discussions of prosperity movement origins) to showcase some of the narratives that feed into the prosperity discourses that are discussed in the latter sections of this chapter.

²⁰¹ The term 'movement' appears most often in the literature without any deconstructed location in a broader 'social movements' literature. I use this term here as a matter of pragmatism; however, any assessment of its alignment with social movements theory is beyond the scope of this analysis.

Kathleen Hladky (2012) also contributes to this discussion, arguing that prosperity gospels can be summarized by attention to two important teachings: “first, God grants all his faithful followers physical health and financial prosperity; second, believers claim their divine right to wealth and health through positive confession, financial offerings, and the persistent faith that God must fulfill his promises” (2012:83). More recently, Bradley A. Kloch (2014) also defines prosperity gospel in a similar manner:

the doctrine that God wants people to be prosperous, especially financially. Adherents to the Prosperity Gospel believe that wealth is a sign of God’s blessing and is compensation for prayer and for giving beyond the minimum tithe to one’s church, televangelists, or other religious causes. The logical extension of the Prosperity Gospel—sometimes explicit, sometimes not, depending on the preacher – is that the poor are poor because of a lack of faith... (2014:2).

Lastly, Kate Bowler (2013) acknowledges the challenge of comprehensively defining the diverse scope of theological, academic, and individual interpretations of what constitutes prosperity gospel, but also discusses prevalent themes within the field before making a distinction between the degrees of what she calls ‘hard prosperity’ and ‘soft prosperity.’

The prosperity gospel, I argue, centers on four themes: *faith*, *wealth*, *health*, and *victory*. (1) It conceives of *faith* as an activator, a power that unleashes spiritual forces and turns the spoken word into reality. (2) The movement depicts faith as palpably demonstrated in *wealth* and (3) *health*. It can be measured in both the wallet (one’s personal wealth) and in the body (one’s personal health), making material reality the measure of immaterial faith. (4) The movement expects faith to be marked by *victory*. Believers trust that culture holds no political, social, or economic impediment to faith, and no circumstance can stop believers from living in total victory here on earth. All four hallmarks emphasize demonstrable results, a faith that may be calculated by the outcome of a successful life, no matter whether they express this belief through what I call ‘hard prosperity’ or ‘soft prosperity.’ Hard prosperity judges people’s faith by their immediate circumstances, while soft prosperity appraises believers with a gentler, more roundabout, assessment²⁰² (2013:7-8).

²⁰² See Bowler (2013), Appendix B for further discussion of prosperity gospel and Appendix A for a list of Megachurches deemed to be practicing various degrees of prosperity teachings.

The field of definitions for prosperity gospels thus connects prosperous notions of good health and wealth to sufficient faith, and often to charitable giving to a ministry or other religiously sanctioned charitable organization. In doing so, the discursive contribution of contemporary prosperity gospel tends to fall very much in line with broader American cultural values concerning materialism and individualism (Hunt 2000) and a desire for the ‘good life’ (Bowler 2013), while reinforcing a direct relationship between faith and reward²⁰³.

While the body of sociological literature taking seriously the role of prosperity gospels in modern religious life is still evolving, many scholars working in the field identify this movement as finding particular prevalence amongst varieties of American evangelical and Pentecostal denominations. Despite this interest, there is still a paucity of qualitative, and especially quantitative analysis, of the complexity of these beliefs, values, and the relationships between demographics. Bowler (2013) recently addressed the difficulty in

²⁰³ As noted above, this brief synopsis of relevant academic literature on defining prosperity gospel is not meant to be exhaustive or complete. It instead seeks to provide the general tone of prosperity teachings that is necessary for understanding how elements of prosperity discourses are made apparent throughout my dataset to shape expectations for subject conduct in matters of health and wealth. I, like Bowler (2013), recognize that there are varying degrees here and acknowledge that theological understandings of what constitutes a prosperity gospel may differ slightly or dramatically from those of this field. For instance, the Lausanne Theology Working Group (an international group of theologians and evangelical thinkers) defines prosperity gospel “as the teaching that believers have a right to the blessings of health and wealth and that they can obtain these blessings through positive confessions of faith and the “sowing of seeds” through the faithful payments of tithes and offerings” (Lausanne Movement 2016). In a statement following meetings in 2008 and 2009, the group more narrowly defined certain prosperity practices that the group deemed to be false distortions of the bible that were ‘unethical and unChristlike’ but also welcomed further reflection on the “*theological, ethical, pastoral and missiological, socio-political and economic*” (Lausanne Movement 2016) influence of this phenomenon. While most theological interpretations of prosperity gospels undoubtedly contribute to prosperity discourses, as noted above, the analysis for this project stems from the discursive contributions of three televangelist programs on-air today. This analysis will be discussed at length through this chapter to articulate the ways in which Hagee, Van Impe, and Robertson contribute to a much broader prosperity discourse while at times both reflecting and contradicting popular academic and theological variants of prosperity gospel definitions. It is not my intent to definitively categorize what does and does not constitute a prosperity practitioner (see Bowler 2013 for discussion here) but rather to better articulate the discursive overlap and tensions that exist within the broader discursive formation concerning responsible salvation.

measuring the breadth of the prosperity movement. For instance, the prosperity gospel cuts across denominations, it is not limited to specific geographic regions, and few leaders “advertise themselves as a ‘prosperity preacher’ even if they sermonize weekly about divine finances...likewise, these congregational estimates cannot account for the millions of Americans who spice up their spiritual lives by watching their favorite televangelists, reading their publications, or attending their conferences” (Bowler 2013:4). The few available in-depth quantitative studies also exemplify the consequences of these weaknesses. A recent survey of global evangelical leaders (Pew Research Center 2011) found that ninety-three percent of those surveyed believe in divine healing, seventy-six percent have claimed to have witness incidents of divine healing, and fifty-eight percent agree that tithing²⁰⁴ is essential to being a good evangelical Christian. Despite this support for general prosperity principles, the same analysis also reports that global support for prosperity gospels is much less clear-cut. Ninety-percent of leaders agree with the statement ‘God doesn’t always give wealth and good health even to believers who have deep faith,’ while only seven percent chose the only alternative statement ‘God will grant wealth and good health to all believers who have enough faith’ (Pew Research Center 2011:109). While this Pew (2011) report explicitly states that their survey is representative of global diversity but is not likely representative of evangelicals as a whole (Pew Research Center 2011:7-8), the deficits in question phrasing and neglect of the complexity of component variables unfortunately limit the possibility of solid claims concerning this subject (based on the available data). This 2011 data also creates an interesting tension when compared with an earlier global Pew study (2006) of general populations of

²⁰⁴ Tithing is a key component to understanding financial prosperity gospels and will be discussed further in subsequent sections of this chapter.

Pentecostal Renewalists and other Christians. Unlike the 2011 analysis, the 2006 report conducts a more comprehensive analysis by country in regards to health and wealth measures. The 2006 Pew report concludes that “belief in the prosperity gospel is quite common among Christians in each of the 10 countries [surveyed], and tends to be stronger among Pentecostals than among non-renewalist Christians” (Pew Research Center 2006:30). According to the same analysis, forty-six percent of all American Christians surveyed²⁰⁵ agree that ‘God will grant material prosperity to all believers who have enough faith’ and fifty-six percent of the same demographic agree that ‘God will grant good health and relief from sickness to believers who have enough faith’ (Pew Research Center 2006:30). Likewise, a 2006 *Time* poll showed that two-thirds of respondents agreed that God wants people to prosper (Bowler 2013:6) and a 2007 Pew survey of Latino believers found that seventy-six percent of Latino evangelicals agreed with the statement “God will grant financial success and good health to all believers who have enough faith” (Pew Research Center 2007:121). While we may have to wait to better understand the full contours of the American prosperity movement, based on her research, Bowler (2013) confidently concludes that prosperity gospels are thriving in the United States, with millions of American Christians seeking money, health, and good fortune through divine faith; I am content to do the same. While we wait for more comprehensive analysis concerning the broader role of prosperity gospel in the global religious landscape, it is evident from my research that mediated evangelical salvation discourses are heavily reliant on the tenets put forth by umbrella understandings of prosperity gospels, and are therefore relevant to the analysis at hand.

²⁰⁵ N=681

By way of resurgent adaptations of prosperity gospels and established scriptural interpretations concerning faith-based healing and tithing, the evangelists considered here contribute to these longstanding discourses concerning the relationship between action, belief, and the prosperous blessings of a generous God. Yet, gone is the earlier faith movement ideal that health and wealth are “the automatic divine right of all Bible-believing Christians” (Hunt 2000:333). Here, affiliation alone is insufficient. Instead, the removal of sickness and poverty is available only to those who live out true Christian faith through belief and action. Hagee makes this most explicitly obvious in his introduction to one sermon series titled *Run to Win*: “you will never succeed in your personal life, your professional life, or your spiritual life until you know *all*²⁰⁶ of the Bible ingredients for asking for what you want either in the temporal or spiritual world. Stay tuned, you don’t want to miss this sermon on the ASK formula” (JHT: Tuesday, December 22nd, 2009). Under this discursive formation, prosperity in both health and finance are intimately linked to individual pursuit and effort concerning faith, belief, and prayer. Not only is personal prosperity steeped in responsibilized choice, national prosperity²⁰⁷ is also at stake here. Responsibilized Christian citizens are therefore offered choice and control concerning their personal and national well-being and financial security. The easily foreseeable discursive consequence of this positive relationship between faith and reward must suggest that believers are also held accountable for implied deficits of faith, as evidenced through the absence of health or good fortune, thus further perpetuating a resounding myth of religious

²⁰⁶ Emphasis has been added here through the use of italics.

²⁰⁷ While matters of national prosperity concerning national debt, capitalism, and socialism are part and parcel of the same discursive formation, these topics will be discussed further in the following chapter to allow adequate discussion here of individualized constructions of prosperity.

meritocracy that reflects the same realities of broader American social stratification²⁰⁸. As such, the intersection of these realities forms an unresolvable tension for the governed subject where poverty and disease become the inevitable byproduct of flawed faith and poor practice, while financial achievement and general well-being are constituted as heavenly rewards for the truly faithful. By examining these constructions of prosperous health and wealth (each in turn), this chapter contextualizes the ways in which each is discursively established and the resultant implications for the governance of evangelical subjects.

Health and Healing

As noted, promises of health and healing are certainly not unique to evangelical discourses; they appear frequently throughout the broad spectrum of secular, spiritual, and religious belief systems as a means of confronting the ever-present, tangible realities of death and disease. It should therefore be no surprise that promises of prosperous health, healing, and overall physical and spiritual well-being are regularly on offer throughout mediated evangelical programming. While none of the evangelists considered here explicitly televise individual ‘hands-on’ healing sessions, in explicit and subtle ways, all three link health and well-being to scriptural promises of blessings, while Robertson and Hagee regularly offer opportunities to achieve such blessings through the power of prayer. These links are constructed as easily attainable through active choice and unwavering faith, with anecdotal and testimonial evidence always at the ready.

²⁰⁸ For further discussion of the relationship between socio-economic status (SES) and belief in prosperity gospel, see Schieman & Jung (2012).

In his global analysis of Christian televangelism, J. Kwabena Asamoah-Gyadu (2012) argues that “television has developed as a point of contact between televangelists and viewers. There are testimonies from people who call in to say how they have received their healing at home simply by exercising the faith that is required of them” (2012:137). In accordance with many prosperity gospels, evangelists (and their mediated ministries) are treated as simply vehicles for the message; it is the construction of an active and ongoing choice of faith that enables subjects to reach for, and attain for themselves, healing for any manner of ailment. These prosperous rewards from a now benevolent God are freely available to those who make good on their end of this spiritual bargain. Given this interpretation, physical proximity is negated as a prerequisite for spiritual healing. As such, control over access to divine healing is placed solely in the hands of the believer and their connection with their faith; often with the implied caveat of personal deficits in faith and practice for those who remain ill despite their spiritual efforts.

As noted above, each of the evangelists considered here engages ideas concerning prosperous blessing with their own unique style, while still contributing to a unified discursive formation that reflects an overarching and consistent message concerning the promises and realities of health and wealth. While Hagee and Robertson regularly feature programming that directly addresses the topic at hand, Van Impe is somewhat of the odd man out here. Given that Van Impe’s very clearly stated mandate concerns the straightforward assessment of apocalyptic prophecy in news headlines as a central focus, rather than the less palpable governing structure that underlies *the 700 Club* and *John Hagee Today*, it is not at all surprising that one needs to dig deeper within his discursive portfolio to assess his rather less obvious relationship to prosperity gospels. The following

sections will address the ways in which each evangelist contributes the broader discursive formation concerning health, healing, and responsible salvation, with the bulk of the description attributed to the work of Hagee and Robertson.

Discussions of divine blessings figure prominently into Hagee's more traditional televised sermon style programming²⁰⁹. In fact, Hagee concludes every sermon by asking the congregation to raise their hands for a blessing. While often this encompasses a general blessing of acceptance of faith and God, he also uses this time to regularly discuss specific forms of blessings such as those regarding health, emotional comfort, or financial wealth, always in accordance with the overarching message of his chosen sermon for the week. Hagee's emphatic belief in this message thunders from his pulpit and routinely elicits participatory approval from his congregation in the form of applause and other visual gestures of agreement. Hagee also regularly exalts the capacity of Christ's healing powers throughout his sermons:

Fear not disease, I am the lord that heals you. If you are in this building and you are fighting in your body a disease or a sickness, I am telling you that Jesus Christ is still the great physician, and he's still the healing balm of Gilead. He can heal you and he will heal you today (JHT: Tuesday, November 17th, 2009).

That means whenever God heals your body you're to tell everyone you meet what a healing Jesus he really is (JHT: Tuesday, December 22nd, 2009).

Sickness comes from the devil. When you walk into a hospital room and your friend is there, a member of your family is there, you have the power to say, in the name of Jesus, I rebuke that disease and the God of heaven will heal that disease when you are right with God in heaven (JHT: February 25th, 2010).

²⁰⁹ As noted above, Hagee regularly preaches on the subject of prosperity concerning issues of health and wealth but also, on occasion, devotes non-traditional programming to the theme. For instance, on Friday, February 5th, 2010, a special episode featuring biblical principles for battling cancer aired during my sample. Throughout this episode, Hagee interviews female family members about their personal experiences with surviving cancer through spiritual healing.

While these discussions often offer the general and overwhelming potential of Christ's healing abilities, at times, Hagee also personalizes the message by making reference to specific dilemmas or scenarios, such as the presence of cancer, obesity, or depression. Either way, the message is consistent in its central theme: whatever ails you may be cured by divine intervention.

Like Hagee, Robertson also regularly celebrates the healing power of Christ. Given *the 700 Club's* broader focus on both ministry and general lifestyle issues, Robertson and his co-hosts engage a wide variety of topics related to health, healing, medicine, and healthcare – from a personal and political perspective. Before looking at the ways in which healthcare as a political values issue is taken up in the following chapter, this conversation will explore the ways in which individual health and healing are constituted as blessings of prosperity in a manner similar to that of Hagee. As stated, Robertson often tackles health issues through the analysis of news items and the presentation of stories featuring triumphant healing in bleak situations. He also calls upon his virtual congregation to ask for health and healing in communal prayer and presents general lifestyle features, such as an ongoing weekly segment entitled 'Skinny Wednesdays'²¹⁰. Like Hagee, Robertson regularly endorses the total capacity of Christ's healing powers throughout the various segments of *the 700 Club*:

God is a healing God. He loves you and wants to set you free. Just keep in mind, God is on your side (700 Club: Wednesday, February 10th, 2010).

There's nothing impossible with God...There's no such thing as an incurable disease. There's no such thing as hopeless when God is involved. Because when he's there, there's always hope (700 Club: Thursday, April 29th, 2010).

²¹⁰ According to CBN's *700 Club* website, this segment "brings you the latest in health and fitness information every Wednesday [where] Pat Robertson and today's leading experts...discuss ways you can improve your health, reduce aging, increase your energy, and receive the best medical care for you and your family" (CBN 2016e).

God is a healing God and when Jesus Christ was here on earth, he healed the sick. He cast out devils. He healed the sick and he proclaimed the goodness of his father....we believe, we believe lord, that you are able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask... (700 Club: Wednesday, June 2nd, 2010).

Therefore, both Hagee and Robertson present a united front concerning the unlimited potential of God and Christ for faith-based healing, in line with the broader field of prosperity discourse.

What remains expressly consistent across the discourse is the frequent reminder (at times subtle and at times explicit) that action and faith are always participatory prerequisites for accessing divine healing. This promise of abundant health is available only through the lived faith and practice of ‘authentic’ Christianity. Both Hagee and Robertson make sure to continually remind us that divine healing is available for the taking but always contingent upon the subject’s wholehearted belief, faith, forgiveness, thankfulness, and above all else, total acceptance of Christ as savior:

If you really want the double blessing, be thankful unto him and he will give you the double portion of the blessing. If you want the miracle, offer up a prayer of thanksgiving and God will do things supernaturally that will amaze you (JHT: Thursday, November 26th, 2009).

If Jesus Christ were standing on this platform, and he is....what would you ask him for? Do you need healing for your body, ask him. Do you want restoration for your broken marriage, ask him. Do you want your business to experience a financial breakthrough, ask. Do you want your children to come to Christ, ask... all of this and much more is available if you will simply ask and receive...its your initiative, not God’s. God said whatsoever you ask in prayer, I will do it (JHT: Monday, December 21st, 2009).

God heals people, Jesus heals people. He healed everyone who came to him...Folks, I want you to pray. This could be your moment. I was reading about Jesus. Jesus is the son of God. There’s nothing impossible with him. Nothing is impossible with him. He said ‘only believe’ and all things are possible to him who believes. That’s what Jesus said. Now let’s believe. What is the problem? You may be bound in a wheelchair. You may have paralysis. You may have terrible migraines. You may have cancer. You may have leukemia. You may have all kinds

of maladies. But we're going to believe God and the son of God will come and touch you (700 Club: Wednesday, February 3rd, 2010).

Gordon Robertson²¹¹: You have the Godlike power to change, and to literally shape your life and then you get the extra, well he'll [God] come along and help you. And he'll be your comforter and your helper and your all and all, to make sure that you make it through. Now, if this is for you, if this is what you want, all you have to do is ask (700 Club: Friday, April 9th, 2010).

Therefore, while the capacity to heal is completely located within the divine, the capacity to activate this blessing is only possible through the active choice and participation of the evangelical subject. Promises of health and prosperity are not simply guaranteed for all, as the divine will of God; it is the responsibilized subject that must take up this promise through the knowledge of these gifts, the acceptance of the Christ as savior, and the act of intentional request through prayer.

Evangelical subjects are thus constituted as individuals who possess both empowerment and control. Both Hagee and Robertson also offer tangible mechanisms for aiding in the improvement of this subject-divine partnership for healing. Throughout his sermons, Hagee regularly asks his electronic congregants to join his physically present congregation in reaffirming their faith. Through these requests, he offers all of his congregants a variety of opportunities to take easy action through individual, group, or mediated prayer, while his ministry's own 'commercials' advertise further opportunities through the purchase of DVDs and other religious consumer products created by Hagee himself:

If you're in this auditorium today, if you're watching by television anywhere on planet earth, the great physician is coming by your way and with a simple prayer

²¹¹ As noted previously, *the 700 Club* features a variety of hosts and co-hosts, including Robertson's son Gordon. Regardless of the host, the discursive message of *the 700 Club* remains consistent; however, unless noted otherwise in quoted text, the words offered up are spoken by Pat Robertson himself. As noted within this example, Gordon Robertson is the speaker in this passage.

of faith believing, you can be healed by the power of the resurrected son of God (JHT: Monday, November 9th, 2009).

I want you that are watching this telecast right now, if you are suffering from any sickness I want you to phone the number that's at the bottom of your screen because we have people there right now who will pray with you that God will heal you. I don't care if your pastor believes or doesn't believe the Bible, does or doesn't believe in divine healing, I do. I am circled by people who have been divinely and supernaturally healed by the power of God. And I want you to have that... I want you to pick up the phone and phone the person that's there right now in our office, they're not in some office on the other side of America, they're born-again Christians in our offices that want to pray for you... (JHT: Friday, February 5th, 2010).

The Healing Scriptures, as read by Pastor John Hagee have ministered to multiplied thousands of people since they were first recorded back in 1990. Now, we're excited to offer *The Healing Scriptures* on this self-contained audio player. It's equipped with a built in speaker. It comes with an earphone for private listening. Buy several. Give one to a friend or family member that's sick. It's ideal for bedside listening at home, hospital or travel. Call or visit our website for more information²¹².

In addition to offering up accessible opportunities for actionable expressions of faith, the evangelists considered here almost always display experiences of successful healing as legitimating evidence alongside these promises. While Robertson regularly offers personal stories of triumph as evidence of God's answers to prayer²¹³, Hagee occasionally submits anecdotal evidence²¹⁴. More often than not, Hagee simply turns to biblical literalism to fuel his practices of legitimation²¹⁵. Hagee reliably returns to the narratives and promises of

²¹² This *John Hagee Ministries(JHM)* produced commercial appears frequently throughout the duration of the sample and the advertised product continues to be offered for sale through the website (JHM 2016c), although it is now called 'The Power to Heal-Player'. The latest incarnation of the *JHM* website has conveniently grouped all of their 'Health and Healing' products under one category (JHM 2016b), making it much easier to find and purchase products designed to assist believers in attaining faith-based healing.

²¹³ 'Answers to Prayer' is also the title of a regular segment on *the 700 Club* and will be discussed in further detail later in this chapter.

²¹⁴ This offering of testimonial evidence is most explicitly notable during the abovementioned special non-sermon episode (Bible Principles for Conquering Cancer) where Hagee interviews his wife, sister-in-law and daughter about their experiences as cancer survivors.

²¹⁵ In addition to the special interview noted in the previous footnote, one other non-sermon episode focusing specifically on health issues was included in the segment. In his special interview with Dr. Don Colbert (author of 'I Can do this Diet'), Hagee defers to the doctor for expertise concerning diet and health, legitimating authority for Dr. Colbert's Christian medical perspective. While Dr. Colbert's own website,

scripture as the irrefutable evidence he needs to support any claim while also tapping into the experiential testimony of other healed believers to further reinforce these claims:

The fact is that twenty-five percent of the people in America will experience cancer and according to the American cancer society 1500 people a day will die of this dreaded disease. I want to assure you that when you receive the phone call from your doctor telling you that you have cancer, the purpose of this telecast is to plant into your mind and soul that there is hope and it is not the end it is not despair and desperation. You can come to divine health and to divine healing and every woman sitting on this set was told by a doctor, “it’s over”...as God has healed them. God can heal you (JHT: Friday, February 5th, 2010).

This is a gospel of hope. It’s based on evidence, hard cold fact of what God has done, can do and will do for every person here and the millions who are watching across America and around the world (JHT: Monday, February 22nd, 2010).

I don’t hope God answers prayer. I know God answers prayer. He hath done it and he will continue to do it. I don’t hope God heals. I know God heals. He hath done it and he will do it. I don’t hope God delivers. I know God delivers. He hath done it and he will continue to do it. That goes on and on. What God hath done, God can do. That’s the evidence of our hope. That’s the substance of our hope. Its not optimism it’s a fact! (JHT: Monday, March 1st, 2010).

Throughout this sample, the positive relationship between faith and health is constructed as a divine gift that is easily attainable. As such, those who are willing to commit to the spiritual process are empowered with access, choice, and control of their health and well-being. The telling of stories of triumph over disease and offerings of scriptural support further legitimate the resounding message that general health and recovery from disease result from individual effort in faith-based action.

As noted above, given the lifestyle focus of *the 700 Club*, Robertson also presents plenty of opportunity to discuss the many facets of the constructed relationship between

Divine Health Wellness (Colbert 2016), makes his Christian affiliation rather obvious, he now also contributes a *Bible Cure* series of books to the JHM ‘Health and Healing’ product catalogue (JHM 2016b). Titles include *A Bible Cure for ADD and Hyperactivity*, *A Bible Cure for Candida and Yeast Infections*, *A Bible Cure for Depression and Anxiety*, *A Bible Cure for Heart Disease*, *A Bible Cure for Hepatitis C*, *A Bible Cure for Sleep Disorders*, and *A Bible Cure for Thyroid Disorders*, to name a few.

faith and healing. As such, *the 700 Club* frequently features health related question and answer segments²¹⁶ where Robertson acts as both spiritual advisor and medical expert before offering up human interest stories of triumph over disease and/or mental health problems as further evidence for the power of faith-based healing. For instance, during one ‘Skinny Wednesday’ question and answer segment, a viewer writes in for advice: “I am standing and believing in faith for physical healing. Is it a lack of faith on my part if I also take medication?” (700 Club: Wednesday, February 3rd, 2010). This viewer letter evokes a response from Robertson that reveals his views on the ways in which faith and medicine can work congruently:

I don’t think so, I think God uses doctors. I think God gave us the blessings of medicine, and I’m just a firm believer in, you know there’s so many Godly people in medicine that really want to bring healing and health to people. I see nothing wrong with using, I mean praying and asking God to bless the surgeon, bless the doctor, bless the medicine. In the old days, they didn’t have any medicine. They came to Jesus and he healed them but it was healing through faith (700 Club: Wednesday, February 3rd, 2010).

While this viewer question offers the opportunity for Robertson to pontificate on issues typical of theological expertise, he also readily wanders into the role of expert on any given number of topics outside the theological, as evidenced in other explanatory responses during the same episode which include: describing the difference between vertigo and dizziness, and separately explaining the health benefits of both bananas and decaffeinated tea (700 Club: Wednesday, February 3rd, 2010). His Skinny Wednesday cohost Kristi also further reinforces Robertson’s authority during these segments by often offering agreement

²¹⁶ Almost every episode of *the 700 Club* features a segment entitled ‘Bring it On’. According to an older version of CBN’s *700 Club* website, “as a regular part of *the 700 Club*, Pat and Gordon Robertson invite millions of viewers like you to Bring It On, as you send questions about life, love, finances, morality, and what it means to be a Christian” (CBN 2016f, see 2016c for recent episodes of this feature). During the televised segments that result, the cohost of the day poses viewer questions while Pat or Gordon Robertson respond as expert authority on a wide range of topics – both religious and seemingly secular in nature.

and concluding with praise for his expertise on health matters: “I didn’t know that Pat! Maybe that’s why I should keep listening to you” (700 Club: Wednesday, February 3rd, 2010).

Another recurring segment, entitled ‘Answers to Prayer,’ exemplifies the discursive contours that surround promises of prosperous health, opportunities for participation, and legitimating practices concerning evidentiary support through testimonial evidence, all wrapped up into one powerfully dramatic foray into everyday lived religious experience. The Answers to Prayer segments appear frequently²¹⁷ as a mechanism to provide *Words of Knowledge* for viewers to *claim* while concurrently offering viewer-provided experience of such healings and blessings at work. Understandings of these so-called words of knowledge can be traced back to the promises of spiritual gifts articulated throughout I Corinthians 12. In an online video segment of *the 700 Club* that is external to this sample, Gordon Robertson elaborates the purpose of these segments for audience clarity:

...we do this often on *the 700 Club* where Terry and I will pray, dad and I will pray, Terry and dad will pray. Kristi will pray. Others will pray and we get supernatural revelation from God about specific diseases and illnesses and people that are asking for answers from God. And we join with them, and God speaks to us, and we share it, and people get healed. And people get set free, and people get financial miracles and people hear from God. You need to understand that this is a normal part of the Christian experience. I want to make it as simple as possible. If you hear from God, you have all you need to exercise the gifts of the spirit.... [*goes on to cite scriptural support*]...word of knowledge is just repeating what you hear from God (CBN 2016g).

In other words, words of knowledge are spiritual gifts offered by God, through *the 700 Club* hosts during prayer. These gifts are meant for specific people experiencing disease or ailment; however, the individual who the word of knowledge is intended for must also actively claim it as their own, through prayer, in order to receive the blessing.

²¹⁷ This segment appears in forty-percent of the sampled episodes, often on Wednesdays and Fridays.

As Gordon suggests above, a typical ‘Answers to Prayer’ segment follows this basic format: 1) viewer letters are posted as text on the screen providing evidence of prayers answered by claiming words of knowledge offered during previous *700 Club* broadcasts; 2) the cohosts then read multiple letters out loud while celebrating and/or commenting on each one; 3) the cohosts then invite the viewers to pray with them and claim their own words of knowledge that are about to be revealed; 4) the cohosts close their eyes, join hands, and pray, offering up specific words of knowledge regarding a variety of specific diseases and ailments for viewers to claim for their own; 5) lastly, Robertson blesses everyone watching and invites viewers to call the phone number now listed on the screen to report any answers to prayer that have been achieved through claiming an offered word of knowledge or to pursue further prayer off-air. The segments of quoted text listed below represent a typical example of viewers’ Answers to Prayer letters, followed by the Word of Knowledge prayers for the same episode:

Answers to Prayer:

Pat reads on screen text: Jane of Cleveland, Ohio performs competitive dancing on roller skates. Last February, she slipped on ice and had to have surgery to repair a tendon in her foot. After the surgery, she continued to feel pain. She also developed a fear of ever skating again. Then one day, she heard Kristi give this word of knowledge: “The Lord is healing someone with a torn or pulled tendon. The Lord is healing you from that.” Jane claimed the word and felt the pain in her foot lessen. Two days later, she was practicing for her skating competition. Her coach is amazed.

Then Kristi reads on screen text: Lou Ann, of Estacada, Oregon, began experiencing chronic back pain and was diagnosed with an inoperable cyst, located between two vertebrae. Although she tried a number of remedies, the pain was constant and excruciating. Then, while watching *the 700 Club*, she heard Pat give this word of knowledge: “There’s a malignant growth on someone’s spine. The doctors say it is inoperable. God says, ‘I will fix it.’ Right now, as we are praying, that inoperable growth is going to disappear...in the name of Jesus!” Lou Ann claimed this word, and the pain left immediately, and has not returned (700 Club: Wednesday, June 23rd, 2010).

Words of Knowledge:

Pat: ...there's somebody who has a lung condition, there's a fungus in your lung and God right now is healing that fungus, you can just cough and it's going to be completely alright, right now in Jesus's name.

Kristi: the lord is healing someone with a severe case of diabetes, you've had it, the repercussions are incredible and the lord is healing you right now, thank you Jesus.

Pat: oh my, you twisted your neck and you can almost feel something popped out on the side of your neck. Just put your hand over there on it, in the name of Jesus you'll feel heat and you'll be completely healed. You can move your neck and you're completely free in Jesus' name. Thank you lord.

Kristi: the lord is healing someone, its either cysts or tumors on your ovarian. The lord is healing that situation right now, in fact you've been praying for a child and that's been the complication. Well we're just going to stand in agreement that God's miracle will come forth and that baby will too. Thank you Jesus.

Pat: cancer in the thorax, God has healed you right now. That cancer is completely gone. And you saw that piece about a knee, you've got a knee problem, your knee keeps popping out. A trick knee they call it. God's going to stabilize that knee and the patella is going to be right where it's supposed to be, just put your hand on that knee, again you'll feel heat. In the name of Jesus, praise God... (700 Club: Wednesday, June 23rd, 2010).

These Answers to Prayer segments efficiently serve as both a discursive and a legitimating practice for the expression of expectation, responsibility, and experiential evidence. They provide ample opportunities for the viewer to encounter the stories of others like them who have accessed faith-based healing, while also offering up easy ways to faithfully claim responsibility for their own health and ailments through communal prayer and divine healing. Nevertheless, no matter what the miraculous gifts on offer may be, the consistent message of God as all-powerful healer is always balanced with the responsibility of individual choice and action through a wholehearted emphasis on claiming these gifts for oneself through faith and prayer.

