

A Pact Under God:
Richard Nixon, Billy Graham, and the Evangelical Movement, 1950-1974

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Dedication

The author wishes to dedicate this thesis to her parents and the unyielding support and guidance they have given to this academic process. No matter how insane the intellectual endeavor, they have always been there to support it.

Specifically, thank you Dad for having the financial patience to stomach a graduate degree. You've adequately prepared me for that push out of the nest.

Abstract of Thesis

A Pact Under God: Richard Nixon, Billy Graham and the Theological Conservative Movement, 1950-1974

The connection between religion and the Presidency has been a long explored topic of interest for historians; from George Washington to George W. Bush, historians have traced the legacy of the White House and it's connection to religious rhetoric and religious organizations. Of all the Presidents explored, Richard Nixon gets the least attention, and is largely overlooked as a President that utilized religion to further his own political goals. Despite having a long lasting friendship with Evangelical preacher Billy Graham, Nixon has been perceived as largely dealing with religious organizations, specifically religious conservatives, at a distance.

In analyzing primary source documents located within the Nixon Library and Billy Graham collections, as well as reexamining popular historiography, this study has found that Richard Nixon not only utilized conservative Protestant support more frequently than previously perceived, but that his relationship with Billy Graham, was a crucial bridge in winning the vote of conservative Protestants. As early at the mid 1950s, Nixon and Graham were utilizing each other to further campaign, White House, and conservative Protestant goals. This study is important in reassessing the role Richard Nixon played in the rise of the Evangelical movement, and Christian Right of the 1970s and 1980s.

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It was a sweltering Sunday morning when crowds of eager Chicagoans gathered at Soldier Field in June of 1962. An audience of nearly 200,000 packed into the stadium, braving the heat for the event that would be considered one of the largest gatherings in modern memory of the city. Young and old, poor and wealthy, crippled and healthy all arrived in cars and buses or made the long trek by foot from all across the city. Clad in shirtsleeves and summer dresses, thousands had poured into the stands by noon, shading themselves from the sun with stray newspapers and umbrellas. Families had brought blankets and picnic lunches; vendors lined the stands to sell cotton candy and popcorn in paper cones, thousands of hotdogs, and commemorative souvenir badges and pennants for those that wanted to remember the day's events. At first glance, the scene looked like a colorful celebration of the height of summer. But this was no ordinary gathering and far from a celebration of the summer season; rather, it was a revival of God. Preacher Billy Graham had come to fortify their faith.

“[Each] was different; yet there was something that made them all alike,” *The Chicago Sun Times* commented on June 18th, 1962, “They came to have their faith restored, as well as have the feeling of unity and solidarity.”¹ Expectant for a reaffirmation in Christ, the crowds gathered to hear Graham speak: “He lifts up your spirits,” one housewife said, “He bolsters your faith and makes it real that there is a higher power. [His] words are so plain and so simple that a fool should not err. I love to hear any minister who speaks out the true word of God.”²

¹ William Braden, “Why the Crowd Came: The Magnetism Of An Evangelist,” *The Chicago Sun Times*, June 18, 1962, pg 3, Folder 73:Religion, Box 21, Vice-Presidential Collection, Richard Nixon Library and Birthplace Foundation, Yorba Linda, California.

² *Ibid*, pg. 4

Reverend Graham's sermon that June Sunday touched on the obviously religious, but more dynamically, declared war against the heady secular threat to the country. "The American people are at bedrock, a deeply religious people," his commanding voice boomed and crackled over the loudspeaker, "[And] no Supreme Court decision can deny it or change it..."³ Graham's message pushed beyond spiritual revivalism. It called to civic duty. He claimed that the root of America's troubles, the social and political upheavals that were on the cusp of erupting throughout the decade, stemmed from the absence of God himself. "America has come close to losing her soul," Graham warned his audience, "No nation has ever shown moral improvement and regained its soul without a religious revival."⁴

The blight of moral decay, Graham warned his listeners, was an infection that stemmed from within the country itself. Foreign evils, such as communism, were only superficial dangers; the real evil bred from within. He warned, "We have too long worshiped the false gods of conformity, affluency (sic) and religiosity."⁵ It was the materialism, the feel-good nature of post-war America, which had brought a dangerous complacency to the American people. Cities like Chicago, with rising crime and poverty rates, were modern day analogies to Sodom and Gomorrah. Only through the power of the public, the preacher warned, through the Christian masses, could anything be rehabilitated.