As we can see above, *John Hagee Today* and *the 700 Club* offer a relatively uniform prosperity message regarding divine health and healing. Through *Jack Van Impe Presents*, we see a much more formulaic structure that very rarely veers from a central focus concerning the assessment of global news headlines as contextualized through prophetic

scriptural interpretation²¹⁸. Other than the odd joke or personal tale, nothing articulated through this program is presented without locating its origins in prophetic biblical passages as a sign of a rapidly approaching rapture timeline. As such, health and healing segments do not figure as prominently into the programming²¹⁹ when directly compared to *the 700 Club* and *John Hagee Today*. However, when present, the construction of health and healing as a promised divine blessing follows some similar trajectories to Robertson and Hagee, while at times diverging in significant ways. Despite Van Impe's explicit contempt for contemporary prosperity gospel preachers (JVIP: November 19th, 2011)²²⁰ who claim to possess, display, and sell healing powers, like Robertson and Hagee, he also takes up the construction of health as a promised blessing to be deliberately activated by faith and the acceptance of Christ as ultimate savior, but Van Impe does so much less frequently, and in less obvious ways. At times, Van Impe also relies on anecdotal testimonial evidence of faith-based healing while also implying individual and national fault for suffering and disease, despite his later on-air denial of a broader prosperity gospel concerning health and wealth. In doing so, Van Impe creates a less unified discursive contribution. While both Hagee and Robertson occasionally locate health and disease within the prophetic timeline of the impending apocalypse, Van Impe is the only evangelist considered here that frequently advances fatalistic themes of impending pestilence and otherworldly reward through the raptured avoidance of such turmoil.

²¹⁸ While apocalyptic prophecy always underlies salvation discourse for the evangelists considered here, the direct connections between prophecy and prosperity is not always on the surface. Ultimately, attaining prosperous health and wealth is a means to achieving responsible salvation and thus part of readying oneself for the impending rapture.

²¹⁹ It should be noted here that one issue relevant to health and healing that frequently appears throughout the sample concerns national healthcare legislation. Given how closely the sample aligns with the original introduction of the Affordable Health Care for America Act in November of 2009 (HR 3962, 2009), this is not surprising. This topic will be addressed in the following chapter.

²²⁰ It should be noted that this episode appears outside the sample utilized for this dissertation analysis.

Therefore, all three evangelists articulate health as a blessing and an expectation of biblical lifestyle; however, Van Impe also goes one step further to provide a plethora of scriptural support for preventive healthcare when directly asked through the ‘Question of the Week’ section of his ministry website. In response to one question, Van Impe cites II Corinthians 5:17, Romans 8:9, I Corinthians 6:19-20, I Corinthians 9:27 and Revelation 22:2-3 as evidence for keeping one’s body in good health²²¹. In seeming contradiction to his expressed belief in the biblical importance of general health noted above, Van Impe does not consistently argue that health is a divine guarantee for all ‘Godly Christians’. After speaking candidly and passionately against ‘phony on-stage healers’ who offer spiritual healing for financial offerings, Van Impe enthusiastically states his position:

Is it God’s will for everyone to be healed? I say dogmatically NO! My Bible says in James 1:12 blessed is the man who endures testing and suffering for he should receive a crown of life to lay at Jesus’ feet...Its not God’s will that everyone gets healed, we all have to die. Some of them say, it’s a demon that controls a person when they have sickness. No it is not. My Bible tells us that people who suffer are going to get rewarded as I’ve already said and every one of us is going to die either through sickness or an automobile accident... (JVIP: Saturday, November 19th, 2011).

Despite this later claim dismissing a broader prosperity gospel, throughout this sample, Van Impe still regularly expresses the capacity for spiritual healing through prayer by taking an active choice of Christ as savior. In doing so, he constructs a softer version of prosperity thinking. Unlike Robertson and Hagee, the Van Impes almost always articulate more specific health concerns, such as alcohol and drug addiction, as maladies for which healing can be accessed:

Rexella: Friends, when you follow the lord, you’re going to have peace. You’re not going to become an alcoholic or drug abuser. You’re going to live for God. So Jack

²²¹ The ‘Question of the Week’ Archive is still a feature of the 2016 online ministry; however, this quoted passage was one of the lost pages noted above. The original link to the question cited above is no longer accessible but is cited in the bibliography (JVIM 2015).

is going to show you right now how you can be forgiven of anything you don't want there...

Jack: Will you confess right now? Look at the lord, and say, father forgive me for my sins. Forgive me for drinking, forgive me for pot, forgive me for my sexual escapades, forgive me for my lying and swearing, forgive me for my dirty talk, forgive me for using your name in vain. God I'm sorry, I'm sorry. Cleanse me now... (JVIP: Saturday, March 13th, 21010).

Rexella: I was talking to a lady today and she said, oh Rexella, my son is on drugs and he can't get out. You know how you can get out of anything, if you have the lord in your life, he will guide you out of it and be your savior now and your savior forever... (JVIP: Saturday, May 29th, 2010).

Rexella: Amen, Amen, I just trust that you prayed that prayer. There is so much in the world that we want to get rid of. Perhaps it's in your life, drugs or alcoholism or pornography or whatever it is that has taken over in your life, the lord will deliver you and be your savior, come into your life and guide you in a new way (JVIP: Saturday, June 12th, 2010).

Also in line with the field considered here, and in seeming contradiction of his opposition to prosperity healers, Van Impe occasionally make use of testimonial evidence as a legitimating strategy for the power of faith and prayer as healing powers:

Jack: Oh do I love what God has done in this man's life (reads a viewer letter): "I would just like to thank you for your program last week. You see, I am a drunk, fighting it most of my life. When Jack mentioned that no drunkard could see the kingdom of God without repentance, it gave me the inspiration to give up the booze for good. The cravings are gone thanks to your words, and I am now able to get on with my life and function normally. Thanks Jack!" (JVIP: Sunday, December 27th, 2009).

Jack: I came up differently, in the night clubs of Detroit where my father was an entertainer, became an alcoholic and then the lord saved him (JVIP: Saturday, June 19th, 2010)

Ultimately these inconsistencies between Van Impe's adamant disdain for the popularized prosperity preachers of the day and expressed belief in the capacity for faith-based healing for substance addictions highlight an important discursive tension. While Christian subjects are not guaranteed good health and a life void of suffering under the Van Impe

model, they are certainly able to access healing through conscious choice of faith in much the same manner that is articulated by both Robertson and Hagee.

As discussed in earlier chapters, apocalyptic biblical prophecy serves as a central organizing feature of each evangelist's belief system. While Hagee and Robertson at times address the role of disease in apocalyptic chronologies (700 Club: Thursday, March 25th) and the reward of good health in a post-Armageddon heavenly world (JHT: Wednesday, December 9th, 2009 and Monday, December 28th, 2009), Van Impe regularly discusses the approaching role of disease and suffering throughout the Tribulation period. This portrayal of apocalyptic doom and plague is always balanced with a feel-good reminder to his viewers that the rapture will spare them from this period and heavenly rewards are awaiting them. In line with prominent prophetic discourses, Van Impe tells us that increased disease and suffering are both important signs of the rapidly approaching end times, as well as an assured apocalyptic reality awaiting those left behind to experience the seven-year Tribulation period:

Jack: ...and Jesus said that just before I come, there shall be pestilences, [quotes Bible passages regarding the four horsemen of the apocalypse]...all of these diseases now and virologists tell us there are over 1 million different pestilential plagues in the world, thank about it! What's going to happen in the future? In China, they are warning that avian flu that started with the birds, is starting to rise again and that's H5N1. When it mixes with H1N1, it says it will be comparable to the plague of 1918 when millions died...isn't it wonderful that we don't have to worry about these things because that happens in chapter 6 of the book of Revelations and we're gone in chapter 4...we go up in the twinkling of the eye...

Rexella: boy it's going to be a wonderful day when the lord comes back, no more disease. Whoa! (JVIP: Sunday, December 27th, 2009).

Rexella: well, let's turn to the diseases, now my heart, wooh, the first mutation of swine flu, they now have confirmed in Mexico and here's something else, the scientists warn of the rise of diseases spread from animals to humans. This is something that everyone was fearing would happen one day. How about this Jack...

Jack: Again, our savior preached about pestilences in Matthew 24:7 and Mark 13:8 but its really defined in Revelations 6:7 and 8 [quotes Bible passages regarding the

four horsemen of the apocalypse]...did you see those headlines? Animal viruses coming – 25 new ones in the last quarter of a century. And Rexella, I'm amazed because the world is worried, scientists say we were lucky that swine flu fizzled out, but if it mixes with another virus we're in...its here [holds up Bible]. Jesus is coming! (JVIP: Saturday, March 20th, 2010).

Throughout his discussions of apocalyptic timelines, Van Impe reinforces his assertion that disease and suffering are inevitable features of humanity while still also conveying the more common evangelical theme that true faith can spare the Christian subject from such suffering through his repeated contention that the rapture will spare him and his viewers from such hardships. Again, we see further evidence for a discursive tendency that constructs prosperous blessings of good health and otherworldly rewards as a salvation goal for the truly faithful.

This exploration of themes concerning health and healing not only examines the ways in which these evangelists contribute to broader discursive formations concerning biblical promises of health, healing, and general prosperity, it also exposes a relationship between health and faith where evangelical subjects are empowered to take responsible and deliberate action through healing prayer. Of course, the logical implication of this discursively constituted reality, is the converse realization that sickness, disease, and general poor health must indicate an absence of 'enough' faith, thus inherently locating fault within the subject's very acceptance of Christ as savior. By consistently reinforcing the capacity for activating divine healing through faith and prayer, and offering up testimonial stories as evidence for this relationship, ailing viewers are subjected to a subtle (and at times quite obvious) reminder of an implied personal deficit. A lack of faith or disregard for a biblically prescribed lifestyle are portrayed as mechanisms by which subjects accept and submit to their own suffering which then, in turn, becomes fodder for

evangelists who legitimate the ongoing presence of poverty, sickness, emotional distress, and torment as evidence of a need for increased faith and prayer. In addition to implied understandings of fault, direct claims of fault are also on offer. We can see this through Van Impe's direct assertion that new forms of cancer are linked to promiscuous sexual activity:

Jack: In fact, we told you something two weeks ago in an article and I didn't have time to explain it. It's this new cancer of the tonsils and the throat. You know what's causing it? Not liquor, not tobacco, I hate to say it, oral sex [dramatizes] "oh we don't have sex because we do this thing orally". Wait a minute, this new cancer is developing because it's the same cancer that the women get internally, and because of oral sex, most men that do it are getting it and isn't it what the Bible says would happen....be careful (JVIP: Sunday, December 13th, 2009).

Meanwhile, although Hagee emphatically reinforces the capacity and potential for faith healing, he also directly chastises viewers for the negative choices they make and their consequences for overall well-being (physical, financial or otherwise):

We sacrifice our marriages to obtain money, more of it. We destroy our relationships with our children, never spending time with them because we're chasing the almighty dollar. We destroy our health to get wealth and then we have to spend all of our wealth to regain our health. How dumb is that? (JHT: Monday, November 23rd, 2009).

The fact is, and I repeat, it is God's will for you to prosper...you have to have a spiritual relationship that is right with God to get the benefits of God. You can't rob God on Sunday and then pray to God on Monday and expect him to meet your prayer. God doesn't answer the prayer of thieves...if you're not prospering, its not God's fault. You are violating one of the principles of seed time and harvest (JHT: Friday, February 26th, 2010).

While promises of rewards encompass the bulk of this discursive field concerning health and wealth, implications of fault are also dominant features throughout these mediated evangelist discourses. Reminiscent of broader secular discourses concerning bootstrap meritocracies and neoliberal individualism, prosperity discourses make possible preventive actionable plans for responsibilized Christian subjects to take up at their discretion. As

stated earlier, this prevalent discursive feature of choice and fault is not one that stands alone in regards to health and well-being; the remainder of this chapter will explore wealth and financial blessings as the companion to health and healing in contemporary prosperity discourses, while following chapters will explore the ways in which national salvation takes shape through domestic voter values issues and foreign policy where healthcare, the role of government, and economic conditions are pressing concerns.

Wealth and Financial Security

As with health and healing, evangelical discourses concerning wealth and prosperity as divine blessings are prevalent and not without controversy. While prosperity gospels concerning health and well-being are almost always targeted at the individual, financial rewards and deficits encompass both the individual and the nation as a site for governance. Returning to the foundations of basic contemporary prosperity teachings, the relationship between wealth and faith is again constructed as a positive one, where wealth and faith move in tandem with one another. Accordingly, the point is often made clear that God intends for believers to be prosperous but always with expectations of unwavering faith, prayer, and other biblically prescribed practices, such as tithing (Pew Research Center 2006:11). Again, we see the amazing capacity of divine blessing juxtaposed with an expected reality of individual choice and participation: “when God provides for you, testify to every person that you see that has a need that the God that sits upon the throne is a God that provides. He makes a way where there seems to be no way. He will open doors and no man can close it” (JHT: Tuesday, December 22nd, 2009). The evangelists considered here all engage beliefs concerning financial prosperity for both individuals and the nation,

exhibiting many of the same discursive tendencies as those regarding health and healing. The abundant possibility for divine blessings of wealth is enthusiastically celebrated, while congregants are consistently reminded that their role in accessing these gifts is neither passive nor optional. Scriptural support and testimonial evidence play a key role in offering legitimization and implications of both individual and national fault for financial insecurity and poverty are always at the ready. The remainder of this chapter will explore the foundations of prosperity beliefs and practices in relation to personal financial blessings before examining the ways by which each evangelist contributes to the broader discursive formation²²².

As a result of this tendency for prosperity gospels to link religiousness with gain and loss, individual effort in work, faith, and practice is constructed as essential for obtaining financial reward for the true believer (Schieman & Jung 2012:740). As noted above, identifying exact measures of prosperity belief amongst American evangelicals is complex; however, the previously discussed Pew (2006) study reports that promises of material wealth are also embraced within these denominations, though slightly less than promises of good health. According to this same analysis, forty-six percent of Christians surveyed²²³ express agreement that ‘God will grant material prosperity to all believers who have enough faith’ (Pew Research Center 2006:30). Demographically, denominations more closely associated with evangelicalism such as Pentecostals (66%) and Charismatics (59%), express higher levels of agreement than non-renewalist Christians who sit slightly lower than the overall field at forty-three percent agreement (Pew Research Center

²²² Like matters concerning national healthcare, economic matters of national prosperity and poverty will be examined in the following chapter.

²²³ N=681

2006:30). Not surprisingly, more recent explorations of prosperity belief probe further at demographics. Schieman & Jung (2012) argue that both education and income are negatively associated with belief in health and wealth gospels. As such, the higher one's socio-economic status²²⁴ (SES), the less likely one is to express strong commitment to prosperity belief. Given the lackluster economic climate aligned with this dissertation sample (late 2009 – mid 2010), this association between SES and prosperity belief could provide potential explanatory power for the prevalence of financial topics during all three evangelist programs considered here, a mechanism to disperse hope to perhaps financially embattled viewers and congregants. Again, while the few measures of broader prosperity belief concerning material wealth convey a complex social reality, the evangelists here offer uniformity amongst their belief in biblical support for a direct relationship between authentic religiousness and financial reward. In doing so, they express a consensus concerning how to stimulate prosperity through faith, belief, and practice.

Before addressing the ways in which responsible salvation is legitimated further through prosperity of wealth, it should be noted that all three evangelists considered here do not hesitate to dole out advice concerning fiscal matters and/or financial woes. With Hagee and Van Impe, this constructed expertise concerning manners of money is at times offered up with scriptural evidence to support a conception of the Bible as a solid financial planning tool. Hagee regularly (and often bluntly) advises his congregation to work hard, live thriftily, and avoid debt: “let me tell you how to survive financial problems: One, tithe. Get God on your side. Two, cut up your credit cards. Hmmm, that’s a sermon by itself. Three, stop spending more than you make. Learn when to say no” (JHT: Monday, March

²²⁴ Schieman & Jung (2012) measure SES here by income and education.

8th, 2010). Likewise, through his website, Van Impe advises viewers to keep money in the banks despite concerns over the American economy: “leave it in the bank. They now are insuring it to \$250,000 per person and don’t put it in your mattress because they will come in your house if they know it’s there and kill you. So the safest thing is the banks today”²²⁵. All three evangelists considered here also express grave concern over growing individual and national debt; however, Van Impe is the only one to acknowledge debt as a reality that may be increasingly unavoidable for some. He makes clear here that debt is not necessarily an obstacle to living a Christian life and accessing the rapture: “everybody has debt of some kind and if we were left behind because of that debt, I don’t think there would be 100 people going to heaven at the rapture. It’s that tough”²²⁶. Of the three evangelists considered here, Robertson advises viewers most often and *the 700 Club* includes a wide array of financial topics ranging from credit card debt to inexpensive activities for marital dates. Similar to his adopted expertise concerning health and medicine, Robertson also confidently takes on the role of financial expert during this question and answer segment, typical of any given ‘Money Monday’²²⁷ episode:

Question: I am thankful that I have health insurance but is there anything I can do to lower the cost my premiums without sacrificing the quality of my care?

Robertson: there are many things and I think the most important one is to set up a high deductible because you don’t want to use your insurance policy for every time you sneeze...

Question: I’ve heard you mention both traditional and Roth IRAs. Would you explain the difference between the two and how I can know which one is the best for my needs?

²²⁵ The ‘Question of the Week’ Archive is still a feature of the 2016 online ministry; however, this quoted passage was one of the lost pages noted above. The original link to the question cited above is no longer accessible but is cited in the bibliography (JVIM 2015a).

²²⁶ The ‘Question of the Week’ Archive is still a feature of the 2016 online ministry; however, this quoted passage was one of the lost pages noted above. The original link to the question cited above is no longer accessible but is cited in the bibliography (JVIM 2015b).

²²⁷ As the name suggests, this feature always appears on a Monday; however, it does not appear weekly. The general purview of Money Monday segments will be discussed in more detail later in this chapter.

Robertson: Well, with a traditional IRA, the money that you put in is tax deductible and it stays in there, tax deductible but when you bring it out you pay ordinary income taxes on the money. Whereas with the Roth you don't have the benefits of some of the tax deductibility going in but inside the Roth it is not taxable and then when you bring it out of the Roth you don't pay taxes on it...

Question: What do you think of extended warranties? We recently purchased a new flat screen TV and the salesman offered me an extended warranty. I turned it down – was that a good choice?

Robertson: You're brilliant, absolutely brilliant. I mean these things are a rip-off. The retail vendor makes a fortune on extended warranties...they sell it to make money, that's what it's all about (700 Club: Monday, June 7th, 2010).

By positioning the Bible as an overarching guide to life that provides counsel for sound financial planning, the evangelists here rely on a de facto expertise concerning matters of money granted by their unquestioned theological and spiritual authority. Alongside their citations of scriptural evidence and anecdotal tales of prosperity, this conflation of theological and financial expertise serves as a further legitimating strategy for their claims.

The most common financial theme addressed throughout the sample concerns combatting financial hardship through religious charitable giving. Like health, the capacity for divinely granted financial security is typically accessed through acceptance of Christ as savior through faith, prayer, and practice. While all three evangelists considered here advance messages of financial prosperity with their own unique style, each endorses an expectation of charitable giving as an expected actionable plan for accessing financial blessings. While prayer is also offered up as a companion mechanism to achieving financial health, the most direct route to financial plentitude occurs through the principle of *tithing*. The concept of tithing requires the giving of ten percent of one's income to God through charitable religious donation (Pew Research Center 2006:11). Tithing is not a concept unfamiliar to broader Christian denominations and remains consistently popular amongst evangelical leaders. Fifty-eight percent of global evangelical leaders surveyed consider

tithing to be essential to being a good evangelical Christian with a further thirty-two percent claiming it to be important but not essential (Pew Research Center 2011:43). All three evangelists considered here regularly encourage their viewers and congregants to practice tithing while habitually reminding them that tithing is set forth as a biblical principle that will garner reciprocal blessings of financial gain. Despite Van Impe's scorn for wealthy prosperity preachers and their lavish homes and jets (JVIP, Saturday, November 19th, 2011), his mandate for tithing as a biblical principle is still made evident and, in doing so, he articulates elements of prosperity thinking: "the Bible teaches that believers are to tithe ten percent of their earnings. Now I don't care if it's a dollar, of a little boy selling lemonade, that's ten cents for the lord. If its ten dollars, it's a dollar for the lord" (JVIP: Sunday, December 13th, 2009). Like Van Impe, Hagee also regularly engages the topic of tithing throughout his sermons, at times alluding to financial tithing as planting seeds, seeding, or binding:

God does nothing, until you take the initiative...what about finances? Bible says give, that's you taking the initiative. And it shall be given unto you but first you give and God gives back to you. Tithing is not giving, tithing belongs to God. Giving above the tithe is what releases the treasury of heaven into your life...when you take initiative, God springs into action (JHT: Friday, February 12th, 2010).

What is tithe? That's ten percent of your income. The tithe is not a debt you owe, it's a seed we sow. It is also a first fruits. That means that if I laid out on this pulpit ten one hundred dollar bills, the first one belongs to God. That's first fruits. If I pay Sears, Americard, MasterCard, anyone else's card and I give God what's last, I'm saying to God "you come after everybody else"...somebody said, "preacher, you don't expect me to give ten percent of my income to God?" No I don't but God does. I'm in sales, he's in management (JHT: Thursday, February 25th, 2010).

Pray with me... from this day forward, I am willing to live on the divine economy, I'm believing that as I plant my seed, God will give me the harvest. I will be patient and I will be obedient and believe that God will give me the financial increase to give me absolute control over my future and for my children and my children's children because this is the will of God according to the word of God. (JHT: Friday, February 26th, 2010).

Both *Jack Van Impe Presents* and *John Hagee Today* approach financial woes as a common problem for Christian subjects. As such, tithing and prayer for relief are represented as mechanisms for achieving financial security and/or wealth. These options again empower the believer to effect change in their financial realities by affording them the capacity to take up the scriptural promises of prosperity and regain control of their finances through faith and practice.

As stated, both Van Impe and Hagee reference biblical support for the practice of tithing; however, both also offer evidence of abundant rewards through both scriptural and testimonial evidence. Both Hagee and Van Impe repeatedly portray heaven and the second coming of Christ as experiences of great reward for true Christian subjects, typified by the examples listed here. This sort of promise of a postponed divine reward is common throughout Christianity, and evangelists frequently embrace this narrative by offering specific testimony concerning financial triumph through divine gifts. For instance, Hagee uses personal experience here to remind his congregation and viewers of the power of tithing and prayer to grant prosperity:

Lastly, I'm thankful to go for his unlimited provision. The Bible says my God should provide all of your needs. A few years ago I asked God to let cornerstone church become a debt free church because I told you that I saw a financial crisis looming and it is now here. For those years, you have offered extra money. I want to tell you all here and those of you watching that cornerstone church is a debt free church from top to bottom. It is my prayer for you that God will make all of your homes debt free and bless you with blessings that you cannot contain...yelling...it is the lord that gives you the power of wealth...may God give it you because his word is true (JHT: Thursday, November 26th, 2009).

Advocating tales of financial blessings as the result of faith, active prayer, and tithing further reinforces the evangelists' efforts to convey scriptural adherence as a mechanism for financial gain while also serving as legitimating evidence to display the power of God's

capacity to grant divine wealth. Tithing is thus constructed as a biblically mandated practice that enhances one's ability to choose financial relief. As such, believers are offered another actionable plan for attaining financial abundance, and thus further imbued with the power to choose their own fortune; they can do so by offering up their own financial gifts with the eternal promise of reciprocal prosperity – both in this world and beyond.

Like Van Impe and Hagee, Robertson also contributes to discursive constructions of tithing as an active practice for obtaining financial gain; however, his representations and process are much more streamlined throughout this sample. Again, given its lifestyle focus, segments concerning finance are regularly featured throughout the sample of *the 700 Club* programming, including an occasional feature entitled 'Money Mondays' where tales of financial blessings are narrated, financial experts are interviewed, and viewer questions regarding finances are posed to Robertson for advice²²⁸. Viewers are regularly reminded throughout these segments that God wants them to prosper and that financial security is within their grasp. During 'Money Mondays', *the 700 Club* also features human interest stories to showcase dramatic examples of God's financial blessings while inviting viewers to activate their own financial gains through the practice of tithing. The following passage of quoted text describe a typical human interest segment of financial reward, followed by Robertson's commentary:

This video segment features Ricky and his family²²⁹. Ricky and his wife own a trucking business which saw profits hit hard by rising fuel costs. They put everything into their business but were having trouble keeping it going. They had faith in God to keep their business going. The announcer proclaims that Ricky and

²²⁸ This question and answer style segment is similar to the Bring It On segment discussed earlier in this chapter, but focuses solely on questions and answers regarding financial matters.

²²⁹ Please note: the italicized portions of the above noted text represent my summaries of a particular *700 Club* segment (in my own words). My summaries here describe the discussion that is offered up by an unseen narrator for the segment. Robertson's commentary that follows these summaries are his own words, and are therefore transcribed word-for-word.

his wife were faithful tithers and have been CBN Partners for years. When his business was ailing, Ricky had initially thought that it was better to wait to donate but then decided you cannot wait for a more convenient time to tithe and was willing to trust God. They called CBN and increased their commitment from \$20 a month to \$500 a month. They scraped by for months but in the New Year, they experience a huge change in new business and are now doing extremely well and are expanding their business. Ricky believes that this is the only area in the Bible that God calls on us to test him and you can trust him

Robertson: I'm just crazy enough to believe it with you, brother. God does what he says he'll do! Ladies and Gentlemen you can count on the lord. A lot of other things will disappoint you in this life but God will not...for those of you who want to join *the 700 Club*, and I wish you would, it would be a chance for you to enter into the some of the blessings that Ricky was talking about and this, I want to give you is *The Secret Kingdom* on DVD (700 Club: Wednesday, June 2nd, 2010).

The product referenced in this episode is continually offered throughout the sample, oftentimes following human interest segments and solicitations for charitable donations. On the CBN website, *The Secret Kingdom*, (authored by Pat Robertson) is subtitled 'your path to peace love and financial security,' and invites the reader to "experience the rewards for your faithfulness with God's gifts" (CBN 2016h). In line with Robertson's *700 Club* message, the CBN website suggests that "these ten principles to happiness are not 'secretly' tucked away, but rather are available to everyone-without exception. They are operative principles that govern all behavior and their impact on our lives is as certain and predictable as the natural law of gravity" (CBN 2016h). As such, the cross-mediated message remains consistent and the viewer is again empowered to seek financial relief through biblical promises while also being offered an easily accessible mechanism to do so through active prayer and tithing.

While all three evangelists advocate tithing as a biblical mandate and actionable plan for alleviating financial woe, Hagee and Robertson go one step further by reinforcing the notion of a proportionate positive relationship between charitable gifts and reciprocal

blessing. Hagee most clearly articulates this message of empowered choice and responsibility for one's financial reality during one sermon:

The size of your harvest is determined by the number of seeds that you sow. II Corinthians 9:6, a farmer who plants just a few seeds, will get only a small crop but if he plants much, he will reap much...let me give you that profound mathematical formula again. Nothing times nothing is nothing...how many of you would agree with me that prosperity is better than poverty, raise your hand? I've tried both, I like prosperity a lot better but it's your choice! (JHT: Friday, February 26th, 2010).

In other words, blessings of a financial nature are proportionate to one's tithed gift to God and viewers are subtly (and at times explicitly) encouraged to seek greater wealth by giving beyond the ten-percent tithing requirement. Neither Hagee nor Robertson argues that poverty alleviates the subject of the responsibility for charitable religious giving. In fact, the opposite consistently occurs where both evangelists instead advocate tithing as a means of alleviating poverty, no matter what one's financial burden:

Hagee: *"Pastor, I'm so far behind financially, I'll never catch up".* That's absolutely wrong. The Bible does not teach that. Paul wrote in II Corinthians 9:8 God is able to make it up to you. Listen to that, God is able to make it up to you by giving you everything you needed and more so that there will not only be ...he can give back to you what you lost in the bankruptcy, he can give back to you what you lost in that bad business venture. He can give back to you what you lost when you were unemployed. The only hope you have of catching up is planting your seed in the kingdom of God and watching the economy of the kingdom of God work for you (JHT: Thursday, February 25th, 2010).

Robertson: Over the past few years, many Americans have lost their jobs. Steve and Janice Zimmerman were among those who were out of work...money was tight. Steve and Janice made a decision that defied logic but it multiplied their money.

***This video segment**²³⁰ features the Zimmermans who experienced sudden and severe income loss in 2008. In addition to tithing to their local church, the Zimmermans had also pledged \$10,000 dollars to CBN that year. Steve's initial thought was to neglect their pledge but Janice argued that they needed to honor it. They cut their spending dramatically and agreed to keep their pledge to see where*

²³⁰ Again, the italicized portions of the above noted text represent my summaries of a particular 700 Club segment (in my own words). My summaries here describe the discussion that is offered up by an unseen narrator for the segment. Robertson's commentary that follows these summaries are his own words, and are therefore transcribed word-for-word.

God would make up the difference. In early 2009, Steve received a call from a former business partner and they decide to go back into business. Within weeks, their business booms. This experience reinforced their beliefs in God's faithfulness. God can create finances out of nothing.

Robertson: He [Steve] is absolutely right. He [God] can create finances out of nothing (700 Club: Wednesday, May 5th, 2010).

Thus, the practice of tithing is constructed as a biblical expectation of good Christian subjects, regardless of financial ability, where a proportionate reciprocal payoff is dangled as the idiomatic carrot to elicit compliance.

Here we see the inevitable consequence of this constructed direct relationship between faith and blessing. If financial prosperity is the divine reward for true faith and adequate tithing, then the reverse must also hold weight – that continued poverty is somehow the result of personal deficits in either faith or charitable giving²³¹. The Christian subject who remains poor, despite continued prayer and tithing, is left to assume that he or she is either at fault in their convictions or their financial gifts are not enough to elicit the abundant reciprocal blessing of divine reward. Of course, there is also an argument made that the crowns and riches promised to Christians in the afterlife may alleviate this consequence; however, the ongoing endorsement of testimonial evidence of this-worldly financial blessing serves to reinforce a reality where reciprocal blessings are prevalent for the faithful. Furthermore, all of the evangelists considered here also directly assert the consequences of failure to happily tithe in God's name:

If you work with it, it blesses you, if not, it hurts you (700 Club: Monday, June 14th, 2010).

Now what happens when Christians refuse to do it? Malachi 3:10 and 11, God says, you've robbed me...he says if you tithe, I will open the windows of heaven and

²³¹ As noted in the previous chapter, Bean (2014) also found similar narratives amongst her participants regarding the redemptive role of poverty. This narrative also helps explain why social change and structural welfare reform is met with disdain by many evangelicals. This subject will also be taken up in detail in the following chapter.

pour out a blessing upon you that you'll not be able to receive it all. Oh it's so important to obey God and to do what you're supposed to do (JVIP: Sunday, December 13th, 2009).

refusing to tithe is to live in rebellion of God...you need to tithe because you live under a financial curse if you don't (JHT: Thursday, February 25th, 2010).

While ignorance of biblical mandates for living a Christian lifestyle are also addressed in accordance to afterlife and second-coming judgments²³², Hagee's concept of a 'financial curse' comes closest to the implied and direct consequence for neglecting the practice of tithing. Viewers are presented with countless stories of abundant reward and then offered seemingly easy and accessible opportunities to partake in these blessings through charitable giving to each ministry, while also being consistently reminded of the vengeful side of a God willing to deny prosperity to those who forgo scriptural obligations. This so-called law of reciprocity constructs a scenario where believers are both chastised and comforted at the same time, by use of the exact same testimonial and biblical evidence.

Conclusion

Promises and evidence of prosperous health and wealth constitute an important contribution to the broader discursive formation concerning responsible salvation. Throughout this chapter, it has been made evident that despite occasional tensions, broader elements of prosperity gospel thinking can be located throughout the data considered here. All three evangelists explicitly mobilize biblical authority and their own theological expertise to lend weight to their advisements concerning an endless variety of medical and financial matters. While each evangelist here constructs their message and expectations through their own interpretive lens, the data is characterized by much more agreement than

²³² See Chapters 9 and 10 for further discussion.

dissent regarding this topic. Overwhelmingly, we see an emphasis on capacity and choice where Christian subjects are regularly responsabilized to actively pursue well-being and wealth through deliberate planning in belief and practice. In accordance with the broader concept of responsible salvation, the wanting subject is imbued with a sense of control by providing an attainable course of direction to set right their health and financial misfortunes. Christian subjects are offered the option to partake in the constant faithful action to accept Christ as savior and unlock the capacity of divine blessing, thus granting the truly faithful the power to access healing and financial reward through the biblically legitimated practices of active prayer and tithing. By forming a divine pact with Christ through knowledge of scripture, prayer, faith, and deliberate choice, the subject is thus provided with a seemingly concrete actionable plan for healing their ailments and curing their financial woes, while also providing a biblically mandated governing structure for living a healthy and wealthy everyday life. This construction of a religious meritocracy where prosperity is constructed as evidence of God's favor, and as evidence of true faith and inspired practice, also conversely reinforces an oppositional reality where the ill and the poor are left to wonder if they are faithful enough or if they have given enough in the name of their God. In conclusion, while the capacity of providing reward is located squarely within the divine, the responsibility and choice for not just salvation, but for this-worldly good health and financial stability, is located within the responsible evangelical subject. As noted above, all of the features described here also contribute to the broader constitution of prevailing evangelical subjectivities; the themes taken up in this chapter concerning individual choice, action, and fault are also constructed as relevant to national

concerns of health and wealth. As such, these discussions will be further elaborated in the next two chapters concerning national and foreign political values issues.

Chapter 9: A National Politics of Salvation

Blessed is the nation whose God is the Lord (NIV: Psalms 33:12).

*Ladies and gentlemen, our pilgrimage is still unfinished, our journey unended;
let us with the candles of our ideals, continue (Pat Robertson: January 31st, 1986²³³).*

Introduction

When we think of the intersections of evangelicalism and American politics, oftentimes the rise of a loud, family values-oriented Christian Right springs to mind, bringing with it a whole host of clouded visions of American theocracies. The reality of the relationship between evangelicals and political engagement paints a much more complex picture of identity, belief, and practice²³⁴. This doctoral research was never intended to assess the adoption of political engagement as a meaningful religious practice for evangelical congregations. Instead, I have explored the discursive contours of evangelical subjectivities that are formed through media. In doing so, I argue that an evangelical subjectivity characterized by political action regarding foundational apocalyptic beliefs is taking shape through the mediated evangelist discourses that inform this project. The evangelical leaders considered throughout this study are no longer content to sit on the marginalized sidelines of an imagined American political arena. Pat Robertson executed a failed presidential bid in 1988. John Hagee holds an annual lobby summit in Washington each summer. Van Impe critiques the Obama administration as much as, if not more than, the popular newsmakers and pundits of our age. Outside of these overt political acts, all three mediated evangelists also engage political values issues throughout their

²³³ See Robertson (2016e).

²³⁴ See Bean (2014) for a thorough analysis of the ways in which politics and civic engagement inform evangelical identity in local American and Canadian congregations.

programming, while regularly taking up opportunities for political commentary regarding relevant and seemingly unrelated religious and secular issues, narratives, and topics. In line with the broader goals of this dissertation, this chapter interrogates the discursive level where the construction of a politics of faith takes shape through mediated evangelism. As such, this is not a variant of an investigation of the much more popularly studied relationship between evangelicals and identified political affiliation, but rather, it is an exploration of intersections between religious, secular, and political discourses that coalesce as a discursive strategy of legitimation for evangelical governance. This chapter first outlines common categorizations of political priorities for the American public before examining the ways in which these mediated evangelists construct their agenda of American religious-political priorities²³⁵.

Conceptualizing Political Importance

When imagining the relationship between American evangelicals and politics, it is easy to fall back on the longstanding popular vision of loud passionate protests over pro-life agendas and definitions of marriage. The reality of the political landscape, as expressed through mediated evangelical discourse, is much more complex than this two-fold agenda. The political priorities articulated throughout this sample of mediated evangelism are expectedly aligned with those of the broader American public, albeit likely articulated and legitimated in different ways. While abortion and same-sex marriage are certainly relevant features to this discussion and do appear as political priorities throughout the data sampled for this dissertation, they feature far less prominently than expected at the outset of this

²³⁵ This chapter will focus on domestic political priorities while the following chapter will address international political priorities.

research. In following the data, what is much more dominant concerns a politics of economics and governmental overreach where the core rally cry is heralded over a perceived rise of socialist agendas in Washington. This first section discusses relevant means for organizing a discussion around evangelical domestic political priorities. The remainder of the chapter follows a data-centric approach to guide the discursive analysis of the most prominent political priorities articulated by Hagee, Robertson, and Van Impe.

Like all definitions, conceptualizing and categorizing *political importance* or *political priorities* presents its fair share of challenges. While I will return to my data as a guide for establishing topical relevance and importance to this project, a discussion of common measures helps to guide this discussion, and lends legitimacy to these markers of political engagement. Both Gallup (2016) and the Pew Research Center (2016) regularly survey public interest in defining a political agenda of importance for congress and the president. While some variation in what constitutes a top priority occurs from year to year (and even month to month), the list of key featured categories rarely changes significantly, suggesting that the landscape of national concerns is characterized by relative stability. A regularly employed open-ended polling question for Gallup, asks respondents “What do you think is the most important problem facing this country today?” (Newport 2010). Given the prevalence of Gallup in American polling, we can reasonably assume that the data garnered through this question can give a broad sense of potential political priorities for both citizens and politicians. In fact, a 2010 assessment report on this particular question unequivocally advises American politicians to take heed of their polling:

Although the precise percentage of Americans mentioning economic concerns varies from month to month, these issues have dominated the public's consciousness for well over two years. This fact should serve as a sharp reminder

to politicians and challengers involved in House and Senate races this fall; failure to address economic issues will be at the candidate's own peril (Newport 2010).

Therefore, Gallup has constructed this question as a barometer for gauging public perceptions for defining a national agenda. Given that the majority of the data sampled for this dissertation was collected in early 2010, an exploration of that year's responses is most relevant. Since the question is open-ended, the scope of possible participant responses is vast. In an effort to manage and categorize their data, Gallup distinguishes between economic problems and non-economic problems; however, these categories are far from mutually exclusive in practice. For the 2010 data, the top three economic concerns were the economy in general, unemployment/jobs, and federal budget deficit/federal debt. Likewise, the top three non-economic concerns were dissatisfaction with government, poor healthcare/healthcare costs, and immigration/illegal aliens²³⁶. Across the two categories in 2010, the top ten problems indicated by respondents are as follows: economy in general (31%), unemployment and jobs (22%), dissatisfaction with government (11%), immigration (7%), healthcare issues (7%), natural disaster response (7%), federal budget and debt (6%), fuel and oil prices (5%), war (4%), lack of money (3%), moral, family, and religious decline (3%), situation in Afghanistan (3%), education issues (3%), and situation in Iraq (3%)²³⁷.

The Pew Research Center also regularly solicits public opinion regarding political priorities for social problems. Instead of using open-ended questioning to solicit

²³⁶ It should be noted that the June 2010 data references 'natural disaster response/relief' as the top identified non-economic problem; however, this is anomalous across the rest of the dataset for 2010. Given that 2010 was a particularly deadly year for natural disasters across the world (The Associated Press 2010), this is not surprising. Its presence in this cycle is not indicative of consistency as this category does not often appear as a top priority. For instance, in 2014 it does not appear at all on the list of top non-economic priorities (Gallup 2014).

²³⁷ My paraphrasing has been added here in summarizing these categories, with great attention paid to ensuring the meaning has not changed.

respondent-identified priorities, Pew uses scaled responses to gauge support for a pre-defined list of problems. The relevant Pew survey question states: “I'd like to ask you some questions about priorities for President Obama and Congress this year. As I read from a list, tell me if you think the item that I read should be a top priority, important but lower priority, not too important or should it not be done” (Pew Research Center 2010a:11). While many of the categories identified by respondents as top priorities correspond to the Gallup categories, we do see some variance here. We also see much stronger levels of identified support for key categories, a probable result of the difference in using open-ended versus closed-ended questioning. Across the listed categories in Pew’s 2010 survey of political priorities, the following were most identified as top priorities: economy (83%), jobs (81%), terrorism (80%), social security (66%), education (65%), medicare (63%), deficit reduction (60%), healthcare (57%), helping the poor (53%), military (49%), energy (49%), health insurance (49%), crime (49%), moral decline (45%), finance regulation (45%), environment (44%), tax cuts (42%), immigration (40%), lobbyists (36%), trade policy (32%), global warming (28%).

While neither of these measures is perfect, an examination of both of them can give us a reasonable snapshot of how the American public conceptualizes issues of political importance in 2010. Of course, there are also notable absences from these two lists of top priorities, particularly in regard to specific types of so-called ‘family values’ issues. While Pew measures each of these elsewhere in various ways, Gallup’s 2010 polling lists these issues as having been identified but not of much statistical significance throughout each cycle of polling. Some of the issues identified by Gallup respondents (outside of the top twenty identified political problems) include: racism, abortion, poverty, drugs, welfare,

children's behaviour, lack of military defense, unifying the country, gay rights issues, gun control, the media, overpopulation, and electoral reform. Unsurprisingly, Americans see a vast amount of potential problems for their political leaders to tackle, with economic priorities topping both datasets. My own dataset of mediated evangelist discourse tells a similar story with notable departures. Of course, all of the identified issues from both Gallup and Pew appear in some respect within my sample; however, not necessarily as one might expect. The evangelists considered here certainly mobilize all of these issues throughout their sample, relying on many of them as general indicators of an overarching moral decline across the nation. As noted above, Hagee, Robertson, and Van Impe regularly engage with issues of national political importance, although their focus and attention to various issues can be indicative of both pattern and exception amongst the three. Given the timespan of the sample and the scope of this dissertation, it would be impossible to adequately address each issue in detail. This analysis isolates their discussions of economic decline and healthcare reform as key organizing issues that exemplify their core enthusiasm for advancing political engagement against what they perceive to be an overreaching federal government rife with socialist agendas. The chapter sections that follow identify and explore the ways in which all three evangelists construct political agendas, with similar and exceptional approaches, while using a variety of identified political issues as exemplars of broader themes.

Constructing Religious-Political Engagement

Much of the research concerning evangelicals and politics examines relationships between identified evangelicals, political party affiliation, and voting patterns, often

highlighting the ways in which “religious differences can map onto political differences” (Evans 2014:148). By exploring religious-political discourses and the concomitant legitimating strategies, this research engages a related but different level of analysis; it instead explores the constructions of religious-political messages emanating from mediated evangelist discourses. Therefore, my focus concerns both the presence and the impact of these discursive formations on emergent evangelical subjectivities which then, in turn, offer the potential of actionable outcomes rather than focusing on the actioned relationships themselves. This allows us to reach beyond the surface to better understand how these relationships originate at the discursive level.

The concept of framing is complementary to my use of discourse analysis to unearth the deeper roots of discursive formations that are informed by conservative political frames throughout religious and secular media²³⁸. In short, *frames* are part of broader discursive statements. According to William Gamson, David Croteau, William Hoynes, and Theodore Sasson (1992), the frame is the “central organizing principle that holds together and gives coherence and meaning to a diverse array of symbols” (1992:384). Based on constructivist epistemologies, the concept of framing gives us a mechanism for analyzing the ways in which news media and other key social actors contribute to our shared meaning of any given subject by the ways in which we frame them; or more simply put, the ways in which we talk about them. In turn, people then rely upon and deploy these same frames to make

²³⁸ While ‘frame analysis’ refers to a specific methodology that is widely used by scholars of news, media, and communications (Sasson 1995), a comprehensive frame analysis is not always required to locate the concept of ‘frames,’ within the broader discourses they belong to. This is particularly true in studies of crime news where various frames are regularly deployed by news media organizations and interpreted by audiences (see Jewkes 2015, Greer 2010 for further discussion). While I have not conducted a methodological frame analysis, I provide background discussion for understanding the concept of frames since I do see some evidence that conservative political frames inform the broader discourses considered here.

sense of any given social problem (Greer 2010:153-154); both producers and audiences are thus active recipients and interpreters in framing, which makes for a much more complex relationship between media and audience than traditional ‘effects’ style research allows for²³⁹. While conservative framing is certainly evident in other topical areas, its presence is notable for evangelical political commentary. According to Theodore Sasson (1995), “political conflicts on particular issues are fought out as symbolic contests between contesting frames” (1995:10). As such, conservative religious-political frames for political importance are deployed throughout evangelist discourses, making evident strategies of legitimation that draw upon both religious and political sources of authority.

While the evangelists under study here all address the majority of issues identified as politically important in national samples, the categorization of their attention does not map neatly onto the categories articulated by Gallup or Pew. Evangelical constructions of political importance all feed into a central concern over a perceived decline in the role of America as a Christian nation. This core concern is expressed through an immense variety of political issues within this sample. The remainder of this chapter will examine the ways in which several dominant issues are framed as religious social problems, the ways in which these constructions influence dominant subjectivities concerning responsible salvation, and the ways in which apocalyptic belief systems help shape resultant strategies of governance.

²³⁹ See [Chapter 3: Addressing Method](#) for further discussion of media effects research.

The Role of Government

It is likely no surprise that evangelicals are concerned about the role of government in any number of issues; however, to discuss each of these in depth would be impractical given the time constraints and central problematic of this doctoral thesis. Broadly speaking, the overwhelmingly dominant theme pertaining to the role of government throughout this sample concerns the perceived socialist agenda of President Obama and the Democratic Party. This anti-socialist tendency is certainly not unique to this sample and apocalyptic evangelicals have enjoyed a varied and tumultuous relationship with both capitalist and socialist agendas throughout their American history (Kyle 2006, Boyer 1992). According to Boyer (1992), “while premillennialists agreed with reformers who deplored conditions in industrial America, they also dismissed most secular proposals to *ameliorate* those conditions. Programs of social and economic betterment by human means were at best misguided and at worst inspired by the devil” (1992:95). Popularized notions of structural social reform²⁴⁰ have often been framed as counterintuitive for apocalyptic evangelicals and as having the potential to undermine the prophesized events of a rapidly approaching end time²⁴¹. Interference through social betterment is often portrayed as interference with God’s own plan for humanity. Also, socialist agendas spark evangelical interest regarding another key feature of apocalyptic timelines as a result of a perceived concentration of

²⁴⁰ It should be briefly noted here that like many interest groups, evangelicals are not inherently against social reform as a concept. They are actively involved in their own conceptualization of what constitutes social reform and engage in framing issues of political importance as a form of religious social problem. As such, their ontological approach to social reform generally includes active involvement in the betterment of American along Christian principles, such as enthusiastically engaging in campaigns against same-sex marriage and abortion. While it is never expressly stated, it is likely that some form of Christian-centric government would be idealized here. These issues will be further addressed later in this chapter.

²⁴¹ As previously noted, Bean (2014) also found that her participants envisioned social reform as counterproductive and thought of poverty as a redemptive force capable of strengthening one’s relationship with God. As such, they saw government assistance as an obstacle to strengthening this relationship.

national and international governmental power. While contemporary evangelical relationships with social reform may not enjoy the more unified consensus of earlier decades²⁴², Hagee, Robertson, and particularly Van Impe, all express a shared disdain for governmental overreach and the centralization of governmental power at both national and international stages. The remainder of this section explores the ways in which each evangelist expresses and legitimates biblically informed domestic political narratives while locating these constructions within the broader discursive formation of responsible salvation.

Pat Robertson is no stranger to the political sphere. According to his personal website, he “has been active in politics and government affairs throughout his life beginning as a seventh-grader when he formed a "Robertson for Congress" committee for his father A. Willis Robertson” (Robertson 2016f). His own presidential bid in 1988 briefly allowed him a more mainstream national pulpit. Despite the brevity of his political career, Robertson himself considered the bid a success:

From Robertson’s personal website: Could it be that the reason for my candidacy has been fulfilled in the activation of tens of thousands of evangelical Christians into government? This campaign taught them that they were citizens with as much right to express their beliefs as any of the strident activists who have been so vocal in support of their own radical agenda at every level of our government. For the first time in recent history, patriotic, pro-family Christians learned the simple techniques of effective party-organizing and successful campaigning...Their presence as an active force in American politics may result ultimately in at least one of America's major political parties taking on a profoundly Christian outlook in its platforms and party structure (Robertson 2016g).

Robertson’s days of political critique and engagement were far from over. Political news segments are a mainstay of every *700 Club* episode. Almost all of Robertson’s direct

²⁴² See Smith & Johnson (2010), Farrell (2011), and Danielsen (2013) for discussions of potentially shifting beliefs and values in evangelical populations and the so-called *liberalization* of young evangelicals.

political commentary takes shape through *the 700 Club*'s regular news segments and occasional interviews with guest experts regarding topics of individual and national financial matters, such as consumer debt reduction and excessive governmental spending. While the interview segment data informs this analysis, the bulk of the remaining discussion concerns the commentary that emerges throughout the news segments. During *the 700 Club* news segments, CBN News (CBN 2016i) anchor Lee Webb²⁴³ reports on current events and news items prior to discussing these reports with Robertson and his cohosts. These CBN news reports cover a wide range of topics that are well aligned with the general news interests of the American population²⁴⁴, including weather, international events, government spending, health and healthcare issues, and the economy. Stories involving perceived local, national, and international hardship for, or persecution of, Christians and Christian organizations are also prevalent during these CBN news segments. Notably absent are crime news stories which appear only occasionally during these segments yet remain a steady fixture of mainstream American news programming. While the reporting of all CBN news stories (and Robertson's commentary) makes evident conservative political and religious frames, by far the most commonly addressed topic features the role of the federal government. The CBN news reports, and Robertson's own political commentary, depict the Obama administration as hostile to evangelical values and interests by crafting and reinforcing a narrative that positions socialist policies as destructive, undemocratic, and at odds with the will of the entire American population.

²⁴³ While Lee Webb was the resident CBN news anchor for *the 700 Club* news segments at the time of data collections, he was also regularly joined by other CBN news correspondents. It is noted within the text of this document when these reporters offer news reports and/or commentary of their own. Lee Webb left his position with CBN News in September of 2013 (CBN 2016j).

²⁴⁴ See Pew Research Center (2012) for an assessment of contemporary news trends from 1991-2012.

While this broader narrative of socialism as an undemocratic attack on the will of the American people is routinely applied to any number of issues, from climate change to economic hardship, it is most consistently articulated during news reports and commentary on the Obama administration's healthcare bill. Throughout the sample, Robertson vociferously critiques the healthcare bill as one totally at odds with the core values and beliefs of the American public. For instance, following a news report concerning Democratic efforts at reviving a healthcare bill that also highlights Newfoundland's then premier Danny Williams's decision to undergo heart surgery in the United States rather than Canada, Robertson offers the following commentary:

You know, I think the Democrats have a death wish, they've got this unpopular healthcare thing and the American people don't want it. They lost the seat of what was considered a safe liberal Democrat seat in Massachusetts. They lost it to somebody who is opposed to this healthcare and they don't seem to get it. I just can't believe that they're still mucking around with this thing, it's so unpopular. Well, if they want to lose seats...it's their business, far be it for me to interfere (700 Club: Wednesday, February 3rd, 2010).

Likewise, following a news report about opposition to the healthcare bill and a Democratic defeat in West Virginia, Robertson offers this advice to healthcare proponents:

they haven't gotten it yet. They just keep on spending and keep on doing what they're doing, more earmarks, more slush funds, more this that and the other. They're not listening. They don't care. All they care about is their own future and they feel that that is tied to spending and the American taxpayers are saying we've had enough of it. And that message on the Democratic primary in West Virginia will send a strong message, a shot across the bow if you will (700 Club: Wednesday, May 12th, 2010).

In his most vocal critique, following a report on House Speaker Nancy Pelosi's efforts at rallying Democratic support for healthcare, Pat offers this assessment, likening Democrats to WWII kamikaze pilots:

remember those kamikaze, if you go back to world war two, when the Japanese were losing, they decided well we'll just start killing as many Americans as we can

even though it costs us our lives. So they would fly their planes right into a carrier or an American ship or into the fire that would come from those ships and they'd get themselves blown up and the hope would be that they would hit the ship and maybe inflict some damage on the Americans. That's what Lamar Alexander is saying the Democrats are doing. They'll destroy themselves in attempt to kill somebody...but people don't want this thing and the Democrats say we're going to jam it down your throat whether you want it or not and we're going to overturn all the normal parliamentary procedures in the United States congress in order to make it happen (700 Club: Monday, March 1st, 2010).

For Robertson, the Democratic push for universal healthcare is significant fodder for political commentary in that it constructs the party as oppositional to American evangelical values and demonstrates their inclinations toward socialist policies:

well, it is hanging by a thread because nobody wants it. The only people who want it are people that want to lock in a socialist type of system into our economy. That's what it's about, it isn't about reforming healthcare. It's not about giving people better choices. It's not about taking the poor and the weak and giving them access. What it's about is tax tax tax tax (700 Club: Tuesday, January 12th, 2010).

these doctrinaire liberals, you know, the cap in trade is an attempt by government to take control of heavy industry, that's what it amounts to. And, and they don't want to give it up, anymore than they want to give up healthcare. Healthcare is an attempt by the government to take control of our healthcare system. That's a socialist mindset. That's what we're dealing with here. This isn't some benign agency being set up. It is to spite the snow, to spite the scandals...they still want to go forward with this thing because its part of the socialist agenda (700 Club: Thursday, February 18th, 2010).

Therefore, universal healthcare, and Democratic support for it, are framed as un-American and unchristian; something to be feared and avoided at all costs. As such, evangelical subjectivities are shaped through expectations of opposition for the Obama administration where non-compliance is constructed as unpatriotic and anti-Christian. In other words, voting for the president, Democrats, and/or supporting socialized medicine is at odds with this subjectivity. This discursive implication encourages self-government for the responsible evangelical subject by implicitly (and sometimes directly) positioning support

for the Democratic Party as a threat to Christianity and ultimately the subject's own attainment of salvation.

While healthcare is certainly the most recurrent issue raised here, Robertson's disdain for most Democratic policies, actions, and the Obama administration's socialist agendas reach far beyond this singular issue. Governmental incompetence, overreach, interference, and excessive spending are derided anywhere they are perceived to be. For instance, following a report on governmental responses to the 2010 Deepwater Horizon oil spill in the Gulf of Mexico, Robertson articulates his lack of faith in governmental intervention: "I think they're screwing up but I have no confidence in the federal government. None, N, O, N, E, none. And I think all they're trying to do is put patches on it and they do not know what to do and hopefully BP can stop this thing" (700 Club: Monday, June 14th, 2010). Likewise, after a news report on weak European economies and the potential collapse of the Euro, Robertson makes these connections between government incompetence and the relationship between foreign and domestic economies:

we don't seem to have a political class that's interested in the long range future of this nation and its terrible what they're doing. What Obama is doing is scandalous, scandalous the waste of money. How are we gonna get out of it? [...]. its horrible what is contemplated and if you have any way of getting your money overseas this might be the good way to do it because the guys in Washington are going to come after you if you've got any money (700 Club: Monday, February 15th, 2010).

Although Robertson rarely misses an opportunity to chastise the Obama administration, the Republican Party is also not free from his scornful narratives either. Following a report on Republican gains over Democrats in polling data regarding the economy, Robertson indicates that while this is good news for the Republican Party, the American public still remain skeptical of anyone in power:

well you know folks, you've got to recognize what they're dealing with there. The Republicans have to walk very softly that they don't come out as the party of obstructionists at the same time they don't knuckle under to Obama and get implicated in some of the mess that he's putting forward and they say well in order to maintain harmony we're going to vote for bad bills. That should not happen. But the truth is, there's an anti-incumbency mood. It's not just anti-Democrat, its anti-anyone in office (700 Club: Wednesday, February 10th, 2010).

On another occasion, following a report on low public support for Congress, Robertson echoes this narrative of all-encompassing governmental contempt: "we've got this toxic atmosphere in Washington. The people in congress aren't concerned any longer about how to do the good of the country and do what's called the people's business. What they want to do is to gain advantage over the other party...we're not getting anything done in Washington. It's a scandal" (700 Club: Wednesday, February 18th, 2010). Overall, no matter what the issue at hand, what political party is spearheading the endeavor, or what branch of the American government is involved, the narrative is consistent here: governmental interventions of all varieties are rarely in the public's best interest and the will of the American people is not being served by their elected officials. Typical of conservative framing, 'big government' is continually mobilized as antithetical to an evangelical belief system. The Obama administration and government in general are positioned as untrustworthy and incompetent leaders, incapable of returning America to its former glory. This further reinforces expectations for evangelical subjects to vote against socialist policies and Obama supporters, in an effort to align American governments with distinctly Christian values and priorities.

Robertson's narrative of political commentary is authoritative and contemporary, maintaining a much more mainstream strategy for legitimation than the others considered here. Whereas Robertson relies heavily on his own constructed political and personal

expertise in relaying and legitimating his political commentary, Hagee and Van Impe rely much more strictly on cited biblical evidence and religious authority when crafting their political narratives. Although Robertson does on occasion make connections to current events as indicators of a rapidly approaching end time scenario, Hagee and Van Impe often directly connect biblical prophecy to contemporary American and global political and economic conditions. Their assessment of these same matters is almost always solidly mobilized through prophetic scriptural legitimation and the privileging of biblical authority as they construct their commentary. This type of commentary reflects elements of American evangelicals' tendency to "mix patriotism and partisanship with religious identity" (Bean 2014:213) while also articulating a broader concern for reestablishing America as a Christian nation (Kyle 2006) where neither political party is exempt from criticism, but where Democrats bare the bulk of their ire. This complex tension will be explored in further detail below.

Like Robertson, Hagee regularly addresses politically charged issues through conservative frames but does not directly reference any specific news report or specific political policy nearly as often. Rather, Hagee's political commentary comes to us in waves throughout his religious sermons, often addressing multiple evangelical values issues at once. For instance, in the quote below, Hagee frames separation of religion and state, abortion, and social security as matters of concern for Christian congregations, all in the same segment:

The prophet Isaiah says in 10:1 woe to those who decree unrighteous decrees. Who right misfortune which they have prescribed. Listen to that. Woe to those who decree unrighteous decrees. That's talking about judges. That's talking about congress. Decrees like what? Like one nation under God is unconstitutional. I assure you that America according to the constitution is under God...unrighteous decrees like abortion. Roe versus Wade is an unrighteous decree that has made

possible the murder of forty million American babies in the womb of their mother. Think about it, twenty cities the size of San Antonio wiped out. Let me tell you why social security will go broke in ten years: abortion. The baby boomers are retiring but there is no next generation to pay social security. They're dead. We killed them (JHT: Monday, November 23rd, 2009).

Prior to this quoted narrative, he had also made links to judicial tyranny, unrepresentative government, and failing education systems, while following this quote he carried on to connect to immigration, same sex marriage, welfare, free speech, terrorism, and a variety of international political concerns. This sort of multi-faceted, stream of consciousness narrative is typical of Hagee's forays into political commentary. Rather than offer the more in-depth, expertly constructed analysis that Robertson tends to engage in, Hagee offers up his political commentary as contemporary exemplars of biblical accounts and evidence of a general moral decline in America. More often than not, these exemplars are constructed as authoritative indicators of the fulfillment of apocalyptic prophecy and are established as signifiers of a rapidly approaching end time scenario.

While Hagee occasionally makes reference to healthcare, he does not afford it the same primacy that Robertson does throughout the sample. As noted above, Hagee engages in a vast array of political values issues but addresses the declining American economy as the most salient political and religious issue at hand – both at the individual and national level. According to Hagee, the United States and the rest of the world are headed for 'Financial Armageddon' (Hagee 2008). Hagee locates the cause of American economic problems in several origins, but most notable are the declining work ethic of individuals

and excessive government spending²⁴⁵. Hagee regularly expresses disdain for avoidance of work and an enabling welfare system throughout the sample:

the Bible has answers for welfare reform. Welfare reform is found in the ten commandments. Five words: six days, thou shall work. Get a job. How tough is that? [applause] saint Paul said he who does not work shall not eat. That's welfare reform. You want to turn it on its ear, that would turn this nation upside down overnight where every able-bodied person actually gets up and goes to work instead of calling Washington and saying where's my check [more applause] (JHT: Tuesday, November 10th, 2009).

be willing to work for what you want. America's losing the work ethic. God gave Israel one supernatural victory, Jericho, and they had to fight for every inch of ground they got to the promised land. If you think you're going to get to the provision without a dog fight, give it up. That's not the Christianity of the New Testament. Ephesians 6 put on the whole armor of God and fight the good fight. You are a soldier not a biscuit eater in the kingdom of God. Wealth without work will destroy you. Father, if you want to destroy your child give them what they want without work. God provides worms for birds but he doesn't throw them down their throats, they have to get up and go get it. The United States government, through welfare, gives money to men who can work and won't work. it's not a Bible principle and it shouldn't be an American principle and it should stop in the United States of America [applause]...you need to get excited about your job or start imagining yourself without your job. That will motivate you a great deal. God worked and nothing in your life will work until you do. Try it, you'll like it (JHT: Wednesday, January 20th, 2010).

Hagee is consistent in his narrative here: social problems are the result of national and individual actions and the widespread rejection of Christian values. A singular solution to all of the nation's problems can be swiftly located through biblical guidance and legitimated through scriptural authority. For Hagee, the problem is easily identified and solved here. Poverty and joblessness are the inevitable results of laziness and poor work ethic; this is a choice made by individuals. Likewise, welfare is constructed as an example of unnecessary governmental spending and is thus an anti-Christian system that enables

²⁴⁵ It should be noted that there is little to no discussion of the structural problems in the financial sector that led to the economic crisis. When present, the banking industry may be chastised, but is not problematized nearly to the same extent as government bailouts.

individual laziness at the expense of hard working Christians, while creating national economic strain. As a result, a return to biblical prescripts is offered as an actionable plan for achieving individual salvation here. One must *choose* to work in order to be both a good Christian and a good American citizen. As such, the discursive implication of this theme constructs acceptance of social assistance as at odds with evangelical subjectivity, thus jeopardizing responsible salvation. For Hagee, joblessness is solely a product of individual fault, not a structural problem. Thus, the financially distressed out of work evangelical subject is found in a tough position, forced to choose between government assisted financial stability and salvation²⁴⁶.

Like Robertson, Hagee regularly constructs the government as oppositional to biblical principles and contradictory to the will of the American people. He often does so by contrasting perceived socialist agendas against Christian beliefs and values:

God will allow judgment to come to America for our idolatry. America has many gods...socialism is idolatry, socialism makes the state god. Who needs God when everything you need can come from the state (JHT: Tuesday, November 24th, 2009).

these are seven spiritual principles upon which America can recapture its foundations and rediscover our national destiny. If there were ever a time for America to receive a wakeup call, its right now. We are slipping into a European socialism. We are walking away from the God of our fathers...but when you look at these seven spiritual principles you see that there is hope and direction for the world tomorrow (JHT: Monday, December 7th, 2009).