³ Dolores Machill, "Graham Crowd a Record," *The Chicago Sun Times*, June 18, 1962, pg. 1, Folder 73: Religion, Box 19, Vice-Presidential Collection, Richard Nixon Library and Birthplace Foundation, Yorba Linda, California.

⁴ Ibid, pg. 4

⁵ Ibid.

The answer was not simply to pray or attend church, but to move the gospel from the confines of the congregation out into the public. “There are enough Christians working together here,” Graham bolstered his audience, “[that can] throw back the forces of crime and violence. We can lower the crime rate and stop the blight of moral decay.”⁶ The first step to the revival was to come from within the church and slowly spread outwards; participants would need to study their bible and unify their congregations, and then, without limitation, move their message into the public sphere. The preacher ordered his followers to step out of the comforts of the Christian community, and to move into civil affairs; religious agency was no longer enough to turn the tide of a rapidly changing nation. Christians had to join hands with social and civil systems to effectively wage combat.⁷

Aside from its enormous popularity, Billy Graham’s speaking crusade, which lasted the rest of that summer, announced the arrival of a new, politically charged movement; as he urged his attendees to delve into the realm of political action, Graham himself had been creating a long-lasting relationship with the White House. Starting with President Dwight Eisenhower and culminating with his relationship with Richard Nixon, Graham forged a political connection in which politicians looked to him and other religious leaders for religious, civil, and even at times, foreign affair opinions.

By and large, scholars have overlooked studying the Nixon-Graham relationship in detail; historians have portrayed Nixon as largely working with

⁶ Braden, “Why the Crowd Came.” pg. 3

⁷ Ibid

religious conservatives during his campaigns and Administration at a distance, and Graham's own influence on Nixon has been largely overlooked. Instead historians have drawn their attention to his Cold War religiosity and social ethic. Early scholarship painted the preacher in positive and lively polemics where Graham spoke for the "silent majority," and was little more than a figurehead for the rise of conservative Protestantism. In reality, Graham's relationship with Nixon was one in which the preacher was incredibly involved in counseling the President on religious matters, and even went so far to join his inner circle, helping to further the Administration's political and voter agenda. "I think your political advice was right on the beam," Nixon once praised his friend, "and, as you probably noted, I have been trying to follow the course of action you recommended during the past few weeks."⁸

During the 1950s and 1960s, the relationship between Billy Graham and Richard Nixon was important in initially forging the bridge between a then budding theological conservative movement and the Republican Party. Graham acted in part, as the voice of the fledgling movement, providing Nixon a link to foster positive ties to these constituents. It was during the 1960 campaign when Nixon and Graham worked together in bringing theological conservatives to their side. In turn, while Nixon used Graham as an important link to the conservative Protestant movement, Graham used his connection to Nixon to further his own political influence and fame. Over time, the Nixon administration incorporated the conservative Protestant movement into its goals; Graham became an important

⁸ Graham, Billy Dr. Letter to Richard Nixon, November 7, 1955, Folder Billy Graham, Box 299, General Correspondence, 1946-1962, Series 320, Richard Nixon Library and Birthplace Foundation, Yorba Linda, California.

and influential participant in the administration's policy making, foreign policy counseling, and in attracting and ensconcing conservative religious voters to Nixon's side.

Moreover, Graham and Nixon's association spoke of the larger connection between the Republican Party and the emergence of the modern movement of conservative Protestants into the realm of political action. The relationship between the two men was crucial in facilitating the rise of the theological conservative movement. Graham's presence in the White House gave Nixon an advantageously direct link to the movement, first in 1960 when it was first emerging as a social and political force, and then again during his two-terms as President, when the Administration solidified conservative Protestants as a long term and loyal voter bloc. The relationship was equally important and advantageous for Graham and conservative Protestants like him; on a personal level, Graham gained a level of political influence and power unlike any he had access to before, and with a position so close to Nixon, conservative Protestants had a direct route in which they could access influence in the White House.

Prior to the Eisenhower administration, the relationship between the Executive Branch and religious groups was largely undefined, and Presidential administrations had no clear method of how to handle religious matters or plan for coordinating the relationship between White House and the various religious groups. With the appointment of an assistant for religious matters, Fredric Fox in 1956, the Eisenhower Administration formed a centralized and structured relationship with the movement; for the first time since the Lincoln administration

there were coordinated religious activities, responses to religious concerns by citizens, and a formal liaison to particular religious groups.⁹ Thereafter, the religious cultural climate and the presidency ran analogous to one another, both sides seeking to gain from the relationship; for conservative Protestants, it was a chance to promote their own agenda with a willing White House to back them. For the President, it was a chance to gain the support and cooperation of a new constituency.

The 1950s marked a watershed moment for the larger Protestant community, and not just for the Evangelicals participating within the Graham revivals. As the Evangelical community began to coalesce into becoming part of a broader working community that considered itself to be politically and theologically conservative, the larger Protestant coalition began around this time to break down internally, fragmenting into smaller factions; with its numerous denominations, the religious movement represented, at its best, compromises between liberal and conservative religious and political ideology, and at its worse, internal chaos. The issue of Catholicism, in particular, created a sharp divide between Protestants; while it was once generally accepted that Catholic religious thought was “too European and not sufficiently appreciative of the American values of democracy and individual freedom,” liberal Protestants began to reevaluate the place of Catholics within American society.¹⁰ The willingness of some Protestant leaders to create dialogue and perceive the Catholic faith as less

⁹ Gary Scott Smith, Faith and the Presidency: From George Washington to George W. Bush (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 239.

¹⁰ Shaun A. Casey, The Making of a Catholic President: Kennedy vs. Nixon 1960 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 43.

of a threat soon created a divide within the Protestant community. Conservative Protestants continued to remain skeptical that Catholics, such as Kennedy, would be free of Vatican interference and control. Liberal publications, such as the *Christianity and Crisis* magazine, pushed for a dialog of Protestant-Catholic tolerance as the campaigns began; influential voices such as John Bennett and Reinhold Niebuhr acknowledged the crude prejudice many Protestants had towards Catholicism, and even observed that a President of the faith, well versed in the teachings of his church, could prove to be an asset in providing a perspective on social justice that Protestants could not themselves attain. While he rejected the Catholic doctrine, Bennett himself would admit that, "...Catholic teaching has its better and more humane side, and it is a repository of much wisdom that could stand a Catholic President in good stead."¹¹

Theologically conservative Protestants were less inclined to change their minds; traditions had connected Catholicism to fascism in the 1930s, and at times considered it to be distinctly outside the American value system. Anti-Catholic rhetoric had become a way for many Protestants to create boundaries between what was perceived to be socially, culturally, and politically acceptable and unacceptable. By the 1930s, scholar John McGreevy argues, both liberal and conservative Protestants were drawing analogous comparisons of Protestantism and the innumerable attributes of American Democracy.¹² Defining "Americanism," within a Protestant construct, provided intellectuals fodder in justifying the opposition to Catholics in positions of power. Max Weber's *The*

¹¹ Casey, 56.

¹² John McGreevy, *Catholicism and American Freedom: A History* (New York: Norton, 2003), 168, 173.

Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism, for example, which allegedly stressed the historical connection of American democracy to the Protestant Reformation, was one of many cited examples, which Protestants, liberal and conservative, used to define democracy.¹³ In a world of fascism and totalitarianism, it was Protestantism's influence that protected democracy, and Catholicism's authoritarianism, which would ultimately damage it. As liberal Protestants emerged into the 1950s with a new proposal that accepted at the very least, an open and intellectual debate with the Catholic community, conservative Protestants were reticent to accept Catholics into the American cultural construct, and were even less willing to take an active role in accepting the Catholic faith in positions of power.