As noted above, Hagee constructs social assistance programs, like welfare, as anti-Christian socialist policies that violate the ten commandments. The federal government and the Obama administration are once again positioned as anti-Christian and anti-American.

²⁴⁶ See Chapter 8: *Health, Wealth & Prosperity* for discussions of evangelical-friendly plans for alleviating poverty through tithing and the principle of reciprocal blessings.

Thus, subjects are discursively discouraged in a multitude of ways to envision support for the Obama administration and Democratic Party as a threat to salvation.

This evangelical contempt for socialism is not just about attempting to abolish poor work ethic and laziness by removing social welfare apparatus; it also stems from apocalyptic prophecy interpretation. A necessary condition for the rise and reign of the antichrist, which, in turn, enables the second coming of Christ, involves (amongst other things) economic collapse and the firm establishment of a one world government. This establishment of the antichrist as the leader of a one world government is typically referred to as the “new world order”²⁴⁷ by both Hagee and Van Impe. According to Hagee, America’s financial decline is wholly dependent on excessive national debt and governmental spending. Impending economic collapse is constructed as a necessary step in the establishment of the new world order, a key indicator of approaching end times:

there must be a destruction of the monetary system. I believe America’s economic problems are not created by market conditions. I believe that they have been planned and orchestrated to devalue and destroy the wealth of the dollar. It does not take a rocket scientist to understand the basic economic concept that excessive debt leads to bankruptcy. How many of you know that when you spend more than you make, you go broke? Now if people in congress understood that we wouldn’t be going in the direction we’re going. You cannot spend your way into wealth. What one person receives without working, another person must work for without receiving.

Hagee’s discussion here leads into a defense of capitalism and gold reserves as the only logical means of maintaining American wealth: “you cannot multiply wealth by dividing it. We’re watching the death of capitalism and the birth of socialism before our very eyes in the United States of America, right now. Our government has deliberately abandoned

²⁴⁷ The concept of a new world order and its significance to apocalyptic prophecy will be discussed in further detail in the following chapter, as it is extremely relevant to perceptions of international politics and relations with other nations and religions.

the gold system” (JHT: Monday, February 1st, 2010). This perceived socialist threat serves as another key indicator for the emergence of a new world order as the concentration of state power at the international stage represents one of the final steps leading up to this preordained fate. As such, one cannot occupy a responsible evangelical subjectivity while also expressing anti-capitalist or socialist sympathies. Questioning the capitalist status quo is thus discursively constituted as a threat to salvation.

Like Robertson, and Van Impe as we will see below, Hagee relies on distressing American economic conditions and social assistance policies as exemplars for his religious-political narrative. This narrative achieves three important ends for Hagee: First, it constructs individual and national debt as anti-Christian practices. Second, it constructs governmental institutions as corrupt, irresponsible socialists who are out of touch with American Christian values. Lastly, it locates economic distress and the uprising of socialism as inevitable elements of a prophesized apocalyptic timeline. As such, individual and national interventions are a biblical imperative. Here though, we see a discursive tension; while fate is foreordained and inevitable²⁴⁸, Hagee still envisions a role for resistance, and therefore encourages his congregation to become actively engaged in making their voice heard to American leaders:

its time for the American people to say to our congress, we want there to be a freeze in spending across the board and right now [applause]...am I worried? No. because the ultimate control of the currency and the gold system is in the hands of God almighty. How do I know that? The Bible says all the gold and silver are mine says the lord. If he owns it all, he has it all, he controls it all...Donald Trump may starve to death on the front porch of Bill Gates but you're not because you're numbered among the righteous! Hallelujah to the lamb of God (JHT: Monday, February 1st, 2010).

²⁴⁸ This seemingly contradictory mobilization of fatalistic characteristics and mechanisms for Christian-oriented social change will be discussed in further detail later in this chapter.

Here, Hagee makes it clear that all saved subjects need to actively resist problematic governmental policies that are not in line with scripture. In doing so, he also advances a companion narrative that assures believers that compliance here will spare them from the cataclysmic aftermath of the impending global financial crisis and subsequent apocalypse.

Therefore, active change is considered necessary at the individual and national level, but can only be achieved by taking a stance against unaccountable, corrupt institutions and politicians within all levels of government. Hagee regularly comments on why and how America is in jeopardy of facing divine judgment. Throughout his sermons, Hagee voices intense frustration, enthusiastically reinforcing his message that the American government is out of touch with biblical principles and common sense:

Americans are frustrated with the decisions coming out of Washington and the impact those decisions will have on your future. We invite you to join us for this prophecy conference where I will show you what the Bible says about the future²⁴⁹.

as Americans, we have to have the courage to face the things happening in our country right now...I have been a student of history all my adult life and I have come to believe that there is an unseen hand that's driving our nation toward the abyss. It is far more than a banking crisis. It is far more than a credit crunch. It is a perfect storm that has been brewing for decades that's about to explode in all of its fury...our forefathers had a Boston tea party over a miniscule tax in tea, something like a half penny tax. Our forefathers resisted aggressively excessive taxation. I think ladies and gentleman its time for another Boston tea party in the United States of America (JHT: Monday, November 23rd, 2009).

Thus, governmental policies, organizations, citizens, and politicians who act outside of biblical interests have allowed the nation to fall out of divine grace:

why would God allow America to come under judgment? One is the rejection of God. There's the Bible principle. If you reject God, God will reject you. One step away from God is a step in the wrong direction. Jeremiah 2:13 says for my people have committed two sins, they have forgotten me the spring of living water. That's what God calls himself. They have forgotten me the spring of living water and have

²⁴⁹ This excerpt is taken from a JHM advertisement for Hagee's prophecy conferences that take place in various American and international cities each year. These advertisements run during at least one commercial break in almost every episode considered in this sample.

dug their own cisterns, broken cisterns that cannot hold water. In other words, you have rejected God and have sought for yourself the solutions, that will not work. That describes America. Billy Graham's daughter, the author and speaker, Anna Graham said about this concerning God allowing disaster to come to America. It's very insightful. Listen, she says 'for years we have been telling God to get out of our schools, to get out of our government, to get out of our lives. Being the gentleman that he is, I believe that he has calmly backed down. How can we expect God to give us his blessing and his protection if we demand that he leave us alone?' America must answer for its rejection of God. The blame is not God's. The blame is America's (JHT: Tuesday, November 24th, 2009).

Hagee makes it clear that America's social problems and ills are a direct result of a shift toward secularity and ensures that quoted verses, biblical authority, and his own theological expertise are all mobilized as a strategies of legitimation for this narrative. Evangelical subjects are thus further responsibilized to bare the weight of a nation in distress. Despite the inevitable fall of all countries in accordance with prophetic timelines, American evangelical subjects are continually reminded that they must actively resist these trends in order to preserve both individual and national salvation by saving as many souls as possible prior to the approaching end times²⁵⁰.

While Jack Van Impe claims that he is 'religious and not political' (JVIP: Sunday, May 29th, 2010), in practice, he is deeply engaged with political commentary. Like Robertson, Van Impe offers religious-political commentary in every episode of his newscast style program while like Hagee, Van Impe's commentary is explicitly grounded in biblical authority and always examined as support for the rapidly approaching apocalypse. Therefore, Van Impe showcases a hybrid style of programming here where Rexella offers up thematic news headlines for analysis (similar to *the 700 Club*). After Rexella summarizes the headlines, Jack himself interprets the current events in accordance

²⁵⁰ A discussion of responsible salvation and actionable plans to achieve this will take shape in the following section of this chapter.

with biblical prophecy, while offering scriptural legitimation for his claims (similar to *John Hagee Today*). The remainder of this section will examine the ways in which Van Impe crafts a religious-political narrative that directly challenges President Obama, while implicitly portraying the Obama administration's socialist agenda as anti-American, anti-Christian, and as a precursor for the President's rise to international power as a potential antichrist candidate.

Like the others, the Van Impes regularly discuss the current political climate (at the time of the sample), notably paying attention to how matters of healthcare, government spending, and economic crisis fit into prophetic timelines. As noted in earlier chapters, Rexella generally reads news headlines from a variety of mainstream and Christian-oriented newspapers prior to soliciting Jack's expert commentary on how these current events are grounded in biblical prophecy. For instance, in the following excerpt, Rexella and Jack pontificate on the ills of both healthcare and economic distress during an episode where they discuss potential candidates that could fulfill the role of the antichrist. Here, they also caution that the current climate of the United States is eerily similar to that of Nazi Germany:

Rexella: You know Jack, this next description again puzzles me because some of us are thinking that the United States is the only nation on earth with economic crisis. We're not. Its growing worldwide. Jack has relatives in Europe, they're all upset about the economics over there. Economic crisis? Now, he'll rule during economic crisis won't he?

Jack: people don't realize what could happen. [Hitler] came into Germany when they were bankrupt and people could hardly eat. They would take a wheelbarrow full of money, paper, worthless paper, just to buy a peck of potatoes. And that could come to America. Now with this healthcare plan. It could bankrupt us. Do you know that every child born now as they come out of the womb already owes the government forty thousand a piece? (JVIP: Sunday, April 3rd, 2010).

As such, the Van Impes paint a bleak picture concerning the landscape of American politics and the future of the United States. Their general assessment that America is in trouble remains consistent with the rest of the field:

Rexella: Now Jack, Americans are truly troubled at this point. I don't talk to anybody that doesn't seem kind of down, nothing seems normal today and here you see a headline 'There is no normal anymore: Americans are living with daily angst because, from the economy to healthcare to foreign policy, our nation is spinning out of control.' And I think that you'll recognize friends around us, nothing seems stable anymore. It's all spinning out of control. Jack, is this found in the Bible? That certainly this would happen?

Jack: Oh, the world is spinning out of control and we're going to see why in a moment because the tribulation hour, a period lasting seven solid years in revelations chapter 6-18 mentions 21 different judgmental things that happen that make people feel like the world is spinning out of control. But guess what, again I'm gonna tell you. We can have peace in the midst of all of it. Jesus said, and Hannity always quotes this one, he doesn't give the Bible verse, let not your heart be troubled, John 14:1 (JVIP: Sunday, January 3rd, 2010).

Despite these troubling assessments, the Van Impes remain optimistic. They repeatedly assure their viewers that the decline of America's economy and its misguided politics are most definitely precursors for the miserable preordained tribulation period; however, viewers are also always reminded (often with smiles and light-hearted banter) that this miserable fate will not affect them (Christians) in the least because they have been saved and will already be raptured prior to the suffering inflicted by the antichrist. Ultimately, while good Christian governmental policies would be ideal, responsible salvation and rapture-readiness are more highly privileged.

Of course, all of this contempt for universal healthcare and governmental assistance also feeds into the rally cry against socialism and socialist leaders. Depicted as undemocratic, unpatriotic, and unchristian, President Obama and his closest allies bear the weight of the Van Impes' critique. They regularly mobilize headlines as current evidence

for their biblically-informed narratives regarding the increasing advancement of dangerous socialist policies and what they see as the emerging new world order:

Rexella: And friends. I just want to say that we've all been amazed, haven't we at the increase in government power and I want you to take a look at this headline, where will we be led? 'Has increasing government power crossed over into socialism?' Now our time has almost gone and maybe Jack will be talking more about this in two weeks. Are we headed in that direction?

Jack: Oh we really are, Rexella. First of all, look at Webster's dictionary. Socialism is defined as Leninism, Marxism and communism. And you know, our president has had a lot of background in that, his father was a communist, his mentor Frank Davis was a communist, Bill Ayres leaned that way and let me tell you something, it's a dangerous policy to follow, when the government takes over every item. For instance, the automobile industry and the welfare and the banking system and the health, that is socialism...we're in it and we're moving in it as Americans and God help us, it's the wrong thing to do. Can two walk together except to be agreed? No, Amos 3:3 and evil communications corrupt good manners I Corinthians 15:33 (JVIP: December 13th, 2009).

Rexella: Friends, I'm going to give you some very serious headlines right up front, things that we will be discussing for you today. The first one, 'Coming Soon, a socialist America?' Whooo. That is dynamite...and usually right at this point, Jack tries to lighten the load and lift our hearts with a little bit of humor but today we're going to begin our program just a little bit differently. Jack has a very heavy heart. He has to deliver some things that are very serious to us today and Jack, we're going to be praying for you as you do this

Jack: Rexella, I'm a Belgian American but I was born in this country and I love America. And my heart is heavy when I see what's happening. That we are speedily coming to a socialist nation. It was Peggy Noonan that recently said that the conservatives were angry with the president because he's dragging us into socialism and the liberals are angry with him because he's not taking us into it fast enough, but its coming ladies and gentlemen. Just like it has come in Canada already. And the new world order is going to be entirely socialistic. Eighty years ago, [a preacher in Chicago] said someday there will be a new world order, a one world government and it will be totally socialistic. That's why America has to soon become part of that and its coming. So, there's a heavy heart. Isaiah 58:1... (JVIP: February 20th, 2010).

The Van Impes continually return to this narrative, reminding their viewers that Jack's prophetic interpretations are solidly supported by pre-ordained biblical timelines. Like Robertson and Hagee, they also routinely express that both President Obama and his socialist policies are against the will of the population and thus undemocratic. For instance,

Jack and Rexella speak to this perceived unhappiness and an established anti-Democratic government in this segment:

Rexella: How far should we go in honoring those in authority and can we turn America back around?

Jack: Rexella, we are to honor the king and all those in authority I Peter 1:17 but there's a qualification in romans 13 verse 7: give honor to them to whom honor is due and with all of the fuss that's going on now in Massachusetts and the tea parties people are disgruntled, unhappy because they are not being told the truth. You see, democracy is a government by the people, for the people. And of the people. That is not what's happening. This president has 32 tsars, he's controlling everything. ... Congress and the Senate don't even have the right to intervene. Not only that but Newt Gingrich says probably we'll have the first president who will become a dictator. I believe this with all of my heart (JVIP: February 20th, 2010).

Jack Van Impe not only considers President Obama to be politically out of touch, but he also makes it clear to his viewers that he questions the very authenticity of the President's Christian affiliation. As a result, the potential for Christian persecution during this presidency is Van Impe's logical end:

Jack: But listen to me again folks, the thing that bothers me the most is that we have a president who says there are many ways to heaven, we don't need Jesus, it doesn't matter. Jesus said in john 8:20 for you die in your sins if you believe not in me and said in john 14:6 I am the way, the truth and the life. No man, no man, no man can come unto the father but by me. Don't call my Jesus a liar (JVIP: Sunday, May 29th, 2010).

Jack: Now there's more. Franklin Graham is an outspoken personality like Dr. Jack Van Impe and he says the day is coming when we will be in trouble, be persecuted maybe even imprisoned if we say that Jesus is the only way and as you know, this interview that president Obama had with the Chicago Sun Times and USA Today stated that he believes there are many ways to heaven. It isn't Jesus alone and any man that says that does not know Christ as a personal savior, he's against the word of God. Four hundred times this book says Jesus is the only way...and until my last breath, I will preach that. I don't care who persecutes me, I don't care what happens to me, its Jesus and I'll never change a word of it because it's the word of God (JVIP: Sunday, June 12th, 2010).

These frequent reminders that the Obama administration is socialist and out of touch with a political, religious, and moral reality serve to deeply reinforce Jack Van Impe's overall

narrative that President Obama and any form of socialism are both dangerous for America and oppositional to Christian values and interests. This further reinforces an evangelical subjectivity that is ultimately constituted as incompatible with support for the Obama administration.

Moreover, as evidenced above, President Obama is also constructed as much more than simply out of touch with the will and values of the American public; he is also portrayed as a power-hungry dictator, poised to rule not just the United States, but the international scene as well. Both Hagee and Van Impe utilize newspaper headlines to legitimate an assertion that President Obama is a potential leader of the new world order, again deploying a concept rife with apocalyptic meaning. For both evangelists, the President's rise to power and political support are emblematic of living proof of biblical prophecy:

The new world order is not a new concept and yet it is a very current topic...here in the San Antonio newspaper, just a few days ago [headline reads: 'New World View in Washington' and displays a photo of President Obama] is the new world view in Washington. Because that's all the rage that's coming. The new world order first appeared on the plains of Shinar where Nimrod proposed to build the tower of Babel (Genesis 10:8-10). His purpose was to defy God's authority over men. To cast God out of their lives and to usher in the occultic world and welcome the prince of darkness to rule the earth (JHT: Monday, February 1st, 2010).

They are actually in Cairo, Egypt, in Lebanon, in Syria and in many places calling for Obama to come and set up the peace process. When the world leader comes to power that's how he arrives, in the eyes of the nations to the top by actually creating the peace thing. So he's going to force it through. That's the way he operates. Like he did with the healthcare, push it through, regardless of what our people say. Push it through, regardless of what Israel says. However, remember this now, Kissinger has promoted Obama to become the leader and creator of the new world order and when he comes to power he's going devour the whole world and that of course is Daniel 7:23 (JVIP: Sunday, May 22nd, 2010).

Hagee is slightly subtler than Van Impe in his discussions of President Obama as the leader of a new world order. After showing his congregation the newspaper story about the

president, he turns his attention to sermonizing on the dark biblical origins and history of the new world order, leaving the audience to draw their own conclusions. As evidenced through the segment quoted above, Van Impe is much more persistent about his message and regularly returns to this subject throughout the sample. This narrative is echoed throughout his online ministry as well:

Question: Could you please explain the peace talks concerning the Middle East that Hillary Clinton and Obama are pursuing?

Answer: I don't have a lot of time, but get ready for a shock. The night the leader appears to make the 7-year contract with Israel and the Arabs and the nations of the world, Daniel 9:27, is the first night the New World Order begins. That's how near it is and Jesus could come at any moment because when it occurs we are snatched away and 7 years later when we return with the Lord, He puts a stop to that world order to set up His own great and new world order... (JVIM 2016d).

Down through history some said it was Adolph Schicklgruber Hitler, Benito Mussolini, Tojo, Stalin, Henry Kissinger, and in the last election, I heard some say, I believe it's McCain and others say, I believe it's Obama. But Dr. Charles Taylor wrote a book on why he believed that Juan Carlos would play a great part in this. Now, we're not going to know so I'm not saying that any of these are right. I'll tell you why. II Thessalonians 2:6 says, the mystery of iniquity does already work. Only he who now hinders the coming of this antichrist to power, will continue to hinder him until the church, we be gone, the rapture. And then shall that wicked one be revealed. So we believers are not going to know (JVIM 2016e).

More simply put, without ever directly speaking the words on-air, and artfully dodging the connection online, Jack Van Impe still conveys the message that President Obama is potentially the antichrist as a result of his involvement as a leader of the new world order. Creative scriptural interpretation of evidentiary biblical passages that outline the antichrist's birthplace are also offered up in support of this possible assertion: "since he comes out of the Roman Empire, Daniel 9:26 remember that the European Union nations believe that America is part of that EU because it is the people from all of those nations in the EU that settled America originally" (JVIM 2016e). Van Impe carefully crafts his discussions of President Obama as the likely leader of a new world order alongside his

discussions of biblical prophecy that speak of the antichrist as the leader of a one world government. He ostensibly takes a great deal of care to ensure he never explicitly states his rather obvious belief that President Obama possesses all the characteristics of the antichrist. Despite this care, he does on one occasion allude to more detailed discussions taking place in his DVD & book offers where he explicitly states that his DVD titled *Dictator of the New World Order: Alive and Waiting in the Wings* (Van Impe & Van Impe 2010) “deals with things [he’ll] never mention on television” (JVIP: Sunday, February 6th, 2010). Generally speaking, Van Impe provides his viewers with just enough confluences of overlapping messages to allow them to draw their own conclusions on the matter. The discursive connection here is most obvious. Political support for Obama and his policies is not just presented as an obstacle to achieving individual salvation, it is constituted as support for the antichrist himself, a precursor to accepting the mark of the beast, and ultimately a rejection of God and authentic evangelical Christianity.

The emergence of this new world order (with President Obama at the helm) and the rise of socialism are noted as precursors to approaching apocalypse, and have global implications that will be discussed at length in the following chapter. In terms of domestic politics and political engagement, herein lies the inherent discursive tension for the evangelical discourses considered here: if moral decline, economic collapse, and apocalypse are inevitable, why act politically to affect change? As discussed earlier, the relationship between evangelical apocalyptic belief systems and perceptions of fatalism is complex. While many “religious and secular apocalypticists may agree that the world is characterized by uncontrollable crisis, evil, and the threat of imminent disaster...they

assign different meanings to the present turmoil” (Wojcik 1997:142). Daniel Wojcik (1997) goes on to argue that

religious interpretations of apocalypse are appealing precisely because of their insistence that events and history itself are fated, that a controlling and meaningful plan underlies all things. By placing current crises within a divine pattern, religious apocalyptic beliefs explicitly address feelings of helplessness and uncontrollability, converting them into an optimistic vision of worldly redemption and salvation (1997:142).

Believers are provided with assurances of hope and comfort as they confront the inevitable ills of the world around them in anticipation of the end times. While the ills of the world are foreordained, social change is privileged as a means to restoring God’s favour for America in advance of the approaching end times. As Kyle argues, “such as position says that the world will get worse until Christ returns to rapture out believing Christians. Current events are watched closely and interpreted in light of an impending end. The premillennialists believe that the world must get worse and worse. But they still have a moral reform agenda for America” (2006:178-179). The evangelists considered here exemplify the sentiments expressed by Wojcik (1997) and Kyle (2006). Declining American morality, economic collapse, global strife, and the rise of a socialistic leader are inevitable realities that American evangelicals must accept, yet responsible salvation is constructed as attainable for both individual and nation. The remaining section of this chapter describes the ways in which all three evangelicals offer actionable plans for explicit and implicit political engagement in the pursuit of salvation.

National Salvation: A Politics of Action

Facing a foreordained timeline for the end of days not only provides meaning and comfort for believers, it also provides an actionable cause to organize around. As succinctly

asserted by Rexella Van Impe, “we may not be able to change the world but we can change ourselves” (JVIP: Sunday, February 20th, 2010). In an effort to attain both individual and national salvation, the evangelists considered here regularly implore their audiences to take action in matters of politics – in direct and less obvious ways. These narratives contribute to the discursive formation surrounding responsible salvation by establishing the good Christian citizen as a responsabilized politically engaged subject who takes seriously their call to proselytize and take political action. By establishing links between apocalyptic prophecy and political realities, the resulting messages and calls to action become firmly established as a divine will that has been long since foretold in scripture. The remainder of this section explores some of the ways in which each evangelist crafts expectations of political engagement that range from easy daily directives to pray for political leaders to more committed forms of action, such as direct lobby opportunities in Washington.

I have argued in previous chapters that responsible salvation is built on the premise of active choice and that individuals must internalize and govern their daily actions through the teachings of Jesus Christ in order to assure rapture-readiness and salvation. In many ways though, national salvation appears to be a lost cause given prophetic timelines, yet all three evangelists still call for change, and individual subjects have a role to play. Hagee’s succinct statement to “fear not, everything’s going to be alright. Washington may not make it but we are” (JHT: Tuesday, November 17th, 2009) exemplifies their common sentiment that true national salvation cannot be attained by political means outside of Christian values. He wholeheartedly endorses divine control as a trump card for state control, as evidenced through his assertions that “the power is not in Washington, not in a bailout” (JHT: Monday, November 9th, 2009). He further reinforces this sentiment in another

episode when he reminds his viewers that faith should be placed in Godly power, not governmental institutions: “our hope is not in Washington, it is in Jesus” (JHT: Monday, January 25th, 2010). As quoted above, Hagee sees responsibility for America’s decline as obvious “America must answer for its rejection of God. The blame is not God’s, it is America’s” (JHT: Monday, November 23rd, 2009). As such, the politically engaged Christian subject is also responsabilized to take charge of remedying this situation for the sake of the nation.

Hagee is joined by both Robertson and Van Impe in his most obvious and dominant plan for action here. All three regularly remind their audiences to pray for their declining nation and their political leaders (particularly President Obama) in an effort to bring America back into God’s favour²⁵¹:

Prayer worked for George Washington at Valley Forge when defeat seemed imminent and victory seemed impossible...Prayer worked for Abraham Lincoln in the civil war...Prayer worked for Franklin Delano Roosevelt following Pearl Harbor...Ladies and gentlemen of America, it is time to pray again...keep the name of America before the mind of God because we the people still have a power, a supernatural power to reach the throne of God.... God, if no one else in America starts to pray for this country, let the prayer revival begin at Cornerstone Church and let us pray everyday until the God of heaven hears us (JHT: Monday, November 23rd, 2009).

Rexella: now friends if we ever needed to pray for our country, we need to pray now. We need to pray for our president. In fact, the Bible commands us to pray for those who are in authority but it adds something, that they will lead us in the right way, that’s something we forget. We need to pray with a definite purpose, a definite reason. Why am I praying for my country and my president? The Bible commands us that, Jack...

Jack: First Timothy, chapter two, verses 1-6... so we’re to pray for our president that he’ll do what is right (JVIP: Sunday, February 20th, 2010).

Jack: and if ever there were a time we need to pray for this president, and that’s I Timothy II verses 1-6, its now! He needs direction. (JVIP: Sunday, February 6th, 2010).

²⁵¹ Again, the evangelists considered here all see America as having decidedly Christian origins and lament the ways in which secularism, socialism, and pluralism have led the government and population astray.

Gordon Robertson: wonderful story. I think we need to celebrate the faith of the president. Here's someone who was raised Muslim but as an adult, in his twenties, converted to Christianity. I would encourage everyone during these difficult times, please pray for him. Pray that he would have unusual wisdom and he would be able to lead us. I know there are a lot of things in his policies you can critique. But like his policies or not, he is the president of the United States and the Bible requests, actually I think it's a little stronger than requests, command that we pray for our leaders (700 Club: Friday, April 9th, 2010).

Pat, following a produced video segment dramatizing the founding of America as a Christian nation: we're here to affirm the Christian heritage of our own nation... wherever you are at this moment, I would ask that you join with us as the three of us kneel here in front of this cross and we're going to ask God to reaffirm that great covenant that he made with our forefathers in Cape Henry in 1607. So as we kneel down here, we're going to ask you to join with us wherever you are and let us believe God together. Father, we join together and pray for this nation, reaffirm the covenant that you made with our forefathers. On this day of celebration, April 29th, we celebrate the first prayer meeting, the beginning of this nation. Bring us back to the sense of where this nation has come from and still the voices of those who want to make this a purely secular nation and take from us the great religious heritage that is ours. Give us a sense of freedom, of justice, of liberty and the blessing of God. May the anointing of the holy spirit rest upon us. Send revival lord to America...wherever you are don't stop praying, God loves America. (700 Club: Thursday, April 29th, 2010).

All three make it clear that America is not held to an exceptional standard in God's plan and that action is needed if national salvation is to be achieved. By expressing a need to pray for both nation and its political arm, the evangelists here establish prayer as a necessary political act. As a result of this necessity, individual salvation then also becomes tied to the act of political prayer, linking individual and the possibility of national salvation in a relationship of interdependence. To quell doubts for their audience, the evangelists employ two key strategies of legitimation. As we can see, both Robertson and Van Impe locate scriptural authority as the source of legitimation by explaining that the need for political prayer is decreed through the Bible. Hagee also offers historical accounts of the power of prayer to serve as evidence for effectiveness. By establishing political prayer as

a necessity for both individual and national salvation, the politically engaged Christian subject is further responsibilized to take action as a means of apocalyptic governance.

As noted above, calls for political prayer are in many ways obvious when we think through the contours of responsible salvation. The act of prayer, in and of itself, forms a cornerstone actionable technique for Christian subjects, yet it is much subtler in its political nuances. This easy action forms the bulk of the evangelists' actionable plans here but it is certainly not the only expressly political act on offer. All three evangelists engage in political commentary about partisan politics and the nation's political leaders, making clear the conservative frames that emerge throughout mediated evangelical discourses. Although both Hagee and Robertson have controversial and longstanding political party ties, Van Impe claims to have voted for all political parties throughout his life (JVIP: Sunday, May 29th, 2010). In terms of direct political engagement, all three reinforce a message that President Obama (and his Democratic, socialist agenda) are at odds with Christian belief systems. The logical conclusion of this sentiment is an actionable plan to vote against the Democratic Party, although it is rarely articulated on-air in such a direct manner.

As noted above, Robertson's engagement with party politics, and what he considers to be problematic policies, is articulated almost exclusively through his engagement with the CBN News reporters featured on *the 700 Club*. The CBN News segments rarely feature stories outside of their dominant framing of Democratic actions as against the will of the people and Republican actions as a saving grace for a nation gone wrong. Through these segments, Robertson regularly makes his preference for a Republican controlled government apparent:

Terry: hello ladies and gentlemen and welcome to the 700 Club. Republicans and Democrats are fighting a surprisingly close battle in an unexpected state,

Massachusetts. And they're fighting for the seat of a liberal icon, Ted Kennedy. Kennedy's seat has always been safe for the Democrats but Republicans are working hard to win it in next week's special election...*summarizing news segment about Scott Brown's campaign follows...*

Pat: Isn't that delicious irony that Ted Kennedy's seat might be the one that is now the swing, tips the balance over so that the Democrats can jam through healthcare. Wouldn't that be nice?" (700 Tuesday, January 12th, 2010).

after a news segment discussing the likelihood of Obama becoming a one term president:

Lee: Well it's a long way until 2012 but Pat with regards to the off year election, Pat are you predicting a repeat of 1994?

Pat: of I don't think there's any question about it, Lee. I think the Republicans will take the senate and I have a very good feeling they'll take the house. Newt Gingrich thinks maybe they'll take the house and maybe not take the senate. I think they'll take both. I believe that, you know, the Democrats are going to be an endangered species. They have just offended so many people (700 Club: Thursday, March 25th, 2010).

Through this news commentary, Robertson makes clear his political party loyalties and as such engages an only slightly less direct campaign against the Democratic Party than simply stating 'vote Republican'.

Hagee, on the other hand, has a much more direct political action plan in store for his audience. Hagee's *Christians United For Israel (CUFI)* organization was established "to provide a national association through which every pro-Israel church, parachurch organization, ministry or individual in America can speak and act with one voice in support of Israel in matters related to Biblical issues" (CUFI 2016). According to his online ministry's website, "Dr. Hagee gains support for this worthy cause by conducting *A Night to Honor Israel* in every major city in America and by organizing an annual *Washington D.C. – Israel Summit* where thousands of CUFI delegates from every state in the union have the opportunity to meet the members of congress face to face on behalf of Israel" (JHM 2015f). While this organization takes on a much more global approach to politics and apocalyptic prophecy interpretation that will be discussed in the following chapter, the

Washington D.C. – Israel Summit is notable here because it provides the most direct political engagement opportunity for evangelical subjects by organizing an event that provides direct political lobby activities. In a recap of the 2015 summit, an older version of the CUFI website offers this synopsis of the events: “we brought together some of the most influential leaders and thinkers and updated you on recent developments in Israel, the Middle East and Washington, D.C. Then we went to Congress and you shared your support for Israel directly with your elected officials and helped change the way Washington views the Jewish state” (CUFI 2016c)²⁵². By providing the opportunity to directly engage with political leaders and like-minded politically engaged Christian subjects, Hagee’s CUFI organization represents an obvious actionable plan for ensuring both individual and national salvation through responsibilized political engagement²⁵³.

Other than his calls for political prayer, Van Impe’s construction of political engagement is more complex than the others as he rarely offers an explicit and simple directive on how to act. Teasing out this discursive tension requires attention to several key details. As in the above quoted section, Van Impe regularly endorses prayer for political leaders, especially President Obama, but does so with the caveat that Christian citizens need not fully submit to the will of their leaders:

Rexella: How far should we go in honoring those in authority and can we turn America back around?

Jack: Rexella, we are to honor the king and all those in authority I Peter 1:17 but there’s a qualification in romans 13 verse 7: give honor to them to whom honor is due (JVIP: February 20th, 2010)

²⁵² This recap of the 2015 summit is no longer accessible through the website and the link now provides information about the upcoming summit for 2016.

²⁵³ CUFI, and its relevance to apocalyptic prophecy interpretations regarding Israel and global politics, will be discussed in more detail in the following chapter.

Ultimately, Van Impe believes that President Obama is not an authentic Christian and regularly expresses this sentiment on-air. In the following quoted passage, Van Impe calls upon President Obama himself to change his ways in order to lead America in a more decidedly Christian direction, an apparently dubious discursive endeavor given Van Impe's assertions that President Obama possesses shockingly similar traits to the antichrist:

You can't get away with it forever president Obama. I read an article today in Detroit free press where a journalist said you would not listen to the voices of the people, you and your proud way said I am the way...you can find a way out, how? James IV, verse 10: humbles yourselves in the sight of the lord and he will lift you up. Get to practicing what you call your Christian experience if you really have it.... not only that, Mr. President, but in the Chicago Sun Times and in USA Today, you had two interviews and in it, you mocked much of God's word. You mocked the lord Jesus Christ, saying you didn't believe in heaven or hell like most Christians believe it. And you said your God wouldn't have a place like that. Well you're wrong, I've got the word of God in my hand and Jesus preached it many many times and there are 162 verses describing what its like to be lost forever...you've been getting the wrong things from the wrong mentors, even communists in the background. God help you fall on your face and ask the lord to forgive you. Oh Rexella, my heart is moved!" (JVIP Sunday, January 24th, 2010).

Therefore, Van Impe locates the president's own inauthentic Christianity²⁵⁴ as the biggest obstacle to not just the President's own salvation but also to national salvation. The message emanating through Van Impe's discussions here is two-fold: First, President Obama cannot aid in the endeavor for national salvation without repentance and Christian correctives. Second, President Obama cannot save America from the global strife promised in apocalyptic prophecy because Van Impe (at the very least) envisions him as being entwined with the dark forces that bring about the apocalypse. As noted above, Van Impe routinely insinuates that Obama might just be the leader of the new world order, a metaphoric means to implying he is perhaps the antichrist himself:

²⁵⁴ Van Impe's accusations of inauthentic Christianity are thematically similar to Hagee's discussions of 'counterfeit Christianity', as discussed in Chapter 7: Apocalyptic Prophecy and the Responsibilization of Salvation.

Rexella: now Jack has given me a description, a very good description of the world dictator. I'm going to go back and forth with him here and see if we can see some things that are emerging, and there are several people around the world that would like to be head of the new world order. Let's see if we can put them together with someone. The first thing he gave me: this person will be stern and dictatorial.

Jack: As we've been saying, there are men like Juan Carlos in Spain, Javier Solana of Spain, Sarkozy of France, Prince Charles of England that many say could become the world dictator but Kissinger is the one to whom I am listening and he says we've prepared Obama to be that one. And the Bible says he will be a leader of stern countenance and if you look it up in the dictionary it means stern face "its me, my, I, that's the way its going to be or else [shaking fist from side to side]" and we're seeing it before our eyes. The Bible says when he come to power in Revelations 13:1 he'll control all kindreds, tongues, peoples and nations. The world government (JVIP Sunday, April 3rd, 2010).

Because Obama is potentially the antichrist and therefore not authentically Christian, we may logically conclude that to attain both individual and national salvation, Christian subjects are expected to stand against the president, his party²⁵⁵, and his values. Therefore, this complex discursive tension is managed through a seemingly contradictory action plan that requires political engagement through anti-Obama rhetoric as well as the necessity of political prayer for (without deliberate submission to) the same leader. Because Obama assumes the role of potential antichrist candidate throughout these discussions, political engagement through prayer is constructed as an action that enables individual salvation with seemingly little authentic expectation that President Obama's socialistic agendas and eventual rise to global leadership of a new world order will be subdued. Therefore, individual Christian subjects can overcome the implied fatalism of this foreordained path through taking responsibility and fighting for their own salvation alongside a potential sacrifice of national salvation under the Obama administration.

²⁵⁵ High ranking Democrats are also routinely chastised throughout the sample for their lack of authentic Christianity and dictatorial tendencies. Then Speaker, Nancy Pelosi draws particular ire from the Van Impes.

Conclusion

This chapter provides an important contribution to the broader goal of this dissertation concerning the exploration of evangelical subjectivities and techniques of apocalyptic governance. By interrogating the discursive level of mediated evangelism, we can better understand the construction of a national politics of faith where evangelical subjectivity is characterized by a responsabilization for political action in accordance with foundational apocalyptic belief structures. This exploration of intersecting religious, secular, and political discourses exposes the political priorities, legitimization strategies, and actionable plans made evident through the programs of Pat Robertson, John Hagee, and Jack and Rexella Van Impe in an effort to better understand the contours of the discursive formation surrounding responsible salvation.

In many ways, the constructions of religious-political narratives emanating from mediated evangelist discourses align with broader public political priorities but are instead crafted and legitimated through an apocalyptic lens. While evangelical constructions of political importance cover a wide array of economic and family values issues, the core theme of political priorities that is present within this particular sample most often expresses a central concern over a perceived decline in the role of America as a Christian nation. This is overwhelmingly articulated through attention to governmental overreach and the perceived socialist agenda of President Obama and the Democratic Party. While structural social reform has historically been framed as counterintuitive for a presumably fatalistic apocalyptic belief system, this relationship between social change and fatalism is much more complex than it has been given credit. While socialist agendas evoke fury from the evangelists under study, it is not just about a rejection of social betterment projects.

Their ire is embedded in a key indicator of apocalyptic prophecy fulfillment: the concentration of national and international governmental power. Here, it is made clear that social change is to be embraced, but only with decidedly Christian characteristics. By examining the expectations of political engagement present throughout the discursive formation of responsible salvation, this chapter makes clear the ways in which these evangelists express and legitimate domestic narratives regarding political action, social change, and individual and national salvation.

Robertson, Hagee, and the Van Impes all contribute to a largely unified discursive formation with few notable tensions. All three evangelists centralize the importance of economic decline and healthcare reform as key indicators of an out of touch presidential administration aiming to turn America into an undemocratic and socialist nation. This overarching portrayal of the Obama administration as anti-Christian and anti-American is further constructed as a necessary step toward the fulfilment of key apocalyptic prophecies concerning the rise of a new world order. In doing so, the underlying tone of this narrative envisions a vote for Democrats as a vote against God's own plan for humanity. While all three mostly rely on similar legitimating strategies, at times, Robertson relies more heavily on his own constructed political and personal authority in relaying and legitimating his political commentary, while Hagee and Van Impe tend toward the use of cited biblical passages and religious authority. All three evangelists make connections to current events as indicators of a rapidly approaching end time scenario and predominantly address religious-political priorities through conservative frames. Ultimately, economic distress and the uprising of socialism are framed as both inevitable elements of a prophesized apocalyptic timeline and as oppositional to American-Christian values, where support for

socialism is constructed as a surefire way to jeopardize both individual and national salvation.

Lastly, an interesting discursive tension is exposed here and offers insight into why apocalyptic belief systems are so often framed as fatalistic. Despite their assertion that hell on earth is inevitable, Robertson, Hagee, and the Van Impes still craft narratives that encourage evangelical subjects to act politically to affect change. This responsibility to preserve both individual and national salvation as end times rapidly approach is a defining feature of responsible salvation. While declining morality, economic destruction, global war, and the rise of a socialistic leader are inevitable realities, responsible salvation is constructed as attainable for both individual and nation through political engagement. Ultimately, the discursive tension is resolved in various ways. While Robertson relies on the active political resistance of all things resembling socialist views and policies, both Hagee and Van Impe lean much more directly toward articulating techniques of self-government for one's conduct. Hagee's narrative is much more rigid in his disdain for individual deficits. A subject either chooses to attain salvation and does so, or the subject has failed at this task because of a lack of commitment or outright neglect; here, the subject is simply not faithful enough. For Van Impe, self-government is less rigid here and mobilizing a 'try your best' sort of pragmatism to meet expectations of political prayer, proselytization, and political engagement appears to be sufficient. For all three, disciplining the self to comply with the expectations of evangelical subjectivity is an ongoing and highly endorsed project. In addition to their more overtly political action plans concerning partisan politics and political lobbying, all three establish prayer as a political act by requiring prayer for nation and political leaders as a biblical mandate. The links between

apocalyptic prophecy and political realities become securely established as a foreordained divine will that provides meaning and comfort for believers, while serving as a strategy of legitimation for discursive messages and calls to action. These dominant narratives activate the good Christian citizen as a politically engaged subject who actively participates in political process through prayer and overtly political acts, thus contributing to the broader discursive formation surrounding responsible salvation as a governing evangelical identity.

Chapter 10: Apocalyptic Governance of International Relations

*I will make you into a great nation, and I will bless you;
I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing.
I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse;
and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you (NIV: Genesis 12:2-3).*

*but every spirit that does not acknowledge Jesus is not from God.
This is the spirit of the antichrist,
which you have heard is coming and even now is already in the world (NIV: I John 4:3).*

Introduction

The general theme of this chapter seeks to understand how the apocalyptic mediated evangelist discourses under study here work to constitute salvation as an individual and national responsibility that is underscored by support for Israel through foreign policy and personal religiously informed political engagement. In discursive practice, a dual focus emerges for understanding the apocalyptic role of evangelical subjects and the United States in international relations: first, Israel holds a privileged place as a nation blessed by divine will and because of this it will be an important site of biblically legitimated conflict according to prophetic timelines; and second, the rise and reign of an international antichrist who brings death and destruction to all of the world under an original guise of peace and good global governance is a prominent topic for the prophetic interpretations that inform expectations for salvation. This chapter explores the contours of the discursive formation surrounding responsible salvation from a global perspective where instances of contemporary conflicts are mobilized and scripturally legitimated as inevitable and just holy wars that occur in fulfillment of apocalyptic prophecy. By analyzing the ways in which apocalyptic belief systems govern individual belief and action in support for Israel,

we can better understand the potential impact on national foreign policies concerning Middle Eastern conflict and pro-Israeli support when evangelical voting power is mobilized. Understanding the ways in which conflict is legitimated through biblical literalism makes evident an evangelical subjectivity that remains skeptical of Islam and encourages subjects to act personally and politically to support Israel. In doing so, we also see subtle and overt reinforcement of an anti-Muslim sentiment that is discursively sanctioned as part of God's own preordained plan for humanity.

In many ways, Robertson, Hagee, and the Van Impes reflect a longstanding tradition that reinforces a commonly held evangelical belief that America was intended to be a thoroughly Christian nation in its origins. As discussed in the previous chapter, these evangelists do not however completely align with the more contested view of America as a "chosen nation – the New Israel" (Kyle 2006:24-25). In fact, they all clearly stress that the United States is fully capable of falling out of God's favour without serious reform to the perceived moral decline taking shape through the rise of secularism, pluralism, and socialism. That said, no such ambivalence and contestation occurs in regard to the importance and prophetic role of Israel and the Jewish people. For all three evangelists, Israel is the only divinely established nation and, as such, its entire history has been unequivocally mapped out by God through biblical prophecy. Accordingly, direct action against Israel and any level of apparent support for its enemies' causes are mobilized as ungodly, thoroughly unchristian, and unpatriotic. The main strategy of legitimation here relies on biblical authority where evangelicals are regularly implored to take responsible action in support of Israel to guarantee both individual and national salvation.

When Israel proclaimed its independent statehood on May 14th, 1948, prophecy interpreters delighted in celebrating the fulfillment of a key indicator of the approaching apocalypse and subsequent return of Christ on earth. While American evangelical history is fraught with contradictory visions of the relationship between Jews and communism (Williams 2009), as stated above, steadfast support for Israel is a dominant discursive feature within this sample. In addition to being unequivocally pro-Israel, contemporary evangelical traditions reinforce longstanding anti-socialist/communist religious-political narratives that correspond with apocalyptic eschatology²⁵⁶ (Hadden and Swann 1981, Kyle 2006). While the specified threat of communism is not a new feature of evangelical discourse, enjoying much popularity during the cold war (Williams 2009), it is not solely a response to the rise of soviet communism during this period. As discussed in the previous chapter, evangelical disdain for all things socialist is born out of apocalyptic beliefs concerning the centralization of power and the positioning of the antichrist as the enthusiastic leader of a one world government, religion, and economy before his fury is unleashed against Christianity, Israel, and the entirety of humanity. This positioning of a socialist antichrist, and his resolute hatred of Israel and Jews, is routinely mobilized throughout the evangelical programs considered here, where his crafty manipulation of global economy, religion, and government under the pretense of peace further reinforces a discursive mistrust of the peace process and reconciliation in the middle east. As such, evangelical subjectivity is characterized by skepticism for international peacemaking efforts, particularly those endorsed or advanced by the Obama administration.

²⁵⁶ This has been discussed at length in the previous chapter.

This biblical rejection of peace and the apocalyptic foretelling of continual conflict until the final battle of Armageddon thus reinforces Middle Eastern conflict between Israel and its enemies as a just and holy war that is legitimated through prophetic scriptural authority. As much as the proclamation of Israel was decried a telling sign of a rapidly approaching end times, so too is any perceived aggression against the state. Here, evangelical subjects are bound through responsible salvation and called to action to privately, financially, and politically support Israel against the antichrist and other earthly enemies. This contemporary alliance between evangelical Christians and Jews is a multifaceted relationship born through theological and pragmatic needs where Muslims and the religion of Islam are consistently portrayed as terrorist aggressors in opposition to Christ's eventual return. As long as it is directed at Israel's enemies, support for intrusive militaristic American foreign policy is thus mobilized and legitimated as sanctioned by the divine sacredness of the Bible itself. As a result, resolutions of conflict and any eventual peace in the Middle East are mobilized as counterproductive to the will of God and constructed as obstacles to the prophesized return of Christ on earth. The remaining sections of this chapter will explore the ways in which Robertson, Hagee, and the Van Impes position themselves and their congregations as allies to Israel in the battle against 'Islamic terrorism' and the antichrist, before exploring the ways in which politically engaged evangelical subjects are responsabilized to seize the offered actionable plans in the pursuit of individual, national, and global salvation.

Sacred Sovereignty

Any analysis of evangelical prophecy interpretation that does not highlight the centrality of Israel within these discourses fails to understand the crux of Christian apocalyptic belief systems and the complex relationship between religion and American global politics. Furthermore, “to understand American attitudes toward the Jews and toward Israel, one must attend carefully to the nuances and subtexts of popular prophecy belief. Premillennialism is a complex system; it is *not* merely a theological mask for Jew hatred” (Boyer 1992:224). The complexity Boyer (1992) refers to here concerns the dominance of premillennialist understandings that envision Israel and the fate of the Jewish people as a central focal point of the antichrist’s wrath leading up to the final battle of Armageddon. Hadden and Swann (1981) review the relevant eschatological chronology here:

In the classic view of these events (which has many modern permutations), the seven-year tribulation after the sudden rapture of the saints will be filled with two major happenings. The gospel of the kingdom will be preached (by believing Jews, it seems, since all Christians have departed), and Israel will be converted. The second major event is the rise of the Anti-Christ, who will attack Israel. After the defeat of the Anti-Christ, Jesus will come down to establish his earthly throne at Jerusalem (1981:95).

After also recognizing the complexity of this prevalent doctrine, Hadden and Swann go on to remind us that “what makes these millennialist beliefs important to analysts is their connection to the U.S.S.R. and Israel in the modern world. Evangelical support for Israel has been noted widely. Support of Israel, to the fundamentalist preachers, simply is cooperation with God in the fulfillment of biblical prophecy. A Christian America cannot do otherwise” (1981:95-96). While the key actors have shifted slightly since Hadden and Swann’s (1981) pioneering work on televangelism, the themes remain the same. Jews

continue to be represented as having a pivotal prophetic role to fulfill and Israel continues to be constructed as ground zero for the antichrist's fury and the eventual battle of Armageddon. Kyle (2006) also notes the continuation of this trend: "of great importance and as a result of its eschatology, the Christian Right has a great interest in Israel. The return of the Jews to Palestine set the divine clock ticking. Nothing else needs to be fulfilled before the end. Thus, the Christian Right staunchly support Israel's interests in American foreign policy" (2006:179). Therefore, this apocalyptic destiny for Israel and the Jewish people has been long since written and rests on biblical authority. As such, this theme remains prolific in contemporary mediated evangelism, saturating our airwaves since the post world war II period (Boyer 1992).

The privileged position of Israel and the global Jewish population depicted in most evangelists' apocalyptic prophecy interpretations is not without its drawbacks. As Boyer (1992) aptly notes, there is a dark side to this vision:

While premillennialists foresee a bright future for Israel, terrible events lie ahead as well. The Jews, long punished by God for their sinfulness, face a final horrendous ordeal during the Tribulation. Only after this 'winnowing' will the survivors at last accept Jesus as Messiah. If we are fully to understand prophetic belief about the Jews, these somber and disturbing themes demand attention (1992:208).

While the degree to which Jews (and all non-raptured survivors) will suffer during the tribulation period ranges in severity, the most emphatic proponents articulate a fate worse than that of the Nazi holocaust (Boyer 1992). As Jeremy Mayer (2004) notes, "for many premillennialists, a united and secure Israel is a necessary first step toward the longed-for reappearance of Christ, along with the inevitable suffering and slaughter of nonbelievers (including, according to some interpretations, two-thirds of Jews, or those Jews who do not accept Christ)" (2004:700). This doomed fate for Jews is a theme that is still present today.

Robertson, Hagee, and the Van Impes all address the prophetic future of both Israel and Jews without reflexive attention to the dueling motivations inherent in their ardent support of a pro-Israel America. As Boyer (1992) notes, "...a telling ambiguity arises. Taken as a whole, the genre sees Jews as victims of both God's loving judgment *and* Satan's hatred" (1992:213). Thus, Jews are constructed as both targets of the antichrist and deserving of God's judgment until the last conversion nearing the end of the tribulation period; a general construction that is often glossed over in the programs of all three evangelists considered here. The nature of evangelical support for Israel has seen the creation of perhaps uneasy alliances between American evangelicals and Israeli Jewish organizations where a foreordained massacre of Jews is indisputably expected by evangelicals yet often pragmatically dismissed and tolerated as theologically irrelevant by Jewish leaders (Boyer 1992:217). The remainder of this section explores the current contours of American evangelical support for Israel and the ways in which Robertson, Hagee, and the Van Impes construct a pro-Israel expectation of political support for their congregations, in an effort to hasten prophecy fulfillment.

General evangelical support here stems from the theological belief that God gave Israel to the Jewish people. However, determining the precise contours of evangelical political support for Israel has been a more complex matter. According to James Davison Hunter (1989),

Israel provides another divisive issue for evangelicals. Its eschatological significance for most evangelicals hardly needs mentioning. Its strategic significance to U.S. foreign policy is also obvious. For both of these reasons, Israel has long been supported by the evangelical laity. Yet on this issue, evangelical elites are sharply divided. Questioned whether America should do everything it can to support Israel, 38 percent of all evangelical seminarians agreed, 31 percent disagreed, and 30 percent were neutral (1989:74).

While Hunter's (1989) work here appears to be based on one survey (the IEA/Roper Center Theological Faculty Survey) published in 1982, similar complexities remain today when attempting to understand evangelical support for Israel. According to the Pew Research Center's 2011 Global Survey of Evangelical Protestant Leaders, attitudes toward Israel are still mixed, but leaders from the United States appear to express similar levels of support to Hunter's (1989) earlier analysis. According to the Pew survey of leaders,

overall, 48% of the evangelicals say the state of Israel is a fulfillment of biblical prophecy about the Second Coming of Jesus, while 42% say it is not. More say they sympathize with Israel (34%) than with the Palestinians (11%), but a small majority say they either sympathize with both sides equally (39%) or with neither side (13%) (Pew Research Center 2011:27).

The survey also highlights that support for Israel amongst so-called American 'rank-and-file evangelical Protestants' is even higher, where "a solid majority (59%) considers Israel a fulfillment of the biblical prophecy about the Second Coming, while 22% do not" (Pew Research Center 2011:65)²⁵⁷. However, when assessing support for Israel regarding conflict with Palestine, American leaders are potentially less certain overall:

While most U.S. evangelical leaders hold a favorable view of Jews overall (82%), they tend to take an even-handed view of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. About half of the U.S. leaders surveyed (49%) express equal sympathy for both parties. Three-in-ten U.S. evangelical leaders (30%) say they sympathize more with Israel, while 13% sympathize more with the Palestinians (Pew Research Center 2011:66)

That said, so-called 'rank and file' leaders express more support (62%) for Israel but, as a result of question wording differences, the report does not make claims that the two datasets are directly comparable (Pew Research Center 2011:66). While Hunter's (1989) early assessment of the scope of evangelical support for Israel does not put forth enough detail

²⁵⁷ These findings among American evangelical leaders also reinforce earlier Pew findings from 2006 which suggest that "white evangelical Protestants stand out for their widespread belief that Israel was given by God to the Jews (69%), and that Israel is the fulfillment of biblical prophecy (59%)" (Pew Research Center 2006a:20).

to make direct comparisons with more recent data, it appears that belief in Israel's eschatological significance is relatively strong among contemporary global and American evangelical Protestant leaders with so-called 'rank and file' American evangelical leaders showing the strongest levels of support for Israel over Palestine.

Belief in the eschatological significance of Israel and support for pro-Israel American foreign policy enjoys even more strength amongst the general evangelical population in the United States, particularly within the white evangelical demographic (Lipka 2013). According to a more recent Pew assessment, belief in God's covenant with Israel is stronger for white American evangelicals than even American Jews, where "twice as many white evangelical Protestants [82%] as Jews [40%] say that Israel was given to the Jewish people by God" (Lipka 2013)²⁵⁸. On its own, belief in God's covenant with Israel does not provide us with a coherent picture of evangelical support for American foreign policy concerning Israeli/Palestinian conflicts; however, the study also surveys respondents about their perceptions of America's relationship for Israel. When asked if the U.S. is too supportive, not supportive enough, or appropriately supportive of Israel, forty-six percent of white evangelical respondents agree that America is not supportive enough of Israel, in contrast to the twenty-five percent of the general population and thirty-one percent of Jewish respondents who agree with the same statement (Pew Research Center 2013:93). Furthermore, fifty percent of white evangelical Protestants do not see a way for Israel to coexist peacefully with an independent Palestinian state (Pew Research Center 2013:87). More recently, when asked "if Israel were to attack Iran to stop its nuclear weapons program, what position should the U.S. take?", sixty-four percent of white

²⁵⁸ The same report lists the general American population's support at forty-four percent (Lipka 2013).

evangelical respondents agreed that the U.S. should support Israel, a significant increase over the thirty-nine percent of the general public (Lipka 2014). Taking the more recent Pew data as a whole, it is clear that white evangelical beliefs (amongst the laity) resoundingly support the belief that Israel is God's promised sovereign gift to the Jewish people. This data also suggests that white evangelicals express strong political beliefs concerning their nation's envisioned role in providing political and military support for Israel in times of conflict.

None of the slight fluctuations present in recent Pew data exist when considering the messages emanating from Robertson, Hagee, and the Van Impes. Here, expectations of personal, political, and military support for Israel (as grounded in biblical authority and eschatological significance) are an overwhelming discursive norm. The significance of Israel, and support for Jewish allies, is firmly rooted in their apocalyptic prophecy interpretations and thereby legitimated through biblical authority. Hagee explains it most succinctly by regularly reminding viewers that "Israel is the only nation created by a sovereign act of God" (JHT: January 25th, 2010), thus positioning the state as divinely privileged. All three evangelists recognize the establishment of Israel as a modern state in 1948 as the fulfillment of biblical prophecy, and enthusiastically celebrate this event as a critical indicator that we are indeed living in the last days:

it was one of the great fulfillments of biblical prophecy when Jews came back to Israel and in 1948 there was the inauguration of the state of Israel (700 Club: March 25th, 2010).

Israel is now on centre stage... World War II brought the holocaust which produced a global demand for the Jewish people to have a homeland, on May the 14th, 1948 Ben-Gurion drove down Rothschild Street in Tel Aviv, Israel and Ben-Gurion stepped lively into a modern two-story building which housed an art museum. There he found four hundred people gathered together in a room that would charge with electricity, including the world press. At exactly four pm, he stood and called

the meeting to order and read these historic words, quote “it is self-evident the right of Jewish people to be a nation, as all of the nations, its own sovereign state. We hereby proclaim the establishment of the Jewish state in Palestine to be called the state of Israel” end of quote...the only time a nation was born in one day was the nation of Israel. May 14th, 1948. It was prophesized 740 years before Jesus Christ was born (JHT: January 19th, 2010).

the Jew is there to stay, his kingdom will last forever with Christ sitting on the tabernacle of David, the throne of David, which will be erected at any time. Thank God for the man who had the vision of Benjamin Netanyahu. Now, the Bible teaches that none of this could happen until Israel became a nation and they did on May 14th 1948 (JVIP: May 15th, 2010).

Both Robertson and Van Impe also go on to reinforce Israel’s political significance as an ally of the United States and as a force for democracy in the Middle East:

We stand with Israel. Israel is our staunch ally. It is a bastion of democracy in the middle of a sea of totalitarianism in the Middle East. If you have any knowledge whatsoever of the Middle East, you see that (700 Club: March 25th, 2010).

Rexella: Well, lets go back to Israel and hit that happy note once again. We all know that Israel is the only democracy in the Middle East and has been a true friend to the United States and we all thank God so very much for that! (JVIP: May 15th, 2010).

While Hagee does not directly address Israel’s position as an American political ally in the television sample, it is tacitly implied throughout his televised sermons. The most obvious exemplar of his support for an American-Israeli alliance is offered up through his online ministry and charitable/political organizations, *Exodus II* and *Christians United for Israel* (CUFI)²⁵⁹. A CUFI website page entitled ‘The U.S. and Israel’ serves as an obvious reminder that Hagee applauds Israeli and American politicians who work toward further solidifying relationships between the two countries. This page offers motivating quotes of support for this Israeli-American alliance that are embedded within images of Presidents John Adams, Calvin Coolidge, Warren Harding, Herbert Hoover, Harry Truman, John F.

²⁵⁹ These organizations will be discussed in further detail in the sections that follow.

Kennedy, Ronald Reagan, George Bush, and George W. Bush. Quotes from Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and President Shimon Peres also appear. For example, the following quotes from Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and former American President George W. Bush both speak to the political significance of Israel-American relations while President Bush's quote also further expresses the biblical nature of their alliance:

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These images exemplify how these quotes and images are integrated into the website to not only convey political messages but to also provide an easy 'clickable' opportunity to show support through social media platforms²⁶¹, thus providing the evangelical subject with yet another actionable plan for attaining salvation through digital proselytization. The dominant narrative regarding Israel's significance tells us that Israel is politically significant to both national and spiritual interests.

²⁶⁰ These images can be found on CUFI's web page, titled The U.S. and Israel (CUFI 2016d).

²⁶¹ While social media is not a central focus of analysis for this dissertation, its presence is now well integrated into the television and online ministries of mediated evangelists. That said, social media content is only assessed in this analysis when it is referenced in televised or online ministry discussions. Evangelical use of social media platforms is certainly a fertile site for future analysis of evangelical media packages.

Support for Israel is thus constructed as a biblical imperative and the resultant strategies for legitimation here are absolute. Supporting Israel through political and spiritual acts is not simply a matter of prophecy fulfillment or an expectation of biblical decree; it is cooperation with God himself²⁶² (Hadden and Swann 1981). The remainder of this section examines the ways in which support for Israel is mobilized as a biblical imperative throughout the sample of each evangelist. Robertson, Hagee, and the Van Impes all regularly proclaim Israel as the only nation created through an act of God, while mobilizing scriptural evidence of this divine plan where God's own love and support for the nation (and its Jewish citizens) is a taken for granted reality:

Israel is the spiritual capitol of the world. This is what God calls the navel of the earth in the Old Testament. Why are all of the nations so concerned about Israel? Because it is God's outpost (Robertson 2016h).

now, God is saying, to those who are hard of hearing, my focus is on Israel at the end of the age. The Jewish people are still the apple of God's eye. They are chosen, they are cherished, they are still his covenant people. Romans 11:26 says and all of Israel shall be saved (JHT: January 26th, 2010).

Rexella: "...they are the one liberation and democracy over there in the Middle East and they are our asset. A big big big question, why has Israel always been hated? This is hard for me to understand! Jack?

Jack: Because God loves the Jew more than any other race on earth from the early days onward, Deuteronomy 7, verses 7 and 8. But I Chronicles tells us that chapter 21, verse 1 that Satan, the old slimy devil, stood against Israel, and I'll tell you, its always been that way (JVIP: June 19th, 2010).

While Robertson and his cohosts more often than not rely on their assumed theological expertise as constructed authority for their messages here, both Hagee and Van Impe regularly cite specific biblical verses as support for their endorsement of the Jews as God's

²⁶² While I recognize and generally engage in the use of gender neutral language and recognize the plurality of religious understandings of non-tangible deities and non-personified forms of sacredness, the evangelists under study very clearly do not. Their language is employed here in an effort to accurately reflect the reality of the discursive formation.

chosen people²⁶³. The most direct example of this strategy of legitimation is evidenced through Hagee's website in a section entitled 'Why Christians Should Support Israel'. Here, Hagee argues that "everything Christians do should be based upon the Biblical text" (JHM 2015b) and then proceeds to contextualize seven important reasons why Christians should support Israel, citing multiple Bible passages²⁶⁴ that serve as evidence of God's love for Israel. The text quoted below offers a brief abridged summary of his main argument regarding Christian support for Israel:

Christians owe a debt of eternal gratitude to the Jewish people for their contributions that gave birth to the Christian faith...It is not possible to say, 'I am a Christian' and not love the Jewish people. The Bible teaches that love is not what you say, but what you do. (1 John 3:18) 'A bell is not a bell until you ring it, a song is not a song until you sing it, love is not love until you share it'...We support Israel because all other nations were created by an act of men, but Israel was created by an act of God! The Royal Land Grant that was given to Abraham and his seed through Isaac and Jacob with an everlasting and unconditional covenant (Genesis 12:1-3, 13:14-18, 15:1-21, 17:4-8, 22:15-18, 26:1-5 and Psalm 89:28-37) (JHM 2015b).

While Hagee is perhaps the most vocal of the three evangelists considered here, each is consistent in their insistence of Christian and American support for Israel as a political and spiritual ally where prophetic interpretation and scriptural support are mobilized as evidence for their claims. By this logic, the inevitable reality of their unwavering support for Israel results in a resounding disdain for the nation's enemies and any interventionist attempts to divide their land or attack their citizens. This narrative contributes to an evangelical subjectivity where expectations are made abundantly clear; spiritual and political support for Israel and pro-Israel American foreign policy are prerequisites for

²⁶³ It should be noted that Pat Robertson's personal website also employs biblical citation as a strategy of legitimation, much more often than his television programming.

²⁶⁴ Hagee cites the following passages: Genesis 12:3, Romans 15:27, St. John 4:22, 1 John 3:18, Matthew 25:40, Psalm 122:6, Luke 7:5, Acts Chapter 10, Genesis 12:1-3, 13:14-18, 15:1-21, 17:4-8, 22:15-18, 26:1-5 and Psalm 89:28-37.

responsible salvation, thus further reinforcing and informing conservative political frames. The following section locates Middle Eastern and global conflicts as further indicators of prophecy fulfillment while also analyzing the ways in which non-Christian aggressors against the state of Israel are constructed as enemies of God and allies of evil.