It was these theologically conservative Protestants who would come to bolster Richard Nixon's campaign in 1960, and later become the cornerstone support for his administration. With a mixture of both liberal and conservative Protestantism, prominent leaders found ways to merge their own personal beliefs into a cohesive movement; Reverend Norman Vincent Peale, for instance, a popular Protestant pastor who inspired popular, middle-class religious liberalism, worked alongside conservative Evangelical figures such as Billy Graham to produce a new kind of theological conservatism that emphasized inclusion, outreach, and interfaith appeal. More often than not, the majority of followers were conservative, both theologically and politically, and ranged widely in specific religious affiliation; Pentecostal, Fundamental, and Evangelical denominations constituted the most numerous of supporters, but more liberal

¹³ Casey, 50.

minded Protestants were represented as well. Moreover, the movement found discordance within its ranks as much as it did against those outside of it; while a majority of the movement followed along popular belief systems, there were those that disagreed with many of the movement's goals or were far more radical in procuring them.

Religious affiliation within this theologically conservative movement was equally varied. The largest participants came from a traditionally Evangelical background. A broad tradition in its own right, Evangelicalism encompassed the more specific dominations of Pentecostal and Fundamentalist faiths; all three bore similar characteristics; most within these faiths were conservative politically and held the general belief that the Bible was inerrant. The differences were subtle and nuanced; Fundamentalists tended towards stricter practices and interpretation of the gospel, and attested to believing its meaning literally. Many Evangelicals were willing to read metaphorically from scripture, regarding the practice and meaning of the Bible with a more flexible interpretation. Differences arose not only in the level of literal interpretation, but in the strictness of practice as well as the level of separation or integration into the larger Christian community and even broader multi-religious one. Fundamentalists tended, again, towards separatism, critical of those who did not agree with their prescribed doctrines; Evangelicals tended towards compromise and often urged taking common cause with more mainstream Protestants.

Internal fissions and changes in biblical and belief interpretation among theological conservatives were, for many involved, the catalyst for renewed

involvement in civil affairs. Many Evangelicals, for instance, departed from a once stringent anti-intellectual stance as leaders within the movement began to grapple with the importance of “secular” scholarship’s influence in religious doctrine. Bill Bright, the founder of Campus Crusade for Christ, criticized the excessive intellectualizing of Christian values and dogma. He argued that it would confuse rather than enlighten followers and prove a “handicap in the propagation of faith.”¹⁴ To the contrary, others within the movement argued that the convictions and secular intellectual scholarship could be tolerated; while it would be easy to justify an argument by quoting biblical scripture literally, many leaders argued that addressing secular explanations in light of scripture would provide a logical, rational debate that could strengthen rather than weaken a practitioner’s convictions. Even though scripture might reject evolution, addressing the evidence provided by secular scientists to that of biblical theology would create a debatable commentary and not simply declare that evolution was false because it differed from the Genesis account of creation. Despite the fact that “secularism” became associated less with being purely negative, many denominations within the theological conservative community were unwilling to accept it forthright within American society; in fact, it was the threat of secularism that was the driving force that brought many within the movement into the realm of politics. By the mid-1950s, theological conservatives were starting to mobilize, driven by this fear.

¹⁴ John G. Turner, Bill Bright & Campus Crusade for Christ: The Renewal of Evangelicalism in Postwar America, (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2008), 103.

Evangelicals and Fundamentalists both contented and justified their growing influence within the realm of politics, and subsequent protest of secularism on the argument that democratic societies were at their roots, based in Judo-Christian values that stemmed from Protestantism. It was the indelible legacy and influence of Protestantism which helped shape the groundwork of American democracy. The dangers of secularism and Catholicism were also connected; secularism came from an absence of God, eroding away at the founding principles of national democracy. Similarly, Catholicism was thought to promote the antithesis to democracy, authoritarianism and oppression. Together, the two threats were believed to be working in tandem; the rise of secularist ideas provided an easier venue in which Catholics could wield power. Within a similar vein, Catholicism's authoritarianism would result in the erosion of democratic principles, thwarting scientific progress, intellectual autonomy and civil liberties, which would result in a subsequent rejection of God.