Challenging God's Sovereignty

Exploring the intersections of apocalyptic, biblical, and political discourses throughout mediated evangelism is essential to understanding how Robertson, Hagee, and the Van Impes enter the political sphere on a diverse range of issues; however, nowhere is it more important than in understanding their positions concerning historical and contemporary conflicts involving Israel. While others have argued, with some merit, that approaches to American foreign policy are not distinctly biblical in nature (Curry 1989), all three evangelists considered here systematically mobilize scriptural authority and prophecy interpretation as a strategy of legitimation for their political commentary on a prescriptive and interventionist American role within international conflicts²⁶⁵. Hadden and Swann (1981) remind us that this has been the case for some time:

to fundamentalists, the world is one giant battleground for the struggle between good and evil, which rages in all realms: moral, religious, social, spiritual, and political. There is no room in fundamentalism for differing social perspectives or political systems. Compromise is sin. This outlook informs their view of U.S. national defense and foreign policy. Many of them fully expect a final apocalyptic war between the United States and the Soviet Union – and they support this expectation with what they regard as specific prophecies in the Bible (1981:94).

²⁶⁵ Of course, the scope here addresses contemporary international conflicts involving Israel but the evangelists under study here also reflect a longstanding tradition of evangelical distrust for the United Nations. As Boyer (2005a) notes, this 'vehement hostility' that conservative Protestants possess for the U.N. is rooted in their premillennialist apocalyptic lens. During the sample, the U.N. is portrayed as both an obstacle to supporting Israel through military efforts and as an enabler for the eventual rise of the antichrist. It is highly likely that the evangelists considered here would support a full American withdrawal from the U.N. were they to influence this possible outcome.

Of course, the cold war has long since ceased, but in this sample, little has changed foundationally since Hadden and Swann's (1981) now dated analysis, other than perhaps the key actors and relevant aggressors. This section examines the ways in which prophecy and biblical authority are mobilized to legitimate narratives of us/good versus them/evil when assessing contemporary Middle Eastern conflict as pertinent to Israel. As such, it is made resoundingly clear that individual and national salvation are on the line when it comes to personal, political, and military support for Israel and the Jewish people in general. This underscores the potential that evangelical subjects hold for influencing American foreign policy through apocalyptic prophecy (Boyer 2005), were they able to unify their voting potential around like-minded elected representatives²⁶⁶.

Robertson, Hagee, and the Van Impes all emphatically reinforce the need for active Christian support for Israel through prayer, while making sure that consequences for inaction are made well apparent for their audiences. Here, they further contribute to the discursive formation surrounding responsible salvation by constructing prayer as not just an easy actionable plan for attaining individual salvation, but also as a biblical command where individual support also becomes tied to national salvation:

Gordon Robertson: it's a time to pray for Israel and pray specifically for the peace of Jerusalem and I'm not sure the administration knows what it has done in order to embolden the enemies of Israel. The assumption of prior administrations, the problem with the peace process has been the Palestinian authority which has never given up its claim to drive Israel into the sea and if you start putting pressure on Israel about building new homes in east Jerusalem which has never been an issue...it emboldens Hamas, it emboldens Iran, it emboldens the Arab world...now is a time to pray. Pray for our administration. Pray for Israel and pray for peace (700 Club: March 26th, 2010).

²⁶⁶ Hagee attempts to hasten this process through the creation of an annual Washington lobby event where congregants are able to connect with elected officials to advance their messages. This event will be discussed in further detail later in this chapter.

He commands us to bless the state of Israel and to bless the Jewish people. We do it because it is the commandment of God. He commands us to go into all of the world and to preach the gospel. Why do I go to Nigeria? Why do I go to Europe? To Columbia? To Canada? To Africa? To the outermost parts of the earth? I go because it's the will of God in this book for me to go [yelling]! I am the servant, he's the king (JHT: January 8th, 2009).

Here we also see expressions of anger concerning American political actions that are perceived to be jeopardizing the allied relationship between the United States and Israel. All three evangelists, routinely caution against distancing Israeli-American national interests and discourage any expressions of anti-Semitism; here, they articulate the most notable consequence as evoking the ire and wrath of God for both individuals and all of the nation:

Our president wants to give Jerusalem to the Muslims, God help America (JVIP: June 6th, 2010).

...keep your eyes on the paper, quit beating up on the Jews, I'm sorry there are people that talk that way about the Jew, he's never had peace for the last 2500 years, until now (JVIP: June 19th, 2010).

We're facing nuclear war in the Middle East as Iran repeatedly threatens to wipe Israel off of the map. And then they promise to attack us. Let me say this to everyone here and especially to those of you in Washington: There's the growing idea that you have the right to tell Israel what to do with their country. Israel has the right to defend themselves against theocratic dictatorships that are forming in Iran. Israel is a sovereign state, they are not a vassal state of the United States and they do not need the permission of the state department to defend themselves against...wake up America. What's the answer? Here's the answer. I want you to listen closely [intense music starts to play in background], I urge every American here and those of you who are listening across the nation to start praying for America everyday. Pray passionately, pray persistently, pray without ceasing because God is the only thing that can save our nation at a time like this (JHT: November 23rd, 2009).

God is turning his attention to Israel. Israel is the only nation ever created by a sovereign act of God. Israel is defended by God...God has promised that he will destroy all nations that come to fight against Israel, and especially Jerusalem...God says any nation that forces Israel to divide their land, I will bring the judgment upon that nation. I believe that soon America's state department will advance the idea that Jerusalem should be divided to make peace with the enemies of Israel. I believe

based on Joel 3 & 2 that the wrath and judgment of God will be poured out on America if we make that foolish decision (JHT: January 25th, 2010).

By establishing support for Israel as a biblical imperative where divine wrath is guaranteed as a consequence for inaction, the evangelists considered here contribute to a narrative that constructs Israel as both a political and spiritual ally in the ultimate battle between good and evil. Consequently, any support or sympathy for Palestinians (or Israel's other constructed enemies) is oppositional to this end. Robertson's most clearly articulated contribution to this narrative takes shape through his personal website's section entitled 'Israel and the Road Map to Peace',

I am telling you, ladies and gentlemen, this is suicide. If the United States, and I want you to hear me very clearly, if the United States takes a role in ripping half of Jerusalem away from Israel and giving it to Yasser Arafat²⁶⁷ and a group of terrorists, we are going to see the wrath of God fall on this nation that will make tornadoes look like a Sunday school picnic (Robertson 2016h).

Not only does Robertson make clear that American policies that support a peaceful two-state solution for Israeli-Palestinian conflict will evoke divine judgment for the nation, he goes on to delegitimize the very existence of a Palestinian state as antithetical to God's own desires:

This is a permanent possession given by God to Abraham, and all of this territory is the land of Israel. There is no such thing as a Palestine state, nor has there ever been. Now we're going to make something that never happened before in contravention to Scripture. God may love George Bush. God may love America. God may love us all. But if we stand in the way of prophecy and try to frustrate what God said in his immutable Word, then we're in for a heap of trouble. And I think this is a warning we should all take (Robertson 2016h).

Robertson's seamless integration of scriptural support (Genesis 13:15 and 2 Chronicles 20:7) and political commentary on contemporary conflict align with Hagee's and Van

²⁶⁷ Given the out-dated political references articulated throughout this webpage, it is clear that it has not been updated for some time yet the overall narrative is still consistent with that expressed through the televised sample.

Impe's contributions to this narrative. All three make clear that responsibilized Christian citizens have no other option than to express spiritual and political support for Israel and their Jewish allies²⁶⁸, and inevitably neglect the plight of Palestinians. In doing so, individual failure to further support Israel through prayer for American politicians and biblically informed foreign policy becomes constructed as a surefire way to evoke God's ultimate judgment, therefore serving as a fearful cautionary tale to be avoided at all costs.

Another important discursive tension is made evident throughout these discussions: while we see an emphatic call for Christian citizens to pray for peace for Israel, in an effort to ensure individual and national salvation, we also see a corresponding acceptance that enduring peace for Israel is not likely in the cards until after apocalyptic timelines are enacted and foreordained biblical prophecy is fulfilled. Likewise, the promised eschatological fate of Israel and Jews is one of extreme conflict, mass slaughter, and eventual conversion to Christianity following the final battle of Armageddon. Under these discursive conditions, any peaceful solution to middle eastern conflict would be met with much skepticism; as either an obstacle to the ultimate fulfilment of apocalyptic prophecy or as another critical indicator that the antichrist has indeed put his plan into action. Of course, the latter would serve as a potential invalidation of the pre-tribulation rapture worldview so the former is perhaps a more likely discursive possibility. Either way, whether Israel remains in conflict or achieves a peaceful agreement with its neighbours, prophetic interpretation is capable of explaining each outcome as evidence of prophecy fulfillment – either outcome further legitimates the end time scenario. The following section examines the ways in which prophetic interpretations concerning the rise of the

²⁶⁸ All three evangelists offer a multitude of actionable plans to help support Israel. These will be discussed in further detail in the final section of this chapter.

antichrist as the ultimate enemy of Israel are mobilized alongside constructions of anti-Christian Islamic aggression as a means of further solidifying support for Israel and opposition against any American political action that supports Palestine and other Islamic neighbours in the Middle East.

Global Governance and the Legitimation of Conflict

As illustrated above, Israel is ground zero for the final hours of most evangelical end time scenarios. Israel is continually constructed as playing a key role as the target of the empowered antichrist who has gained control of all the world's political, religious, and economic systems under the façade of peace. Knowing the Jews to be the chosen sons of God himself, the antichrist turns his violent attention toward this population and brings his earthly allies to battle. Here, we see most prophetic interpretations envision a horrifying fate of slaughter and destruction thrust upon Jews and their non-raptured supporters – an inevitable step prior to the ultimate return of Christ as victor in the final battle of Armageddon. Despite the grim fate awaiting the Jews, “prophecy writers [tend to portray] this coming holocaust as the means to a good outcome” (Boyer 1992:212). Robertson, Hagee, and the Van Impes add their voices to this longstanding tradition. While all nations that act against Israel are exemplified as recipients of divine consequence, Islamic nations in particular are discursively mobilized as an ally of the antichrist and an enemy of Israeli and American interests. Little attention is paid to isolating Islamic faiths from the terrorist acts of some adherents. Acknowledging any wrongdoing by Israel (or its allies) or sympathizing with Palestinian land claims are also entirely absent. By mobilizing fear and the threat of God's wrath as foreordained consequences of ambivalence here, all three

evangelists mobilize biblical justification for acts of violence against Israel's enemies, while regularly conflating Muslims as terrorists and portraying Islam as a religion at odds with God's plan for humanity²⁶⁹. According to Boyer (2005a), this anti-Muslim theme has reached 'feverish levels' for post-9/11 prophecy interpreters and conservative evangelists, echoing and reinforcing secular and political discourses that also exude a mistrust of American and International Muslims that proliferates throughout the United States more broadly (Jung 2012). Conflict is thus normalized as just and inevitable, while peace is depicted as an unattainable reality prior to the intervention of Jesus Christ at the conclusion of apocalyptic timelines; earthly organized peace solutions are thus constructed as counterproductive to the nearing apocalyptic end-game.

Because Israel's proclamation of statehood has so often been viewed as the final eschatological step toward the ultimate fulfillment of prophecy, it appears as though apocalyptic preachers have been on the edge of their seats since 1948, impatiently awaiting the rapture and subsequent rise and seven-year reign of the ultimate antichrist. Prophecy interpreters often express agreement with biblical scripture which states that "even now many antichrists have come. This is how we know it is the last hour" (NIV: I John 2:18). While general evangelist consensus acknowledges the existence of many antichrists throughout history, the ultimate antichrist who comes to reign over the world, who confronts Israel and its allies in battle, and who unsuccessfully challenges Jesus Christ, is the antichrist most discussed throughout the programming of Robertson, Hagee, and the

²⁶⁹ Islam's popularity as a focal point of prophetic significance has varied throughout the longstanding history of this tradition (Boyer 2005a). As Boyer (1992) notes, "as Ottoman power waned and then finally collapsed, the Muslim world diminished as a focus of eschatological attention. During the Cold War, Russia largely replaced Islamic nations in the end-time drama" (1992:327). In our post 9/11 social reality, this is no longer the case. While Russia still enjoys some discussion throughout this sample (mostly in Van Impe's analysis), it is clear that Islamic nations have again become eschatologically significant for the evangelists considered here.

Van Impes. Throughout the televised sample and their online ministries, it becomes clear that this antichrist has yet to make his appearance known. This absolute ruler is said to exhibit mighty and unusual power. He is projected to destroy the holy people of earth (Jews and non-raptured individuals who convert to Christianity during the tribulation period) and bring about poverty, destruction, and genocide. He does all of this after creating the illusion of peace by claiming to be the messiah but prior to divine intervention during the battle of Armageddon. While Hagee and Van Impe regularly address the antichrist's nearing reign on earth, Robertson stands out within the television sample as almost entirely neglecting this specific topic; instead speaking around the topic by addressing concurrent prophetic fulfillments that occur alongside the rule of the antichrist. While the bulk of the discussion concerning Hagee's and the Van Impes' perceptions of the antichrist will be heavily informed from the television sample, Robertson's contributions here will also be drawn out from more recent online data.

Given how much of their on-air discussion is devoted to the prophetic interpretation of contemporary news events, it should be no surprise that Jack and Rexella Van Impe regularly assert that the antichrist is currently poised to commence with his eschatological role within the end times. As noted in the previous chapter, Jack Van Impe remains steadfast in his argument that the antichrist is ready and waiting to assume global governance of political, religious, and economic systems (the new world order) under the guise of peace, therefore fulfilling the last prophetic requirement before the rapture and tribulation period. Van Impe routinely smiles and announces to his viewers that we are indeed living in the last age, or days, or hour. According to Van Impe, the emergence of the new world order (led by the antichrist) is prophesized in the Bible and has been in the

works for at least a thousand years. While Van Impe reminds us that the Illuminati, the Bilderbergs, the Tri Lateral Commission, the Council of Foreign Relations, the Club of Rome, the United Nations, and the New Age Movement have all played a role in the historical development of the new world order (JVIP: February 6th, 2010), he also maintains that the prophecy is only now about to be fulfilled:

They believe he is the one [President Obama]. Recently in Newsweek, which I reported on three weeks ago, Van Rompuy...said, 'I'm being deposed by Obama who is the de facto president of this new world order', of the United Nations and the European Union. De facto means one who is already giving orders though he's not been elected. We are living in that hour (JVIP: June 26th, 2010).

As discussed in the previous chapter, Van Impe is consistent in his depiction of a socialist new world order and regularly discusses news headlines regarding President Obama's foreign and domestic policies as evidence of not just the President's faux Christianity, but also as a reminder that he has been long since groomed by Henry Kissinger to be the leader of an eventual one-world government or new world order:

What an hour to be alive...Well folks, its here and remember when it comes to power [the new world order], we're gone! Think of it, they are preparing our president, Kissinger said so, Zbigniew Brzezinski said so, he's been working with him since 1976 and that's why Kissinger is so dogmatic about this. And remember this, when Jesus returns to set up his kingdom, that's the end of the new world order as Christ sets of the real new world order. Oh he's coming soon [throws his fist in the air]! (JVIP: February 6th, 2010).

Jack: the new world order, its here!...

Rexella: oh, and you know Jack, this one is unfolding in front of our eyes, dictator of the new world order, now, there had to be a new world order, and we're seeing an international global government coming, forming right now. The dictator of the new world order will set up a 7-year peace contract in the Middle East, that's his goal right now Jack!

Jack: Oh, Obama said 'I wanna do that within the next 24 months' and that's how he comes to power, as that world dictator because he comes in peaceably, Daniel 11:21 (JVIP: June 12, 2010).

Jack Van Impe isn't alone in his apparent belief that President Obama is a possible contender for the role of the antichrist²⁷⁰. According to a national survey from Public Policy Polling²⁷¹ (2013), "20% of Republicans believe that President Obama is the Anti-Christ, compared to 13% of independents and 6% of Democrats who agree" (Jensen 2013). A further seventeen percent of Republican participants could not be certain as to whether or not the President was in fact the antichrist (Jensen 2013). By offering up scriptural support for his apocalyptic timelines, alongside both historical interpretations, and contemporary examples of President Obama's perceived socialist agenda and offences toward Israel, Jack Van Impe routinely provides enough conflation here to conclude that he envisions President Obama as not just a socialistic anti-Israel politician, but also as a direct threat to God's chosen nation should he assume any role as a peacemaking global leader of the perceived new world order. Here, Van Impe is able to construct his critique of the then current social order by maintaining apocalyptic and biblically informed legitimacy for his politically-charged anti-Obama rhetoric. By positioning President Obama as the antichrist, he becomes the personified symbol of all that is seen as wrong with the world from this perspective: socialism, secularism, pluralism, liberal tolerance, lax immigration laws, international relations through the U.N., and broader peace-making efforts, to name a few. Under this antichrist conflation, President Obama himself is discursively held to account for the general decline of American Christian morality, as well as global conflict and disaster – as such, he becomes a key symbol for Van Impe's prophetic timeline.

²⁷⁰ It should be noted that Pat Robertson (2015) also recently expressed that President Obama believes himself to be 'the messiah' which could lead to a possible conclusion that this is a thinly veiled means of calling him out as an antichrist. This episode of the 700 Club is outside the sample of analysis.

²⁷¹ n=1247 registered voters

While Hagee doesn't directly name an antichrist candidate in this sample, he certainly contributes to apocalyptic evangelical discourses concerning the emergence of a new world order and the fast approaching rise and reign of the antichrist. Hagee devotes a considerably amount of time to this topic, particularly in a namesake sermon entitled "Prophetic Mysteries Revealed – The Coming New World Order" (JHT: February 1st, 2010). Throughout the televised sample, Hagee echoes Van Impe's revelation regarding the historical evolution of a new world order, whose leader is the bloodthirsty antichrist himself²⁷²:

Now [Jesus] warns Israel about false prophets coming into their future [Matthew 24:10&11]. Since the time of Christ, Israel has had about 40 false messiahs. The greatest deceiver of them all is yet to come. His name is the antichrist. He will appear immediately following the rapture of the church. Many Jews will believe this master orator is their messiah. He will make a seven-year treaty with Israel. He will break it after three and a half years. He will force all both small and great to take his mark in their right hand or on their forehead. Daniel states [8:25], he will cause craft to prosper. That means he will be bringing to an end an economic crash. He will form a one world government, a one world currency, a one world religion. I believe the economic slump we're in is going to lead to the global crash and he is going to stand on the platform we're now building (JHT: January 19th, 2010).

Now comes the United Nations who wants a new world order. What does it mean? Listen to the words of Brock Chisholm, former director of UN World Health Organization, quote "to achieve world government, it is necessary to remove from the minds of men, their individualism, to remove loyalty to the family, national patriotism, and religion" objective? To cast God out of society. Are we hearing right? The United Nations is...the house of political prostitutes who have sold themselves to someone else and they think they're ready to rule the world. I agree with the slogan 'get America out of the UN and get the UN out of America' [applause]. Listen closely, there is going to be a new world order. Its not going to be the socialistic utopia that self-serving politicians in D.C. believe its going to be. Its not going to be the heaven on earth that Marxist professors in America's universities are clamoring for. Its going to lead to an economic crash and then to a living hell on planet earth...God is about to say its enough. Its enough. You've rejected me. You've rejected my word. You've rejected my son Jesus Christ. I'm going to turn Satan's messiah loose on the earth, I'm going to release the antichrist

²⁷² Like Van Impe, Hagee also regularly links the Illuminati, Hitler, the United Nations, the ACLU, and new age movements to these discussions.

and the four horseman of the apocalypse who will make Hitler look like a choirboy (JHT: February 1st, 2010).

Like Hagee, Robertson also does not directly name an antichrist candidate; in fact, he does not directly address the antichrist within the television sample. He does however reference concurrent prophecy fulfillment that is very much related to the rise and reign of the antichrist: notably the so-called ‘mark of the beast’²⁷³:

Following a news segment on RFID nanotechnology and cashless payments, Gordon comments: this is just the beginning, we’re talking about technology that you will have a smart refrigerator and a smart cupboard that will start telling you when you’re out of particular items and it can even through the internet start ordering those items for you. So this is really going to revolutionize our commerce and when you look at it from a biblical perspective, you start seeing how the various things are being put in place where we’re all going to be ID’d. The current call for a national ID card. Well this kind of technology takes it from a card and it has it be something that’s physically on your body (700 Club: May 14th, 2010).

Following a news segment on a national ID card for all U.S. employees, Pat comments: well if its lost, what’s the next step? Well, you have to have a laser imprint on your hand...this is exactly what is said in Revelation. You won’t be able to buy or sell, except the mark of the beast. Isn’t that terrible to think about? Well, folks, read the Bible, read the paper, they’re coming pretty much in parallel (700 Club: March 25th, 2010).

Despite his neglect of directly addressing the rise of the antichrist on-air, the above quoted passages make it clear that Robertson and his son Gordon are also engaged in the interpretation of current events as indicators of the fast approaching end times. Robertson more directly engages this discussion in the ‘Bring It On’ section of *the 700 Club* website. When asked “Do you believe that the Antichrist the Bible talks about will be a person, an institution, a religion, or something else?”, Robertson offers the following response:

²⁷³ Prophetic interpretations of Revelation see the followers of the antichrist as taking on a bodily ‘mark of the beast’ during the tribulation period. According to Boyer’s (1992) synopsis of Revelation, “those who refuse to worship the Beast’s image are put to death. The Beast requires everyone, ‘both small and great, rich and poor, free and bond, to receive a mark in their right hand, or in their foreheads’ in order to buy or sell. This mark apparently consists of either the Beast’s name or its numerical equivalent [666]” (1992:38-39). Accordingly, grave punishment awaits those who accept the mark of the beast at the final judgments, after the defeat of the antichrist.

Maybe all of the above. I think when you read the book of Revelation, you see a false prophet. He's going to be the one who is actually doing miracles. The Antichrist will be a person, but it could also be an antichrist system. We have in the Bible that 'the spirit of the antichrist' is upon the face of the earth. It has to do in some measure with the systems, with anyone who does not confess that Jesus is Lord. You have all kinds of definitions of antichrist. It is very difficult to say it is an institution or whatever. I think they would have thought the Roman Empire in those days was an antichrist system. I think that they would think that Islam today is an antichrist system, at least radical Islam. I think that those people would say that some of the dictators, like Hitler, were antichrist. A person or an institution is motivated by Satan. That is the big thing. Satan is motivating and pulling strings, and it can appear in various forms and various manifestations (CBN 2016k).

Here, Robertson offers a much less decisive rendition of his conceptualization of the antichrist, a fairly stark contrast against Hagee's discussion, and especially Van Impe's pseudo-naming of President Obama as antichrist.

While the evangelists may offer slightly varied accounts of the personification of an antichrist figure in our time, they are in solid agreement about his eventual existence and devastating role within eschatological frameworks. Likewise, they express consensus in their expectation of an inevitable and destructive conflict that takes shape as the antichrist sets his sights on Israel. More specifically, the stage becomes set for the hellish tribulation period as a result of any attempt to divide Israel and relocate control of its lands to non-Jewish populations (notably Palestine as a tangible example of Islam more broadly). The evangelists considered here express this as a foregone conclusion for prophetic timelines, cautioning that anyone or any nation who stands against Israel on this matter will face the unmitigated wrath of God:

Israel, according to the Bible, is going to be isolated, you read the prophet Zechariah, it is clear that in the latter days, Israel is going to be isolated and all the nations of the earth will come against her. That's exactly what's happening. Israel is getting more and more isolated. More and more the victim of program from all the nations, and its biblical and its one of these things where God himself has got to defend them, because they're in trouble (700 Club: June 2nd, 2010).

That's why the world can never end, and I've got 120 verses where Yahweh God promises to the people of Israel, his beloved, Deuteronomy 7:7, they're going to have that land forever and forever so quit trying to give it to the Muslims Mr. Obama (JVIP: April 17th, 2010).

[Israel] had to be in control of Jerusalem because when the holocaust breaks forth on earth, its all over Jerusalem, because they divided Jerusalem, Joel 3 verse 2, that's what causes world war three. And I'm so sad to say that our American president Obama does not favor the Jews...but he has just promised Abbas that he will give them much of the land, as Arabs. Worse yet, he said 'I Will Give You Jerusalem!' That's the eternal capital of the Jews! And God is angry! 930 times, this book says [picks up Bible] Jerusalem belongs to the Jews! (JVIP: May 15th, 2010).

Bill Clinton's pastor told Bill Clinton, just before he went to Washington, D.C. to be the president for the first term, he said, and I quote "God will forgive you for the mistakes you make with other nations but God will not forget what you do to Israel" end quote. I agree, and so does the word of God (JHT: January 25th, 2010).

in our lifetime, we have watched the enemies of Israel attack Israel with corrupt peace treaties...the next treaty that is coming down the road will be intended to divide the city of Jerusalem. Listen to me, every Bible believing Christian in America and around the world should resist the effort to divide the city of Jerusalem, period (JHT: February 2nd, 2010).

As noted, this tribulation period is rife with natural disasters and genocidal wars where the non-raptured inhabitants of the earth (including Jews and their allies) sustain substantial loss of population as part of the antichrist's vicious crusade against God and Israel.

According to Hagee,

one fourth of humanity is going to die in a period of seven years. In America, that would be 76.5 million people and I believe that's going to happen. Where is the church? In heaven!... your mind cannot really grasp that kind of horror. The four horsemen of the apocalypse are galloping across the earth in a river of human blood...Jesus is warning the Jewish people. He's saying, listen, there's coming a false prophet in Israel who will do signs and wonders. He will call fire out of heaven. He's going to cause a statue to speak. Jesus is saying, this guy is a con artist. He's the front man for the antichrist. You've been conned by Bernie Madoff, don't be fooled by this false messiah, he's the antichrist (JHT: January 25th, 2010).

Van Impe reiterates Hagee's dismal vision of what lays ahead, noting the especially dire fate that awaits Jews during the tribulation:

Oh I'll tell you how the Jew has suffered and its going to happen even more. Why? Because Jeremiah 30 verse 7 says alas for that day is great so that none is like it. It's the time of Jacob's trouble. Talking about the tribulation hour, Revelation 6 to 18, and Jacob changed his name to Israel, II Kings 17:34. What trouble? Daniel 12:1 says it shall be a time of trouble such as never was, since there was a nation (JVIP: June 19th, 2010).

Again, Robertson rarely addresses the destruction awaiting the world during the tribulation period during the television sample; however, he does allude to Israel's increasing isolation and victimization in the passage quoted above regarding the division of Israel's lands (700 Club: June 2nd, 2010). He more directly contextualizes prophecy on his website by quoting Zechariah 14:2 in a discussion of the final battle: "for I will gather all the nations to battle against Jerusalem. The city shall be taken, the houses rifled and the women ravished. Half of the city shall go into captivity, but the remnant of the people shall not be cut off from the city" (Robertson 2016b). In reaffirming common apocalyptic evangelical sentiments, it becomes clear that Hagee, Van Impe, and Robertson all see destruction, war, and enduring conflict over Israel as a fated reality for humanity, long since devised through divine means, and articulated through biblical prophecy. This inescapable battle between good/God and evil/antichrist is deeply embedded in any evangelical discussion of conflict with Israel, where the antichrist becomes a discursive symbol of evangelical disdain for peaceful cooperation, socialism, and global governance through international organizations, like the United Nations. As such, this narrative influences a subjectivity that fuels intolerance for American governments and politicians who favour these approaches and advocate for social change, cooperative trade agreements, and global peace accords. Personal and political support for these agendas thus jeopardizes the attainment of salvation.

Islam: A Prophetic Enemy

Given that Israel is centralized as a divinely privileged nation, any aggression against this state is vociferously critiqued as an act of aggression against God himself. For complex geo-political and religious reasons, this ire is often directed at Israel's neighbours and particularly the religion of Islam itself as a prophesized breeding ground for anti-Semitic and anti-Christian terrorists. Clearly there are pragmatic geographical reasons for their positioning of Muslims as eventual allies of the antichrist, given that the majority of Israel's conflicts are with so-called Islamic nations. This apocalyptic worldview also emphatically maintains that any nation that acts against Israel is automatically positioned as falling out of God's favour. However important the geo-political influences of Israeli conflicts are in the construction of this apocalyptic disdain for Islam, the interpreted biblical roots of these conflicts are much more relevant to these evangelist constructions. As Boyer (1992) notes,

an anti-Arab bias colored much post-1948 prophecy writing...many authors assumed Arab complicity in Russia's invasion of Israel. Others speculated that the Arabs would use their control of oil to enforce Antichrist's global economic order, during the Tribulation. "The Arab world is an Antichrist-world," one asserted. In addressing Mideast issues specifically, most prophecy writers either ignored the Arabs or treated them as an obstacle to be removed (1992:200)²⁷⁴.

For many prophecy writers, this historical division between these two prominent religious traditions can be traced back to one key biblical figure, Abraham, and his covenant with God over the divine lineage of Israel: "others questioned the meaning of 'thy seed' in the

²⁷⁴ It should be noted here that usage of 'Arab,' 'Muslim,' and 'Islam' is regularly conflated throughout the evangelist discourses considered here, and at times throughout scholarly work more broadly. Like evangelicalism, the populations subsumed under these categories, and the usage of these religious identities for the believers that claim them for their own is diverse and complex. For instance, significant populations of Palestinian and other Arab Christians disrupt the tendency to treat the Arab world as strictly an Islamic region – a discursive norm throughout this sample. It is not my intention to reinforce the connotations between these identities and groups, but rather to employ the original language as it appears in both the evangelist discourses and the referenced academic literature.

Genesis passage. Since Abraham fathered not only Isaac by his wife, Sarah, but also Ishmael, founder of the Arab peoples, by his handmaiden, Hagar, some held that the Abrahamic covenant covered Arabs as well. Most, however, rejected this view” (Boyer 1992:194). Hagee routinely summarized this early biblical division of land throughout the preliminary research that informed this dissertation:

In an often recurring sermon series, Hagee tells us that these two religious paths were formed when Abraham had two sons: Ishmael, his first illegitimate son by Hagar, and then Isaac, his second son by wife Sarah. Hagee tells us that God told Abraham that his son was to inherit the covenant land: Israel. While Abraham expected this to be Ishmael, God decreed to Abraham that it was to be Isaac. Therefore, Islam followed unceremoniously from Ishmael and the Judeo-Christian faith, as a chosen people, formed through Isaac’s descendants (Thomas 2013:30).

Therefore, contemporary instances of conflict are depicted as simply recent examples of a longstanding and predestined biblical feud between Judeo-Christianity and Islam. By locating biblical origins for this division and constructing the two religious traditions as entirely oppositional, all of the evangelists considered here reflect the anti-Arab bias that Boyer (1992) addresses, despite very occasional instances where they carefully craft a discussion of respect for Islamic-Americans. In doing so, conflict between Israel and its Islamic neighbours becomes legitimated through scriptural and prophetic authority and Palestinian land claims are delegitimized as acts against God’s covenant with Abraham. The legitimacy of Israel’s occupation of Palestinian lands is unquestioned and is constructed as divine will where any efforts at peaceful resolutions that divide land are steadfastly challenged as ungodly. The remainder of this section explores the ways in which Robertson, Hagee, and the Van Impes mobilize biblical authority to further legitimate support for Israeli occupation of Palestinian lands and while doing so reinforce

a longstanding anti-Arab bias that has been pervasive in apocalyptic prophecy interpretation (Boyer 1992, 2005a).