For many theological conservatives, it was imperative to have a dominant Protestant influence within the country. A "Christian" influence, defined within the constructs of a Protestant doctrine only, provided an "emphasis upon man's individual responsibility to his God, thereby laying the basis of freedom of conscience, freedom of the mind, and freedom of inquiry."¹⁵ Evangelical scholars contended that the memory of the atrocities committed between Catholics and Protestants during the Thirty Years War, created the necessity of a state that was intrinsically separate from the sphere of religious influence. Even outside of the

¹⁵ Agnes E. Meyer, "Democracy and Clericalism," (delivered at the Ware Lecture, Boston, Massachusetts, May 21st, 1954) 4-5. Folder 73: Religion, Box 19, Vice Presidential Collection, Richard Nixon Library and Birthplace Foundation, Yorba Linda, California.

Evangelical community, mainstream Protestants espoused the belief that the roots of democracy stemmed from a common existential source. “No government can be justified unless it draws its strengths from the free consent of the governed...” intellectual Agnes E. Meyer noted in her book *Democracy and Clericalism*, “sovereignty resides in the will of the people, and that government is merely the trustee of the ends they wish to achieve.” It was the “gospel of Protestantism,” Meyer attributed to the creation of a free state; it destroyed the influence the church had on the state and, in its place, created a secular ethic modeled after key Christian tenets. “Our secular institutions and our secular ethic are no mere accident,” Meyer concluded, “but the finest product of five centuries of thoughtful statesmanship.”¹⁶ Separating itself from church influence, American society would then be allowed to judge in terms of “how conflict can be solved with the least damage to all concerned.”¹⁷ Institutional church structures acted in terms of “right or wrong according to their various forms of absolutes”¹⁸ which ultimately prevented statesmanship and democratic practice.

Even within the Catholic Church, scholars espoused the important connection between American democracy and the influence of Christian theology. Liberal Bishop John. J. Wright drew on the connection between democracy and Christianity in a keynote address to Congress in 1959, and argued that the structure of law, philosophy of democracy, and the rights of individuals were all intrinsically connected to a Christian foundation. Key documents, such as the Declaration of Independence, were created out of the inspiration of these religious

¹⁶ Meyer, 6-7.

¹⁷ Meyer, 8.

¹⁸ Ibid.

values; The Founding Fathers, “placed the Bible, God’s law, on the very rostra where they took their oath to defend the law of the land.”¹⁹ Even though the constitution made a distinct separation between church and state, Wright argued that most of the nation’s secular laws were inspired by Christian theology. While he did not come out in support of Protestantism being the dominant religious influence in the country, Wright did argue that the state and the religious movement were intrinsically linked. “Those who bear witness to the law of God,” Wright posited, “[are] wholehearted[ly] obedient to the law of the land, because in doing so, they are logically and loyally defending the civil corollaries of their sacred teachings.”²⁰ As Protestantism drew from the order of law to effectively practice virtue, law and civil society drew from the morality of God to practice a common good. The influence of secularism, threatened the careful balance of influence that state and religion had on one another; the farther Americans drifted from religion and God, the more eroded and threatened American democracy became. It was exactly this scenario, Wright warned, that was unfolding by the beginning of the 1960s.

The Presidential election of 1960 brought many of the shared anxieties over Catholic influence and the threat of secularism to the fore for many theological conservatives. The nomination of Democratic candidate, John F. Kennedy prompted many within the conservative Protestant camp to consider the election to be particularly portentous, all on the basis of Kennedy’s religion.

¹⁹ John J. Wright, “Aggressive Secularism Seen Undermining Nation: Extension of Remarks of Hon. J. Glenn Beall,” Congressional Record- Appendix, September 14th, 1959, A8441. Folder 73: Religion, Box 19, Vice-Presidential Collection, Richard Nixon Library and Birthplace Foundation, Yorba Linda, California.

²⁰ Wright, A8441.