As noted above, it is commonly expressed by all three evangelists that “any nation that curses Israel will be cursed by God...that’s the word of God” (JHT: January 11th, 2010). Because of Israel’s privileged position within apocalyptic timelines, political strife and territorial conflicts in the Middle East provide substantial opportunities for Robertson, Hagee, and the Van Impes to mobilize their prophetic interpretations. A resultant consequence of these narratives is fuel for religious intolerance for a so-called radical or radicalized Islam that is rarely separated from the vast majority of Muslim adherents. Hagee and Van Impe are more direct than Robertson in their on-air discussions of a radicalized Islamic culture that seeks out destruction of Israel and the American way of life. One of the most frequently aired commercial segments during *John Hagee Today* is a video offer for Hagee’s DVD entitled *The Third Jihad: Radical Islam’s Vision for America* (JHM 2015g). The commercial appears in multiple variations that all portray Islam as a radical religion whose adherents are setting their sights on global domination and the destruction of America from within. After flashing images of Islamic religious leaders and adherents proclaiming that Islam will dominate the world, the film’s commercials and extended trailer state that ‘The Third Jihad’ is “a film about the greatest threat facing America today. We all know about terrorism. This is the war you don’t know about” (IMDB.com, Inc. 2016). Not only is Hagee’s anti-Islam rhetoric reflected in his DVD offers, he also intermingles discussions of contemporary conflicts within his on-air sermons. In one prophetic sermon, Hagee cautions that

Ahmadinejad’s hope is that the Islamic messiah will soon appear. They don’t know who he is. They don’t know where he is, but in their theology, if they start a world

wide crisis, he will suddenly appear and bring about a world wide Islamic revolution that will end in all nations living under a global sharia. In other words, every nation living under an Islamic law. Ahmadinejad believes he can make that world war become a reality...its time for American to begin to think the unthinkable. That we are living in a very dangerous time threshold here (JHT: January 25th, 2010).

Hagee's narrative constructs all Muslims and Islamic nations in conflict with Israel as evidence of an endemic terrorist trend within the religion itself. His online ministries reinforce this trend in both their product catalogue and charitable organization websites. In a donation solicitation pamphlet for Exodus II²⁷⁵, Hagee reinforces his on-air sermons by claiming that "Israel is simply the first line of defense in this war against radical Islam. Israel and America are democracies and if there is one thing radical Islam hates it is the freedom we enjoy" (JHM 2015). Across platforms, a singular message emerges: Islam is a terroristic prophetic enemy of both Israel and the United States and its adherents are part and parcel of this interpretation. By consistently reinforcing a narrative that portrays Islam as a political and spiritual enemy of Israel and the United States, Hagee further reinforces the longstanding anti-Arab sentiment (Boyer 1992, 2005a) embedded in evangelical apocalyptic discourses, thus contributing to an evangelical subjectivity where religious intolerance is normalized through biblical authority.

The Van Impes add their voices to this conversation during a multitude of separate discussions, regularly positioning Israel against Islam while mobilizing scriptural support for God's covenant with Abraham. In an article regarding the placements of Palestinian flags in Tel Aviv (found in the 'News' section of their online ministries), Van Impe's commentary reinforces Hagee's construction of biblical support for Israel: "what brash and foolish games these perpetrators play. They'll soon know whose side the God of Abraham,

²⁷⁵ This charitable organization will be discussed in further detail in the next section of this chapter.

Isaac, and Jacob favors. God is identified by this title 32 times. Never by Abraham, Isaac, and Ishmael — Islam's son from Hagar" (JVIM 2016f). In a televised episode, Van Impe clarifies that while Islam will certainly be involved in the antichrist's reign of terror over Israel and the rest of the world, the antichrist himself will definitely not be Islamic (JVIP: February 13th, 2010). Van Impe regularly reminds his viewers that both Islamic terrorists and religious leaders are embroiled in plans to annihilate Jewish populations around the world:

...they are going to try to blow up the subways there. And you know why? Come on, figure it out. Because the largest concentration of Jews in the world, outside of Israel, is New York City. I feel sorry for that city because these Islamic terrorists want to get rid of them and that's why Ahmadinejad says I'm going to try to get rid of every because my messiah Mahdi will not come until I do (JVIP: May 15th, 2010).

While Rexella reads a variety of news headlines that suggest its Arab neighbours are 'beating up on Israel', Jack interjects: it's the Islamic clergy men saying that, kill all the Jews (JVIP: June 19th, 2010).

The Van Impes also make evident their belief that the United States should support Israel in their endeavors to maintain Israeli settlements and caution the Obama administration against any further divisions of land, peace treaties, or two-state solutions:

Rexella: why is this happening with Israel and the United States, do you think?

Jack: well, because Obama won't keep the promise that George Bush made, Bush was wrong in everything, you know [mocking]. Bush said Israel, we will help you and that is your land! And you have the right to build 1600 homes in the future. And so they took him at his word and now Obama comes along and says not only am I upset about the 1600 homes but I'm going to give Jerusalem to the Muslims, to the Arabs. And that goes against this book! [shakes Bible] 930 times, Jerusalem belongs to the Jew! (JVIP: March 20th, 2010).

I say it every week and I'm going to say it again. 930 times God says Jerusalem belongs to the Jew and our president wants to give it to the Muslims, to the Palestinians. Its not theirs...there's going to be an atomic war and I'm sorry President Obama, all your efforts, although you would like to have it that way, aren't going to work (JVIP: April 24th, 2010).

By citing what they clearly consider to be extensive scriptural support against Palestinian settlements, the Van Impes further legitimate Israeli interventions in land conflicts as divine will while also reinforcing their depiction of President Obama as oppositional to authentic Christian belief systems. The Van Impes also express disdain for what they consider to be the excessively pro-Muslim agenda of the Obama administration, often condemning terrorism alongside these discussions:

Jack: I've got some breaking news here here, I just studied this during the week, I found that these Islamic terrorists, since 1995 when they bombed the train station in France, and did 9/11 and killed 3000 people here in America, they have committed 1300 terrorist attacks! I'm not afraid to call them what they are, President doesn't want them called that but they are Islamic terrorists, they are murdering people! (JVIP: April 3rd, 2010).

Jack: it goes on and on and on. And you're not allowed by this president to use that terminology but it is Bible terminology and its happened in 1300 different places since 9/11 and we're just supposed to sit back and say oh, a peace loving religion, really?

Rexella: Islamic terrorism. And that's too bad they can't use that term, Jack (JVIP: June 12th, 2010).

While on occasion, Van Impe does acknowledge that he respects and has met peaceful Muslims (JVIP: May 15th and June 26th, 2010), his discussions make clear his thinly veiled attempts at avoiding charges of overt racism and hate speech while articulating his concerns that Islam is a religion in opposition to Christianity's own goals of peace and love. Likewise, his constant linguistic descriptions of 'Islamic terrorism' instead of simply 'terrorism' further reinforce a narrative that envisions Israeli-Islamic conflict as inevitable, necessary, and foreordained through biblical prophecy. These discussions contribute to an evangelical subjectivity where anti-Muslim sentiment is at the very least tolerated, and at the very worst openly encouraged and legitimated through prophetic interpretation.

Robertson's own conflation of Islam and violence addresses both domestic and foreign controversies. Following a news segment discussing the still debated building of a mosque at the 'ground zero' site in New York City, Robertson expresses support for those protesting the plans:

Ladies and gentleman, I am very frank to say what I feel. I feel that its an abomination to build a Muslim sign of triumph at the ruins, well the gravesite of the three thousand brave Americans. I just think its something that's terrible...what are they going to be preaching in that mosque? They're going to preach Sharia law, they'll be preaching the ascendancy of Islam over the rest of us, and the undermining of the American way of life. Its not a good thing and those protesters, I'm all for them (700 Club: June 7th, 2010).

In the same episode, Robertson comments on Israeli blockades of flotillas, encouraging American support for their endeavors:

nevertheless, it was a setup by armed terrorists to hurt the state of Israel and the United States needs to stand with its ally Israel on this particular issue. And we also understand the other thing that has come out from Europe, that there is a move afoot, that once Israel is weakened...there will be a move by the European union to set up an independent Palestinian state with Jerusalem as its capital, unilaterally whether Israel likes it or not. That will be a tragedy (700 Club: June 7th, 2010).

In other episodes, both Pat and Gordon Robertson caution their viewers against President Obama's perceived 'downplaying' of Islamic terrorism, reflecting similar sentiments to Van Impe and Hagee. Here, Pat and Gordon Robertson again rely on interpretive textual authority to support their claims, this time rendering Islamic religious leaders and the Qur'an as anti-Semitic:

Gordon: the level of indoctrination going on in the West Bank, the Gaza strip. The messages you hear from the imams in Jerusalem, the imams in Medina, the imams in Mecca, all aimed at driving Israel into the sea and defeating the west. That's what this is about and they are literally training their children from kindergarten to believe that martyrdom is a wonderful thing, that the struggle, the jihad is what we need to devote our lives to. That's the face of Islam (700 Club: April 23rd, 2010).

Pat: you figure that in the Qur'an, there are passages that say the Jews are the descendants of apes and pigs. Well, that's being taught in madrasas in northern

Virginia. Not in Palestinian land, but in Virginia! That's what the young people are being taught and certainly in the Palestinian territory, they're being taught much worse things. They're being taught that the Jews mix the blood of innocent children with matzos...the hate that is spewed out there is and anybody who dies fighting Jews is a martyr and they're naming streets after them. How can you have peace if that kind of incitement is going on... (700 Club: May 12th, 2010).

Like Van Impe, Robertson does, on occasion, establish a semantic difference between peaceful Islamic-Americans and presumably foreign Islamic terrorists. However, through his online ministry, he does so with full recognition that he still envisions the religion of Islam as one of violence:

We must distinguish between the origin of the religion and those who adhere to it in the United States, who are indeed a peaceful people. To say the religion of Islam is peaceful, I do not think is accurate. To say that most of the adherents in America to the Islamic religion are peaceful, is absolutely correct. It is just a question of semantics, but I think it is vitally important in our war on terror that semantics be correct (Robertson 2016i).

As with Van Impe, this rare acknowledgement of a linguistic separation between terrorism and American Muslims appears far less frequently than his discussions of Islamic aggression against Israel and the United States. Like Hagee and Van Impe, Robertson mobilizes prophecy interpretation and the divine inerrant authority of biblical scripture in order to delegitimize any Palestinian land claims that contradict Israel's current geopolitical borders. After citing Genesis 13:15 and II Chronicles 20:7, Robertson states,

This is a permanent possession given by God to Abraham, and all of this territory is the land of Israel. There is no such thing as a Palestine state, nor has there ever been. Now we're going to make something that never happened before in contravention to Scripture. God may love George Bush. God may love America. God may love us all. But if we stand in the way of prophecy and try to frustrate what God said in his immutable Word, then we're in for a heap of trouble. And I think this is a warning we should all take. This road map, as it is set up now, with the United Nations, with the European Union, and with the Russians coming together in the so-called quartet, these are all enemies of Israel. If we ally ourselves with the enemies of Israel, we will be standing against God Almighty, and that's a place I don't want us to be (Robertson 2016h).

Here, he resolutely and directly denies the very existence of a Palestinian state and constructs lack of individual or American political support for Israeli action against Islamic nations (and terrorists earlier) as acts against God himself – acts that would necessitate divine wrath and negate any possibility of responsible individual or national salvation.

Ultimately, by pitting Israel against Islam as a foreordained biblical showdown, and as a necessary stage in the fulfillment of God's prophetic promises, all three evangelists considered here inherently legitimate Middle Eastern conflicts as inevitable and just holy wars, while conceding that peace is truly unattainable until the return of Christ on earth. Under these conditions, any attempts at political interventions for peace between Israel and its perceived Islamic enemies are portrayed as a futile contravention of God's word²⁷⁶:

and they fight the greatest war in Revelation 9, verses 14-18, and its all fought over Jerusalem. Because they're going to try to divide the land, and you find that of course in Joel chapter 3, verse 2, so watch what happens if Obama goes and gives Jerusalem to the Muslims as he's claiming he will do, that is going to trigger the greatest war in history, and I wish there would be peace but I know what this book teaches and there can only be peace when the prince of peace, the lord Jesus Christ, Isaiah 9:6 returns to set up his kingdom...so there you have, its covering most of the headlines you just gave, the Bible is right to date (JVIP: June 26th, 2010).

In short, those political initiatives that some have asserted will guarantee peace, will in truth guarantee unending struggle and ultimate failure. Those political leaders who only understand the secular dimension of Israel's existence and who cavalierly dismiss the spiritual dimension will find that they receive the mess of pottage of Esau rather than the inheritance of Jacob (Robertson 2016j).

scientists are now saying we have enough nuclear power to kill everyone on earth at least twenty times. Think about that. Has it brought peace? No. No. The nuclear genie is out of the bottle in the Middle East. Pakistan has it. India has it. Iran will soon have it. Presidents and prime ministers and statesmen are running to the four ends of the earth with scraps of paper called peace treaties trying to get mankind to do what he's not be able to do since the garden of Eden. What is that? To control

²⁷⁶ As demonstrated earlier, were peace to be maintained in the Middle East, this would also serve as legitimating evidence for apocalyptic timelines. The rise of the antichrist occurs through the guise of peace and concentration of global economic, religious, and government systems.

himself. There is no peace treaty that can get a man or a nation to control himself. Only God can cause that to happen (JHT: December 7th, 2009)²⁷⁷.

Therefore, conflict becomes normalized as a biblically mandated reality for these last days, reminding us that individual and political interventions are useless and unnecessary prior to the return of Christ on earth. By legitimating conflict as a biblically justified battle between good and evil, the evangelists considered here further reinforce divides between Islam and Judeo-Christianity, while also contributing to the longstanding, biblically sanctioned anti-Muslim rhetoric discussed earlier. According to Jong Hyun Jung (2012), Islamophobia (fear of Muslims or of the Islamic religion) is not uncommon in post 9/11 American society and is particularly present for identified evangelicals:

In the midst of growing presence of Muslims in the US, evangelicals have developed anti-Islamic discourse since 9/11 drawing sharp line between Islam and Christianity, which functioned to strengthen evangelical Protestant identity in the US (Cimino 2005 in Jung 2012:114).

Furthermore, Jung also concludes that “the image of a punishing God is positively associated with the likelihood of Islam being least respected” (2012:122). As noted above, this image of godly vengeance for all those in violent or ambivalent opposition to Israel, is continually mobilized throughout the evangelical discourses here. In doing so, expressions of empathy for Palestinian suffering and support for political and humanitarian aid for this region are unlikely to correspond with the evangelical subject’s quest for responsible salvation. The representations employed by Hagee, Robertson, and the Van Impes have the very real potential to further fuel evangelical religious intolerance for Muslims by lending

²⁷⁷ Preliminary research for this dissertation also saw more direct articulations of this trend in Hagee’s sermons where Hagee argues that as long as Jerusalem is at war, the world is at war (Thomas 2013:31). Likewise, many of Hagee’s product offers express similar sentiments. For instance, the synopsis of his 2007 edition of *Jerusalem Countdown* states that “Hagee skillfully unveils the reasons radical Islam and Israel cannot dwell peaceably together as he paints a convincing picture explaining why Christians must support the State of Israel” (JHM 2015c).

biblical authority to a war against Islam and its adherents, despite the evangelists' very occasional pleas that this is not their aim.

Responsible Action for Israel

The only thing equaled by promises of a grim and enduring conflict between Israel and the antichrist is the assured prophetic victory of Jesus Christ at the battle of Armageddon, the most anticipated fulfillment of God's plan for humanity. Only through the divine intervention of God's own hand will this historical conflict truly end and a millennium of peace will be ushered in, where Jesus Christ reigns over the world from his throne in Jerusalem. Robertson, Hagee, and the Van Impes all emphatically remind their viewers of God's guaranteed victory:

Satan doesn't like Israel. Israel is the example, exhibit A that there's a God in heaven. God cannot forsake Israel so they have one comfort in this but its not going to be easy (700 Club: May 25th, 2010).

its forever, and God says of his covenant concerning Israel, as long as the sun shines by day and the moon shines by night. The covenant with Israel stands. Why am I saying this? Because right now you can't watch a telecast on the TV or pick up a newspaper where somebody is not fighting over the land of Israel and somebody's not trying to tell the Jewish people what they can and cannot do with the city of Jerusalem. When the dust settles in Jerusalem, it will be just like God said it will be. It will not be controlled by radical terrorists. It will not be controlled by Ahmadinejad of Iran. It will not be controlled by the president of the United States or the state department. It will be controlled by the one true God, the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. The God of covenant. The majestic God who said Jerusalem and the city of Jerusalem and Israel shall be theirs and theirs forever. Praise and glory in the house of God (JHT: December 15th, 2009).

No! God loves the Jew! They are his chosen people. He loves them so much he calls them the apple of his eye...don't worry about little Hitler [Ahmadinejad]! You can't beat God (JVIP: June 6th, 2010).

All three evangelists make it abundantly clear that God will ultimately be victorious, enacting a crushing defeat to the antichrist's campaign of terror against Israel. One could

logically assume that this narrative is meant to provide comfort in the face of a truly horrifying tribulation period. However, most evangelical apocalyptic belief systems express premillennial tenets that envision a pre-tribulation rapture. As such, all true Christians will be instantly removed from the earthly realm prior to the commencement of the antichrist's reign of terror. Both Van Impe and Hagee assure their viewers of this privileged rapture fate as often as they discuss other prophetic stages. Van Impe repeatedly reminds his viewers that destruction awaits the earth but always cheerfully reminds them in the next breath that responsible salvation awaits them and they will be spared this turmoil through the rapture:

Ladies and gentlemen, this is it. Jesus could come at any moment. That's our only hope. I would love to say, of if we would just pray, we would get this thing licked, but the Christians are going to be gone soon. Come up hither and we're going to sweep through all of this area of space, 187 trillions billions of miles, in the twinkling of an eye, I Corinthians 15:52, so we're not going to be here, the true believers, just pray about the change of America (JVIP: February 20th, 2010).

but remember this, when it happens, we will have already been in the presence of the lord for 42 months of that seven-year period of tribulation, so sleep well tonight (JVIP: May 22nd, 2010).

Hagee echoes Van Impe's dire warnings of the turmoil that awaits humanity while also blissfully assuring his congregants through prophetic interpretations and quick-witted catchphrases that this is not a fate in store for them:

Pack up, pray up, we're going up...the king is coming, get ready to meet him (JHT: January 18th, 2010).

a lot of people read that and say he's talking about the church. Please. Where is the church [yells]? In heaven [congregation yells back]. When did they leave? Verse 14, they're not here! [laughter] (JHT: January 25th, 2010)

But I've got good news. Some of you look like you desperately need it [laughs]. The good news is that the church is gone [yells] when all of this breaks loose! (JHT: February 2nd, 2010).

While Hagee and the Van Impes make their belief in a pre-tribulation rapture undoubtedly clear, Robertson remains silent on this topic throughout the television sample and his personal website. Here, we see the most dominant break from the premillennialist norm evidenced throughout these mediated evangelist discourses. While *the 700 Club* website does address the question of tribulation, it is not nearly as popular a topic as one might think. Occasional contributors to *700 Club* content, viewer discussions, and guests express support for the sparing of Christians from the reign of the antichrist yet Robertson himself does not make these same prophetic interpretations. Instead, he occasionally advances support for a post-tribulation rapture as the literal word of God. In this ‘Bring It On’ section of *the 700 Club* website, Robertson makes his oppositional argument for a mid-tribulation rapture known²⁷⁸:

You read the 91st Psalm. God doesn't take us out of trouble. There is this doctrine that is running around that says as soon as something bad happens, all the American Christians are going to get raptured. That is nonsense. It just isn't in accordance with the Bible. We, as Christians, will know suffering, and Christians have been suffering for centuries. But God is with us in the suffering. He takes us out of the suffering and He gives us glorious victory. That is what He promises us: not that He will take us out of it, but that He will give us victory in it. So you don't have to be afraid. 'Fear not,' Jesus said. 'I am with you.' Jesus Christ is with you. Do not be afraid (CBN 2016m).

As such, Robertson’s scriptural interpretation of prophetic timelines places Christians within the earthly wrath of the antichrist and does not spare them entirely from the suffering awaiting the rest of humanity. While suffering is assured in this interpretation, it is not without hope as Robertson also continually reminds viewers that the suffering will be short-

²⁷⁸ Pat Robertson recently elaborated on this interpretation during a special *700 Club* feature entitled “Pat Robertson Teaches on the Prophetic Significance of Israel”. This special feature was part of a week long extended program entitled “Signs of the Times: How will it all end?” (CBN 2016l). While this programming is outside the sample, it has informed this analysis.

lived and God will make good on the promise to promptly remove Christians from this scenario.

Despite this discursive tension, all three evangelists maintain that enduring peace in the Middle East (and globally) is a lofty and desirable goal, but is ultimately a goal that is not biblically possible until the end of days and the second coming of Christ. While peace might be unattainable until the return of Christ, salvation is still obviously still at stake – through a pre- or mid- tribulation rapture. As such, prayer and other actionable plans for attaining individual and national salvation are essential to guaranteeing a rapture-ready Christian citizenry. Hagee reinforces this expected reality:

That means our prayers will not change what is going to happen but it can control when it happens. You see that? The sovereign will of God is going to happen but God says if you pray about it you can change how its going to happen to your benefit. Woooooh, that's enough to preach another forty minutes, but I don't have the time for it (JHT: January 25th, 2010).

The evangelists consistently check in with their congregations, asking if they are ready to meet Jesus? Ready to be raptured? Ready to be judged? The implication of these spot checks is to ensure that if there is any doubt, one needs to take action to ready themselves, lest they be subject to a complete and enduring hell on earth during the tribulation period. While prayer is always mobilized as a ready-made actionable plan for salvation, here we also see other opportunities and strategies of legitimation take shape, where attempts to govern through fear become a common feature of these end time discussions. We also see the creation of multiple charitable organizations and easy web access to relevant information sheets that reinforce the apocalyptic necessity of responsible salvation through action-oriented practices of charitable giving and informed proselytizing.

As discussed, the dominant contour of responsible salvation here concerns active and ongoing support for Israel. By legitimating support for Israel through scriptural authority and prophetic interpretation of contemporary events, the responsabilized subject is imbued with a keen awareness that Jewish-Christian allegiances are biblically mandated. As Hagee notes (also quoted above), “he commands us to bless the state of Israel and to bless the Jewish people. We do it because it is the commandment of God” (JHT: December 8th, 2009). Thus, prayer for Israel is constructed as an active Christian choice and is habitually mobilized as a technique for achieving individual and national salvation. In addition to active political prayer, the evangelists also mobilize a whole host of other options for expressing personal, charitable, and political support for Israel. While the Jack Van Impe Ministry leans toward a Christian-centric public education campaign regarding Israel, Robertson and Hagee deliver several charitable organizations that provide easy options for expressing spiritual and monetary support. Lastly, Hagee also offers an explicitly political option for expressing support through his annual political lobby event in Washington.

For Jack and Rexella Van Impe, knowledge truly does equal power when readying oneself for the coming events of the apocalypse. Their online ministry reflects this theme, offering a variety of products, news sources, and ‘intelligence briefings’ to complement their on-air interpretations of prophetic current events. One DVD offer, entitled *Coming Soon: The Judeo-Christian New World Order* (JVIM 2016g), reinforces their longstanding pleas for Christian support for Jewish allies by directly assessing this idealized relationship and making clear their firmly held belief that this godly sanctioned alliance is destined for victory over the new world order. Its summary notes:

You've been waiting a lifetime for this announcement – and now the time has come! The true 'New World Order' that will ultimately control this earth is not the Satan-inspired, man-made cabal of the Antichrist, the false prophet, and their wicked followers, but rather: The God-ordained government of Christ the King who will return to triumph at Armageddon and establish His peaceful domain on earth (Revelation 21:3). Now Drs. Jack and Rexella Van Impe explain the wonders of this New World Order and show you how soon we may see its coming.

In addition to the consumer product offers, the online ministry site also offers several options that allow viewers to stay up-to-date on all important and unfolding events concerning Israel. While each of these sections also includes a variety of topics unrelated to Israel and the antichrist, many of the topics make reference to prophetic significance. In the 'Global News' section of the website, daily headlines and segments of news articles from around the world are presented with accompanying links to the original source. In the 'Intelligence Briefing' section of the website, news articles related to domestic and foreign security issues are presented alongside biblical passages and presumably Jack's own commentary to contextualize their significance. This section often addresses instances of Israeli conflicts, state aggressions, and terrorist attacks. Lastly, the 'Email Newsletter' section presents an online version of their weekly newsletter which contains messages from Jack and Rexella regarding the state of the world as it pertains to Christianity and apocalyptic timelines, viewer commentary on their work, and the latest product offers. The online ministry therefore serves as an informative companion to their on-air programming where viewers can access more of the same worldview-compatible news and biblical commentary that they view during *Jack Van Impe Presents*.

While Robertson and Hagee also offer educational opportunities for viewers seeking information about the prophetic significance of Israel, they both offer even more

direct methods to help show one's support for Jewish allies²⁷⁹. For instance, commercials and segments featuring the various chapters of Operation Blessing, are common throughout *700 Club* programming. Operation Blessing International (OBI) was founded by Pat Robertson in 1978 and according to their website, OBI "is a nonprofit...humanitarian organization dedicated to demonstrating God's love by alleviating human need and suffering in the United States and around the world" (OBI 2016). As part of their relief efforts all over the world, OBI also offers a specific section in their 'giving catalog' for 'Israel Relief', allowing users to direct their financial donations toward Israel-oriented aid efforts, such as supporting impoverished holocaust survivors. This monthly or one-time donation page reminds viewers that their financial support for this cause will "show the poor and downtrodden in Israel that they are not forsaken" (OBI 2016a). *The 700 Club* also reinforces their charitable work on-air, offering updates on OBI efforts and advertising options for donations throughout the commercial segments. During an update on their Israel relief efforts for impoverished holocaust survivors, Gordon Robertson again legitimates the need for charitable giving through scripture, reminding viewers that "if you bless Israel, if you bless the descendants of Abraham, then God will bless you – I will bless those who bless you" (700 Club: January 8th, 2010) before calling on viewers to donate to this cause and help establish an Israel branch of Operation Blessing. By reinforcing charitable giving to Israeli causes as a fulfillment of biblical mandates, *the 700 Club* hosts provide their viewers with another actionable plan for easily attaining salvation through

²⁷⁹ In addition to their charitable and political work through OBI, CUFI, and Exodus II, *the 700 Club* and *John Hagee Today* also regularly air commercials featuring opportunities to travel to Israel. These commercials vary from Israeli tourism organizations (on both programs) to ministry sponsored tours with Hagee and his family (specifically aired during *John Hagee Today* programming). While these commercials are related to evangelical support for enhanced Jewish-Christian relations, they are not always explicitly contextualized through an apocalyptic lens and are therefore excluded from formal analysis here.

spiritual and financial support. As such, OBI offers a two-fold benefit for viewers: first, salvation is ascertained through financial support for pro-Israel causes; and secondly, salvation is further reinforced by the concurrent fulfillment of biblical tithing mandates²⁸⁰.

Like Robertson, Hagee is also deeply involved in promoting and legitimating his charitable organizations through his television programming and online ministry. His Israel-oriented charity, Exodus II, and his more expressly political organization, Christians United for Israel (CUFI), provide multiple opportunities for financially and politically supporting Israel as a means to fulfilling this perceived biblical mandate to align with Jewish interests. Exodus II began as a charitable organization that helps ‘exiled Jews’ relocate to Israel (Thomas 2013). According to the ministry website, their aims have expanded to also include education, helping orphans, and other humanitarian efforts. Potential donors are assured that “ALL of our efforts directly benefit Israel and her people” (JHM 2015a). The Exodus II organization also makes it abundantly clear that financial support for Israel is a biblically mandated endeavor, while also reminding potential donors that God’s favor, and broader salvation, is dependent upon their action here:

As Christians, it is our duty to minister to the Jewish people in material things. “It pleased them indeed, and they are their debtors. For if the Gentiles have been partakers of their spiritual things, their duty is also to minister to them in material things,” Romans 15:27. If you want God’s favor then I challenge you to make the finest contribution you can to Exodus II (JHM 2015a).

Here, we see that prayer and spiritual support for Israel are insufficient on their own; that responsible salvation is also dependent on financial action for Israel as well.

Hagee’s political organization, CUFI, further reinforces Exodus II’s efforts to increase evangelical support for Israel by providing even more opportunities for active

²⁸⁰ See Chapter 8: *Health, Wealth & Prosperity* for further discussion of how tithing is constructed as a biblical imperative and as an actionable plan for responsible salvation.

involvement. CUFI's broader mission includes a variety of pro-Israel education efforts in communities, in schools, in churches and most notably, in American government. Their yearly Washington Summit "enables CUFI members to personally speak with their elected officials on behalf of Israel" (CUFI 2016) and their 'Defend America, Vote Israel' campaign reinforces Hagee's on-air messages regarding anti-Islamic sentiments, and the biblical significance of Israel as both a spiritual and political ally for the United States. This online form offers supporters an easy opportunity to add their name to a statement that will be sent to Republican and Democratic presidential nominees. It states:

I BELIEVE that a strong Israel is an American strategic asset. I BELIEVE that when Israeli soldiers patrol their border, they are maintaining our first line of defense against militant Islam. I BELIEVE that when Israel confronts Hezbollah, Hamas, Islamic Jihad and Iran they are confronting shared enemies that we'd otherwise face alone. As America limits its commitments abroad, allies like Israel which take the lead in pursuing shared strategic interests become more important than ever. As America cuts spending, military aid to Israel remains a wise investment in our own security. Now is not the time to walk away from Israel. Now is the time to stand with Israel. When I cast my vote, I'll be looking for a candidate who affirms that one of the best ways to defend America is to stand with Israel (CUFI 2016a).

In addition to supporting their stated political cause, CUFI also provides evangelical subjects with a variety of possible actions that can aid in their individual salvation efforts. Through the CUFI website Hagee offers commentary regarding 'dangerous' American foreign policies, alongside a plethora of informative links to assessments of current events and prophecy interpretation. The site offers an entire section devoted to prayer for Israel, which includes scriptural support for blessing Israel and an opportunity to submit prayer requests to be delivered to the Western Wall²⁸¹ in Jerusalem. The extensive 'Act' section

²⁸¹ According to the Western Wall Heritage Foundation's website, the Western Wall, otherwise known as the Kotel, "is the most significant site in the world for the Jewish people...it is the last remnant of our Temple. We also know that Jews from around the world gather here to pray. People write notes to G-d and place them between the ancient stones of the Wall" (The Western Wall Heritage Foundation 2016).

of CUFI's website offers even more direct opportunities for evangelical subjects to act in support of Israel, such as signing a pledge for Israel, following CUFI on social media, requesting a CUFI speaker attend your community event, and registering to become a 'congregational representative' as part of "Israel's first line of defense in churches throughout America" (CUFI 2016b). By making available a multitude of easily accessible options, Hagee's ministry leaves no available excuse for financial and spiritual inaction regarding Israel, thus reinforcing his overall rhetoric of choice and fault as defining characteristics of how individuals either choose or reject salvation, and ultimately God's favour.

Through educational efforts, charitable aid, and political action, the evangelists considered here further reinforce their on-air messages regarding the centrality of Israel's prophetic and political significance by providing actionable opportunities for supporting Israel either from the comfort of one's home through financial and public support, or through committed volunteering for more direct involvement in humanitarian and political campaigns. These efforts work to further responsabilize the evangelical subject to take action for Israel in an effort to ensure both individual and national salvation. By linking American political and Christian spiritual interests to those of Israel and its Jewish citizens, these evangelical discourses mobilize scriptural authority as a strategy of legitimation where the consequences of non-action are exceptionally grim. Not only are subjects continually reminded that blessing Israel is acting in the interest of God's own designs, they are also reminded of the risks of falling out of God's favor by not acting in support of his chosen land. While salvation is still mobilized as an attainable goal here, the risk of being left behind for the entirety of a horrifying tribulation, or being negatively subject to

God's final judgment are also mobilized as cautionary tales for not 'choosing' salvation. While Hagee is exceptionally graphic in his descriptions of the consequences for not attaining salvation in time for the rapture, Van Impe also joins him in governing through fear:

When the church is raptured it will be a day of terror for those left on earth...they will beg for God to let them die to escape the wrath...you're left behind, you're lost, you have two options – take his mark and lose your soul or don't take it and he will cut your head off...today, receiving Jesus is the intelligent choice (JHT: December 28th, 2009).