While many liberal and conservative Protestants both articulated the legitimacy Catholics had as American citizens in running for elected office, there was an equal outcry by many who maintained that the keystone of American democracy, the separation of church and state, would be threatened. “Informed Protestants believe, not at all irrationally,” a *New York Times* editorial noted on the impending 1960 election day, “that the interests of the nation are safer in the hands of one who does not confess to a foreign, earthly power.”²¹ A majority of theological conservatives had a difficult time placing a Catholic in position of power, and many feared that the presidency would “aid and abet the [movement towards Roman Catholic dominance] in America...” giving “more power to advance such a goal than any other person.”²²

Organized foundations within Evangelical and Fundamentalist circles pushed anti-Catholic agendas within many of their congregations. Fundamentalist Bob Jones Sr., founder of Bob Jones University, and Carl McIntire, founder and president of the American Council of Christian Churches (ACC), voiced their concerns vocally. The National Association of Evangelicals (NAE) published a restrained but pessimistic booklet entitled *A Roman Catholic President: How Free from Church Control?* and circulated a “Plan of Action” letter to church leaders across the nation, pointing out the dangers of the Roman Catholic religion on American society.²³ “Public opinion is changing in favor of the Church of Rome.”

²¹ “Political Criticism of Catholic Backed,” *New York Times*, February 7, 1960. Folder 73: Religion, Box 19, Vice-Presidential Collection, Richard Nixon Library and Birthplace Foundation, Yorba Linda, California.

²² Smith, 250.

²³ NAE concerns over a Catholic President. Folder: National Association of Evangelicals, Box 547, General Correspondence, 1946-1962, Series 320, Richard Nixon Library and Birthplace Foundation, Yorba Linda, California.

the pamphlet cautioned, “It is time for us to stand up and be counted as Protestants. We dare not sit idly by—voiceless and voteless—and lose the heritage for which others have died.”²⁴

Billy Graham’s own father-in-law, Dr. Nathan Bell, painted an equally venomous picture of Catholic representation in a circulated speech titled “Protestant Distinctives and the American Crisis.” One of the only reasons Catholics observed American convictions, Bell claimed, was out of sheer necessity; without a majority population and dominant influence, Catholics had to work subversively. The Church was a political system analogous to, “an octopus [that] covers the entire world and threatens those basic freedoms and those constitutional rights for which our forefathers died in generations past.”²⁵ Bell warned that “once a nation becomes 51% Catholic, the pressure increases, and as the percentage rises in favor of that Church, tolerance recedes and oppression intervenes.” He used the recent suppression of Protestantism within Latin American countries and Italy, reminding his audience that “Rome never changes.” No matter the outward façade, Catholics were assumed to be loyal to the Vatican before the American government.

The magazine *Christianity Today*, founded by Billy Graham, painted a similarly bleak future under the tutelage a Catholic president. If a Catholic was elected President, the magazine predicted dark days ahead for the nation: “We Christians,” it asserted, “must work and pray as never before in this election or the

²⁴ NAE concerns over a Catholic President.

²⁵ Bell, Nation speech against the Catholic Denomination, “Protestant Distinctives and the American Crisis.” Folder 73: Religion, Box 19, Vice-Presidential Collection, Richard Nixon Library and Birthplace Foundation, Yorba Linda, California.

future course of America could be dangerously altered and the free preaching of the gospel could be endangered.”²⁶

Graham himself took a more subtle approach to the prospect of a Catholic president after early news reports nearly damaged his public reputation. Originally vocal over the prospect of Catholics in the White House, Graham initially expressed concern in a handful of letters to both President Eisenhower and Vice President Nixon, voicing the belief that the then President needed to show more forceful support for the Republican candidate. Roman Catholic influences, included likely Senate majority leader Mike Mansfield and Representative John McCormack as House Leader, would provide support for the Democratic candidate, and had to be tempered with equal support for Nixon. “The Catholic Church,” he warned, “will take advantage of [the situation].”²⁷ While there was no lack of ardent outcry over the prospect of a Catholic president from Protestant supporters, opposition to these views was equally present.