Why am I so anxious for you to hear the prophetic scripture? The answer is in the Bible Hebrews 9:28 says to those who eagerly wait for him. Do you hear that word 'eagerly'? Hebrews 9:28, to those who eagerly wait for him, will he appear the second time. The point is, if you're not eagerly waiting for him, he's not coming for you. Everyone going to church singing 'I'll Fly Away' is not gonna fly away. You're going to stay right here. And go through living hell. And as soon as the antichrist finds out who you are, he's going to cut your head off. The Bible says that. Now how many of you are anxious for his appearance [all of Hagee's congregation appear to raise their hands here] (JHT: January 11th, 2010).

and that was the prophecy of the lord Jesus in Matthew 24:37...when I'm about to return, its going to be like it was in Noah's day and then in genesis 6:11, the whole world was filled with violence and terrorism...its here ladies and gentlemen, we're going to see atomic warfare, we're going to see terrorism, and all I can say is thank God we're not going to be here because he's going to save us from that hour, Revelation 3:10 is we hear the voice, come up hither. That's how near the coming of the lord is (JVIP: January 3rd, 2010).

Despite Robertson's belief in a mid-tribulation rapture that does not see Christians entirely spared from the wrath of the antichrist, God's judgment of action and non-action is thoroughly embedded within the entirety of these evangelist discourses, weaving in and out of all the television and online ministries considered here. Given the terrifying apocalyptic consequences of neglect, acting in accordance with perceived biblical mandates for spiritual, financial, and political support for Israel are portrayed as of the utmost importance for attaining individual and national salvation.

Conclusion

In summary, this chapter broadens the previous chapter's assessment of evangelical political action by articulating the ways in which an international politics of salvation emerges throughout the mediated evangelical discourses under study, and also locates this biblically legitimated politics within the broader contours of the discursive formation surrounding responsible salvation. The central theme emanating from these prophetic assessments of international conflicts and political relations concerns two key elements of apocalyptic timelines: first, the central significance of Israel as a nation created through a sovereign act of God himself; and second, the rise and reign of a bloodthirsty antichrist under the guise of peace and global governance. By locating contemporary conflict within prophetic timelines as a foreordained divine plan, instances of contemporary conflicts become legitimated as inevitable battles within a justifiable holy war between good and evil. Peaceful resolutions to any conflicts involving Israel become constructed as against God's own will and are therefore portrayed as ungodly, unchristian, and un-American. For reasons grounded in the secular realities of conflicting political borders and the apocalyptic location of Israel's dominant enemies, a concomitant consequence of evangelical support for Israel tends to translate into anti-Islamic rhetoric given that the only acceptable action for the evangelical subject is emphatic support of a pro-Israel agenda. As such, spiritual, financial, and political support for intrusive militaristic American foreign policy is thus mobilized and legitimated as part of the prophesized plan for humanity, should individual and national salvation be desired. We see similar strategies of legitimation emerge here where Robertson, Hagee, and the Van Impes rely heavily on biblical authority and fear of God's judgment to regularly appeal to their viewers to take responsible action in support

of Israel. Through their discussions of various spiritual practices and supporting organizations, a multitude of actionable plans are mobilized to assist subjects in attaining both individual and national salvation. Here the evangelical subject is one who not only supports Israel through prayer but also through charitable giving, voting, public education, and political lobby.

To conclude, this analysis of the ways in which apocalyptic belief systems govern evangelical belief and action in support for Israel demonstrates the ways in which potential evangelical voters are discursively mobilized to show all forms of support for conservative, pro-Israel foreign policies while being thoroughly enabled with the resources to do so. In doing so, we see further evidence of what Boyer (2005a) refers to as the ‘the politicization of prophetic belief’ where the discursive formation of responsible salvation works to further reinforce elements of the so-called culture wars in contemporary America. By pitting liberals, secularists, and non-Christian citizens against the wholesome Christian political morality of saved evangelical subjects, we see evidence here of a discursive polarization that results in biblical legitimation for oppressive views of racialized and outsider groups, notably Muslims. Furthermore, these narratives are also legitimated through conservative framing of democracy and liberty that reinforce socialism, global cooperation, and peace as oppositional to American patriotism and Christian values. While Israel is held up as a laudable exemplar of democracy in what is perceived to be an entirely oppressive Middle Eastern region, the evangelists considered here do little to apply a reflexive critique to their own inconsistencies and contradictions when assessing the nature of American life and liberty. The assumption that the United States was destined to be a nation built on democratic but decidedly Christian values is never questioned and

cornerstone protections of freedom, equality, and free-speech are highly prized but only truly accessible to Christian subjects under apocalyptic frameworks.

Chapter 11: Conclusion

Introduction

Throughout this dissertation, I have examined contemporary mediated evangelist discourses in order to better understand how televangelists participate in an increasingly mediated religious landscape and the ways in which apocalyptic and salvation discourses constitute religious-political evangelical subjectivities. In doing so, I have explored several intersecting areas of inquiry to answer the following questions: 1) What prevailing apocalyptic and evangelical discourses take shape through contemporary American televangelism? 2) How do evangelicals use media and technology to advance religious-political messages? 3) How are evangelical subjects constituted and governed through these mediated apocalyptic discourses of responsibility and salvation? By answering these questions through an in-depth, qualitative discursive analysis of evangelist media packages, my work makes several contributions to the sociology of religion and media. First, I expand the boundaries of Foucauldian theory and method by theorizing a methodology appropriate for the holistic study of discursive formations that cut across technological platforms. In employing this framework, I have also positioned myself within the broader field of governmentality studies by excavating both subjectivities and techniques of governance from evangelical discursive formations of apocalypse and salvation. Second, I contribute to a growing literature that examines the ways in which media and religion interact by advancing a discussion that defines and locates mediated religion within broader discussions of what constitutes religion today. Lastly, my work contributes to our understanding of how evangelicals confront politics by examining the discursive subjectivities that are articulated throughout evangelist programs and the

constructed governing expectations for conduct that emerge alongside them. By constructing salvation as an active, responsible choice that empowers evangelical subjects facing a rapidly approaching end time scenario, and establishing authentic Christianity as dependent on personal and national salvation, the evangelists considered here create expectations for political engagement that permeate everyday decision-making in religious, mundane, and political endeavors.

I began this dissertation with an exploration of sociological definitions of religion to better understand how mediated religion has become entrenched in our broader understandings of what constitutes religion in general. As part of this discussion, I have explored some of the ways in which mediated religion has manifested throughout television and cyberspace, and have responded to critiques of mediated religion as an authentic space for religious expression and scholarly consideration. I have examined the ways in which today's popular evangelists employ *media packages* that allow their message to remain consistent across a variety of traditional and new media technologies to provide believers with access to complementary evangelist products and messages twenty-four hours a day from a variety of devices. For these reasons, I now refer to televangelism as *mediated evangelism* and televangelists as *mediated evangelists*. To examine the complex mediated discourses that take shape across media packages and face-to-face religious expression, I have developed and applied a Foucauldian inspired theoretical-methodology that is shaped by discourse analysis, archaeology, and genealogy to examine the discursive content of three popular American evangelist programs: Pat Robertson and *the 700 Club*, John Hagee and *John Hagee Today*, and Jack and Rexella Van Impe of *Jack Van Impe Presents*. I have examined the ways in which evangelicalism has been defined in sociological and religious

studies literatures, and have briefly summarized the social history of modern mediated evangelism to explore the significant and emerging trends present within both evangelicalism and mediated evangelism more broadly. Lastly, I have employed a governmentality approach to explore in great detail the contours of the discursive formation surrounding *responsible salvation* to better understand how it contributes to the construction of the *responsible evangelical subject*; a religious-political subjectivity that creates expectations for spiritual, civic, and political engagement by articulating personal and national salvation as an active choice for authentic believers. To this end, I have also explored the resultant techniques of governance that follow from the constitution of this subjectivity. These are largely located within apocalyptic belief systems and legitimated through scriptural authority and constructed televangelist expertise.

The rest of this chapter serves as a brief overview of my doctoral research and is divided into three sections. In the following section, I overview the main arguments of the thesis and expand on my conclusions regarding mediated religion, theoretical methodology, governmentality, and the discursive constitution of evangelical subjectivities. I also summarize and expand on the findings presented in chapters seven through ten, and conclude the section by reflecting on the ways in which evangelical subjectivities contribute to our broader understandings of religious-political engagement in a mediated public sphere. In the next section, I address the limitations of my research project and explore potential directions for future research opportunities. Finally, I conclude this dissertation by reflecting on my overall experience of the research process and the significance of this project.

Overview of Arguments

Religion and Mediated Religion

It was never my intention to reconstruct an all-encompassing definition for religion through this dissertation but I have inevitably needed to explore the ways in which mediated religion contributes to our broader ideas about what constitutes religion in an increasingly mediated landscape of social interaction. Religion, in all its varied forms, is in many ways beyond the scope of comprehensive definition. Like so many others before me, I recognize the futility of this task and have concluded that what constitutes ‘religion’ for believers is something that is lived out through everyday experience. The variance of what this may look like in practice, in belief, and of course, in the discursive realm is immensely diverse, and does not lend itself well to a catch-all definition. While I have taken Durkheim’s ([1912] 1995) definition of religion as a starting point for sociological inquiry into the phenomena, I recognize that his attempt to categorize the broad spectrum of what constitutes ‘the religious’ inevitably falls short of success and neglects much of what the religious milieu has to offer. Despite the deficit of Durkheim, and all others who take on this ambitious task, assessing definitions of religion has been useful in establishing the foundational interest of sociological definitions that take note of the collective element of religious belief, practice, and experience. By establishing religion as a fundamentally collective expression, and tying it to the social actors that shape religious experience and meaning, we must inevitably include religious expression that takes shape through a technological platform like television or internet. Ultimately, this exploration has worked to lend legitimacy to my concept of *mediated religion* – an idea that may seem so obvious to scholars in 2016 but was somewhat less assured when this research started to take shape.

Exploring definitions of religion has therefore been a means to an end – to establish mediated religion as part and parcel of what constitutes religion more broadly. While assessing Jim Beckford's (2003) pragmatic approach to conceptualizing religion as a concept that takes account of its contexts, Linda Woodhead (2011) writes, "religion is constantly being constructed, as political and legal authorities claim the right to define religion, some social groups vie for the privilege of being counted as religious, others seek to wrest control of the meaning of religion from dominant groups, and still others seek to restrict religion and its sphere of influence" (2011:122). Similar battles have been fought over whether or not mediated religion constitutes 'real' religion. Throughout this dissertation, I have used the term mediated religion to practically differentiate my objects of analysis from forms of religious expression that take place in face-to-face settings. In other words, I have used mediated religion as an organizing concept that gave me a practical linguistic term to articulate the scope of where my discursive analysis will be drawn from. In assessing the evolution of debates over the accepted status of mediated religious expression, I have sought to break down this conceptual barrier between the so-called 'virtual' (mediated) and 'real' (face-to-face or 'bricks and mortar') religious expression. In recognizing the fluidity of these imagined boundaries I have argued that mediated religion should not be conceptualized as an entirely distinct category that is somehow less meaningful or less authentic than its traditional face-to-face counterparts. Here, I have concluded that mediated religion and religion should be accepted as extensions of the same phenomena, where religious expression that takes place through a technological platform can be seen as a unique, but situated component of 'religion' more broadly. In its mediated form, religion again becomes firmly entrenched in a now mediated

public sphere (Hoover 2012) and this dissertation examines one important conversation that stems from this reality: the ways in which discursively constituted subjectivities imagine an America where evangelical citizens actively participate in the establishment of Christianity as the dominant political and moral compass for the rest of the country. By using media to do so, the evangelists considered here certainly widen the scope and capacity of this message.

Theorizing Methodology

While exploring definitions of religion and defining mediated religion have been useful endeavours, the object of analysis for this dissertation has always sat both *within* and *outside* of the expressions and technologies that are assessed here. In other words, this has never been a dissertation that is strictly about religion or media; it is a dissertation about the discursive realm in which religion is articulated through and shaped by. It is an analysis of active discursive formations that shape subjectivities and articulate techniques of governance. The intersections of Foucauldian theory and methodology became an obvious choice for creating a theoretical framework and conducting this analysis. In order to establish both a practical and epistemological approach to discursive analysis, I have examined prevailing forms of qualitative discourse analysis, notably Foucault's archaeology and genealogy, to inspire a method and methodology capable of examining the ways in which evangelical discourses cut seamlessly across media technologies and face-to-face experience. As a result, I see discourse as a holistic object of analysis, incredibly deserving of our scholarly attention. By examining previously dominant assumptions about the nature of *text* and *discourse* that neglect the influence that both have

in shaping and reproducing social realities, subjectivities, identities, and worldviews, I have concluded that while there are certainly limits to what discourse analysis can do, these limitations are certainly no more problematic than those of other well-established quantitative, qualitative, or mixed methods approaches to the study of our religious-social worlds. By integrating Foucauldian theory and sound methodological design and practice as an underlying framework for the entirety of this dissertation, I have contributed to an ongoing conversation that seeks to better understand the “different modes by which, in our culture, human beings are made subjects” (Dreyfus, Rabinow & Foucault 1983:208). In this objective, I have crafted a project that pushes the boundaries of what qualitative discourse analysis is capable of in the exploration of discourses that do not respect the imagined divide between the so-called *real* and *mediated* social worlds that we inhabit.

Governmentality and Responsible Salvation

As noted above, Foucauldian theory underlies my methodology while also shaping the ways in which I understand the evangelical subjectivities that emerge through the discursive formation that surrounds responsible salvation. While the theoretical methodology enables an understanding of how evangelical subjects are constituted through discourse, governmentality provides an analytical framework capable of exposing the ways in which techniques of government are also deployed alongside and through subjectivities. This framework has also allowed for an analysis of the ways in which mediated evangelists legitimate and craft authority to justify the actions required through a responsabilization of salvation that is informed by apocalyptic prophecy interpretations. In other words,

governmentality has given me the tools to better understand the ways in which mediated evangelists construct discursive expectations for subject conduct.

While evangelicals are not a completely unified group in terms of beliefs, values, and social attitudes, this analysis of the *conduct of conduct* has led me to conclude that Robertson, Hagee, and the Van Impes are active contributors to a rather unified discursive formation that locates salvation in apocalyptic prophecy and envisions it as the ultimate goal and responsibility of the responsible evangelical subject. By empowering subjects to actively pursue this endeavour through biblically legitimated *actionable plans* for everyday decision-making, the evangelists considered here actively shape expectations for political and civic engagement as a prerequisite for personal and national salvation. The contours of responsible salvation and the construction of the responsible evangelical subject will be revisited and summarized in the following section of this chapter.

Governing the Responsible Evangelical Subject

Apocalyptic belief systems and prophecy interpretation are intimately linked to the evangelist understandings of salvation that have been explored throughout this dissertation, and work to constitute what I term responsible salvation. This concept, and the discursive formation that surrounds it, envisions salvation as an active, ongoing choice that believers make for themselves and for their nation. The construction of salvation as a choice has been central to understanding key elements of apocalyptic prophecy and works to responsabilize subjects and inform expectations of conduct. Throughout this dissertation, I have concluded that the evangelists under study here understand salvation as an active and continuous choice to be taken up with constant attention to the rapidly approaching

apocalyptic timeline, where individual and national salvation are essential to an end goal of creating a rapture-ready evangelical citizenry. Here, personal and political action are not just religious practices but are constructed as biblical imperatives where the ultimate consequence for inaction is God's promised wrath of eternal damnation. To further reinforce these expectations, the evangelists considered here rely on the centrality of biblical literalism to legitimate their narratives and mobilize their own unique brand of religious truth and constructed personal expertise. The discursive result is a prevailing subjectivity that embraces responsible salvation as the ultimate end by which subjects are governed. By expressing 'authentic' Christianity in belief and action, subjects can ensure they are rapture-ready by taking up the evangelist approved 'actionable plans' for ensuring salvation through active political and personal decision-making. Biblical advice for living a truly Christian lifestyle shapes strategies for managing personal and national finances, staying healthy, voting, lobbying, educating others, and charitable engagement.

The contours of the responsible evangelical subject, corresponding techniques of governance, and evangelist strategies for legitimating authority have been discussed at length throughout this dissertation. This will be briefly summarized here before I discuss the limitations of this research project and other avenues for future research. This dissertation has explored three key areas of the overarching evangelical subjectivity that emanates through these discourses: prosperous health and wealth, American political values issues, and the construction of Israel as a divine nation that is central to apocalyptic timelines and deserving of a strong allied relationship with the United States.

First, I examined how promises and testimony of prosperous health and wealth constitute an important contribution to the broader discursive formation concerning

responsible salvation. Here, Robertson, Hagee and the Van Impes mobilize biblical authority and their own theological expertise to lend legitimacy to their advisements concerning an endless variety of medical and financial matters. Evangelical subjects are responsabilized to actively pursue health and wealth through deliberate planning in belief and practice, and are imbued with a sense of control by crafting an attainable course of action through prayer, faith, and charitable giving to set right their health and financial misfortunes. This biblically mandated governing structure for living a healthy and wealthy everyday life contributes to the construction of a religious meritocracy where prosperity is constructed as evidence of God's favor and strength of authentic individual faith. The unfortunate flipside of this construction (the presence of poverty and disease) reinforces an oppositional reality where the ill and the poor are left to wonder if they have truly been faithful enough or if they have fallen short in their financial donations to the church. In conclusion, the responsibility and choice for salvation has been firmly located within the Christian subject, while the capacity of providing reward is located solely within the divine power of God.

I also examined the ways in which evangelist religious-political narratives align with broader American political priorities. While these priorities are often aligned, evangelists construct and legitimate their political priorities through an apocalyptic lens that again mobilizes responsible choice and active political engagement as an expected conduct for believers in search of salvation. The set of political priorities examined here reflects a central concern over a perceived decline in the role of America as a Christian nation. This theme is largely expressed through a unified disdain for governmental overreach and the perceived socialist agenda of President Obama and the Democratic Party.

This ire reflects a general rejection of liberal social reform in favour of an apocalyptically informed agenda for social betterment. This agenda is firmly embedded in a key indicator of prophecy fulfillment: the concentration of national and international governmental power that leads to the eventual rise and reign of the antichrist. To this end, Robertson, Hagee, and the Van Impes emphasize the importance of economic decline and healthcare reform as evidence that the Obama administration is attempting to turn America into an undemocratic, unchristian, and thoroughly socialist nation. Here, it is made clear that social change and political engagement is to be embraced, but with decidedly Christian characteristics. While responsible action is encouraged to attain personal and national salvation, the evangelists still see economic and social decline as a necessary element of their apocalyptic timelines, indicative of a discursive tension across the field that has often led to assumptions about fatalism in apocalyptic belief systems. Ultimately, the discursive tension is resolved through actionable plans for responsible salvation and subjects are encouraged to resist and denounce socialist views and policies, while also engaging in less explicit techniques of self-government for one's conduct (for instance, political prayer). Here, disciplining the self to comply with the expectations of evangelical subjectivity is an ongoing and heavily endorsed project that epitomizes political engagement as a biblically sanctioned imperative for achieving salvation.

Lastly, I examined the ways in which responsible salvation and apocalyptic prophecy contribute to biblically legitimated political ideas about global conflict and international relations. These reflect two important themes for end time scenarios: first, the central significance of Israel as a divinely created sovereign nation; and second, the rise and reign of a bloodthirsty antichrist under a guise of peace that centralizes religious,

political, and economic power through total global governance. Robertson, Hagee, and the Van Impes locate contemporary conflicts as modern instances of an enduring, historical religious war that has long since been prophesized as a foreordained divine plan. In doing so, instances of contemporary conflicts become legitimated as inevitable battles within this justifiable holy war between good and evil, where peaceful resolutions to any conflicts involving Israel are constituted as antithetical to God's plan. Evangelical support for Israel is constructed as a biblical imperative that is legitimated through scriptural authority, where anti-Islamic rhetoric becomes the discursively inevitable result of an actionable plan that requires emphatic spiritual, financial, and political support of pro-Israel agendas and foreign policies. The responsible evangelical subject not only supports Israel through prayer, but also through charitable giving, voting, public education, and political lobby. Here, we see the emergence of a subjectivity that is well aligned with what Boyer (2005a) refers to as the 'the politicization of prophetic belief' where liberals, secularists, and non-Christian citizens are pitted against the wholesome Christian political morality of saved evangelical subjects. This works to further polarize evangelicals against an imagined American mainstream where oppressive views of racialized and marginalized groups, notably Muslims, are legitimated as biblical mandates for attaining both individual and national salvation.

To conclude, this dissertation has enabled an exploration of a subjectivity that embodies traditional evangelical tenets while locating salvation within apocalyptic discourses that serve as a governing structure for everyday religious, mundane, and political decision-making. Throughout the dissertation, I have explored the ways in which the responsible evangelical subject has been crafted as a subjectivity that encourages

believers to be active participants in their own individual and national salvation. Through this work, I have articulated a comprehensive understanding of how various techniques of governance and complementary legitimating strategies discipline the evangelical subject to make sound, biblically informed everyday decisions regarding health and financial lifestyles, charitable giving, and national and international political engagement with a variety of values and foreign policy issues, ranging from healthcare and economic reform to foreign policy. By thoroughly examining the complex intersections between apocalyptic discourse, salvation, and evangelical discursive governance, this dissertation contributes to evolving scholarly discussions that attempt to better understand the increasingly complex relationship between religion, media, and politics in North America.

Research Limitations and Directions for Future Research

This section briefly acknowledges several limitations of this research project while highlighting areas for future research possibilities. First, this Foucauldian inspired theoretical-methodological framework is well-suited for this type of mediated discourse analysis but it inherently has its limitations. Discourse analysis is regularly subjected to common critiques that are lodged against other forms of unobtrusive and textual analysis, like content analysis. The lack of statistical analysis or physical interaction with participants has been said to minimize the power of discourse analysis, despite its very appealing strengths. While no form of discourse analysis is fully interactive in the same ways as interviewing or ethnography, Foucauldian discourse analysis answers this limitation by exposing the ways in which social interaction and practice are thoroughly embedded in language and discourse. Despite this more nuanced understanding of the

productive power of discourse, Foucauldian analysts are still limited by the lack of participant interaction. While this project has the capacity to articulate the contours of discursively constituted evangelical subjectivities, analyze the various rationales and techniques of government that are legitimated through a variety of authoritative strategies, and to expose the expectations for conduct that discipline the evangelical self, this research approach is not designed to assess whether or not evangelical subjectivities are embodied in or resisted by actual evangelical citizens²⁸². In other words, discursively constituted evangelical subjectivities cannot tell us about how evangelicals actually think and act. Future research is necessary to assess whether the discursively constituted expectations of conduct for the responsible evangelical subject are actually expressed through the everyday lived experience of evangelicals who engage with mediated evangelist programming. One possible way to explore these ‘messy actualities’ could take shape through a discourse analysis of evangelical social media engagement. Since web 2.0 allows consumers of content to also easily produce and publish content online, a more comprehensive analysis of both televangelist and believer-generated social media discourses could provide insight into these issues while still allowing for the use of unobtrusive research methodologies.

A second limitation concerns the challenges that arise when attempting to translate a holistic analysis of discursive formations that takes seriously the role of visual and auditory elements in televangelist programming to the confines of the printed word throughout this dissertation document. It is difficult to translate the holistic text of television (as constituted through image and sound) and the fluidity of hyperlinks and interactivity that are embedded in the architecture of the internet without any loss of

²⁸² Of course, we can examine the ways in which the televangelists themselves embody subjectivities through their mediated programming, even without access to their broader everyday lives.

meaning. Despite my meticulous attention to these elements throughout my data collection and analysis, making this holistic approach come alive through the confines of a printed text has not always been easy. I see myself in future conversations with projects that push the boundaries of what constitutes an academic document. In doing so, we can attempt to rethink the ways in which academic conventions of rigour can be applied to alternative means of disseminating findings while also taking account of our mediated landscape.

Lastly, another limitation of this dissertation is really both a blessing and a curse; it is also not confined to this project as it reflects an inevitable limitation of conducting media analysis in a rapidly evolving technological landscape. In a world where planned obsolescence is the norm and digital technologies are becoming obsolete within months instead of years, this field of inquiry can be exciting and frustrating in ways that couldn't be imagined even five years ago. Even if we discounted the lengthy academic timelines of producing a dissertation or submitting to the peer-reviewed publication process, the reality of today's constantly evolving technological landscape virtually guarantees that any comprehensive academic analysis of 'contemporary media products' will inevitably be dated by the time it reaches completion. I have lived this reality first-hand while watching social media explode over the course of this project. Social media was barely on academic and televangelist radars at the outset of this research but has since come to occupy a prominent position within the media packages employed by the televangelists under study here. An inevitable next step in understanding the full contours of mediated evangelist discourses involves the study of not just evangelical social media usage, but also the ways in which similar, contradictory, and/or fractured subjectivities may be constituted uniquely if social media discourses are added to this analysis.

Despite this rapidly evolving landscape, my research has shown me that apocalyptic religious narratives and anxieties about ‘new and novel’ media are rarely as new and original as the popular pundits would have us believe. While the key players and technologies may change, much of what constitutes ‘new’ apocalyptic discourse or technological commentary is really a reshaping and repackaging of much broader and older social histories. I have found great comfort in this realization. While the technologies and topics have evolved and may be considered ‘out of date’ by some standards, the message remains largely consistent and remains typical of apocalyptic narratives that are reshaped to reflect contemporary critiques of the social order. I am reminded of this consistency every time I turn on my television to see Robertson, Hagee, and the Van Impes discussing new events, new policies, and new public figures while still advancing the same discursive features of responsible salvation and constructing similar expectations of conduct for the responsible evangelical subject. Taking up discourse as an object of analysis, rather than the televangelists or the mediated technological platforms themselves, has lent an element of timeliness to my work that ensures a meaningful contribution to the constantly evolving literature on media and religion.

Final Remarks

This dissertation has been an emotional and academic challenge that has been unmatched, but it has also been the most rewarding experience of my young scholarly life. At the outset of my doctoral experience, I never imagined engaging with a project of this nature and I had almost no understanding of who televangelists were, why they are important, or what they had to do with politics. In the years that followed, I have had the

privilege of experiencing the joys and frustrations of engaging in this type of in-depth analysis that results in a deep familiarity with one's research subjects, however mediated or distant they may be. While my own beliefs and values still remain at odds with so much of what I have examined, I contend that my initial outsider position has served me well in articulating the contours of evangelical subjectivities. Likewise, my willingness to be an engaged and empathetic qualitative researcher has allowed me insight into a complicated area of apocalyptic evangelical belief that is much more complex than the American mainstream would have us believe. This is an area that still remains fascinating to me after all this time. I look forward to determining the next project on this research arch for a group that shows no signs of fading into the margins.

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Appendix A: Episodes of John Hagee Today

Month	Day of Week	Date	Series
November 2009	Monday	9	The Magnificent Seven
	Tuesday	10	The Magnificent Seven
	Tuesday	17	The Magnificent Seven
	Wednesday	18	The Seven Secrets of Happiness
	Thursday	19	The Seven Secrets of Happiness
	Monday	23	The Magnificent Seven
	Tuesday	24	The Magnificent Seven
	Wednesday	25	I believe in miracles
	Thursday	26	I believe in miracles
	Monday	30	The Magnificent Seven
December 2009	Tuesday	1	The Magnificent Seven
	Wednesday	2	The Seven Secrets of Happiness
	Monday	7	The Magnificent Seven
	Tuesday	8	The Magnificent Seven
	Wednesday	9	Live to Win
	Monday	14	The Magnificent Seven
	Tuesday	15	The Magnificent Seven
	Wednesday	16	Live to Win
	Thursday	17	Live to Win
	Monday	21	Live to Win
	Tuesday	22	Live to Win
	Monday	28	The Magnificent Seven
	Tuesday	29	The Magnificent Seven
January 2010	Wednesday	6	Special Interview with Dr. Don Colbert, author of 'What Would Jesus Eat'
	Monday	11	Prophetic Mysteries Revealed
	Tuesday	12	Prophetic Mysteries Revealed
	Wednesday	18	Prophetic Mysteries Revealed
	Tuesday	19	Prophetic Mysteries Revealed
	Wednesday	20	Promise – Problem – Provision
	Monday	25	Prophetic Mysteries Revealed
	Tuesday	26	Prophetic Mysteries Revealed
February 2010	Monday	1	Prophetic Mysteries Revealed
	Tuesday	2	Prophetic Mysteries Revealed
	Wednesday	3	Promise – Problem – Provision
	Thursday	4	Promise – Problem – Provision
	Friday	5	Special Feature: Bible Principles of Conquering Cancer with Diana Hagee
	Thursday	11	Write it Down and Make it Happen

	Friday	12	Write it Down and Make it Happen
	Wednesday	17	Write it Down and Make it Happen
	Thursday	18	Write it Down and Make it Happen
	Monday	22	Hope for the Troubled Heart
	Tuesday	23	Hope for the Troubled Heart
	Thursday	25	Write it Down and Make it Happen
	Friday	26	Write it Down and Make it Happen
March 2010	Monday	1	Hope for the Troubled Heart
	Tuesday	2	Hope for the Troubled Heart
	Monday	8	Hope for the Troubled Heart
	Tuesday	9	Hope for the Troubled Heart
	Monday	15	Hope for the Troubled Heart

Please note: this analysis has also been informed by an unnamed episode (aired in November of 2006) from my preliminary doctoral research that exists outside of this sample of episodes. See Thomas (2013) for further discussion of this episode.

Appendix B: Episodes of *the 700 Club*

Month	Day of Week	Date
January 2010	Monday	4
	Friday	8
	Monday	11
	Tuesday	12
	Wednesday	13
February 2010	Wednesday	3
	Wednesday	10
	Monday	15
	Thursday	18
March 2010	Monday	1
	Wednesday	3
	Thursday	25
	Friday	26
April 2010	Friday	9
	Friday	16
	Friday	23
	Thursday	29
May 2010	Wednesday	5
	Wednesday	12
	Friday	14
	Thursday	20
June 2010	Wednesday	2
	Monday	7
	Monday	14
	Wednesday	23

Please note: only *John Hagee Today* makes use of sermon series information and episode titles. Neither *the 700 Club* or *Jack Van Impe Presents* had any discernible naming conventions at the time of data collection.

Also, this analysis has been briefly informed by an episode of *the 700 Club* that was posted on YouTube in April of 2015. See Robertson (2015) for details.

Appendix C: Episodes of *Jack Van Impe Presents*

Month	Day of Week	Date
November 2009	Saturday	28
December 2009	Saturday	12
	Saturday	19
	Saturday	26
January 2010	Saturday	2
	Saturday	9
	Saturday	23
	Saturday	30
February 2010	Saturday	6
	Saturday	13
	Saturday	20
March 2010	Saturday	6
	Saturday	13
	Saturday	20
April 2010	Saturday	3
	Saturday	17
	Saturday	24
May 2010	Saturday	8
	Saturday	15
	Saturday	22
	Saturday	29
June 2010	Saturday	5
	Saturday	12
	Saturday	19
	Saturday	26

Please note: this analysis has also been informed by an episode outside of this sample of episodes (aired in November of 2011) that appears on YouTube.