For liberal Protestants, Kennedy’s campaign also prompted internal divisions its own; many liberals who supported Nixon protested against the election of a Catholic president in fear that Kennedy’s nomination risked the future status of church-state separation. The more libertarian of Protestants concluded that Kennedy could not resist, “the determined efforts of the hierarchy of his church...to breach the wall of separation between church and state,” and defined their protest against the Democratic candidate as not one that was spurred

²⁶ Christianity Today warns of Catholic oppression. *Christianity Today*, February 1, 1960, pg. 20.

²⁷ Graham, Billy Dr. Letter to Dwight. D. Eisenhower, Copy to RN. August 4, 1960, Folder Billy Graham, Box 299, General Correspondence, 1946-1962, Series 320, Richard Nixon Library and Birthplace Foundation, Yorba Linda, California.

on by bigotry or fear, but by the insistence of “the absolute separation of church and state as necessary for complete individual liberty.”²⁸ Liberal institutions such as the Protestant and Others Americans United for Separation of Church and State (POAU), publicly critiqued Catholicism, claiming the ideological battle over its presence in American politics was about public policy, not private religious faith.²⁹ Famous POAU lawyer Paul B. Blanshard expressed his deep concerns that the Catholic Church’s political goals undermined liberal goals: “Belonging to the [Catholic Church] for a genuine liberal is like a Democrat belonging to the [anti-civil rights] Dixiecrat Party at the same time,” he wrote. Catholics were characterized as illiberal, deviant and politically ignorant, and Blanshard believed that “the members of the Catholic hierarchy will be as reactionary as they dare to be...”³⁰

Other liberal Protestants flat out rejected all protest against a Catholic President; it was perceived that tolerance of sectarian differences and the avoidance of secularism as the solution would be the best possible way to preserve religious freedom. Editors of liberal Protestant magazine, *Christian Century*, counseled tolerance in regards to American Catholics, reminding its readers that there was a clear differentiation between the Catholic Church proper, and Catholic individuals. While it was deemed acceptable to critique the institution itself, the magazine, and liberals with similar views, decried religious intolerance towards Catholic individuals. “In theology [American Catholics] allow the authoritarian principle to prevail; in politics they insist on using private

²⁸ Thomas J. Carty, *A Catholic in the White House?* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2004), 68.

²⁹ Carty, 69.

³⁰ Carty, 73.

judgment. Ecclesiastically they are Catholics; politically they are Protestants.”³¹

While doubts over Catholicism persisted, many liberal and moderate mainstream Protestants recognized that intolerance towards Catholic individuals could and would eventually alienate entire religious organizations from political liberal ideology. Though many liberal Protestants would continue to support Nixon’s campaign and oppose the election of a Catholic President on the basis of church and state separation, they would oppose the attacks theological conservatives made against Kennedy solely on the basis of religious affiliation.

Similar critiques and near controversy caused Billy Graham to tone down his own partisan statements, when in August 1960, he was quoted in both TIME and Newsweek, as saying “a man’s religion cannot be separated from his person; therefore where religion involves political decision it becomes a legitimate issue.”³² When asked why Protestants were reluctant, as a whole, to vote for a Catholic president, Graham answered that, “some Protestants are hesitant about voting for a Catholic because the Church is not only a religious but a secular institution which sends and receives ambassadors from secular states.”³³ The evangelist echoed popular concerns brought up by many theological conservatives over the loyalty of a Catholic President and the potential breach of the separation of church and state. After the TIME article was published, Graham sent a frantic letter to then Vice President Nixon lamenting his concern over his public perception. “I emphatically deny that I plunged into American politics as stated in

³¹ Carty, 81.

³² Graham, Billy statement to TIME and Newsweek. August 28, 1960, Folder Billy Graham, Box 299, General Correspondence, 1946-1962, Series 320, Richard Nixon Library and Birthplace Foundation, Yorba Linda, California. A copy of the letter was sent to RN on the same date.

³³ Ibid.

the August 29th issue of TIME,” he said, “or that I had Senator Kennedy solely in mind when I made my remarks.”³⁴ Nearly destroying Graham’s credibility, the TIME debacle was a clear indicator of the internal struggle the preacher battled. Likened by Marshall Frady to that of a “fastidious celibate struggling to effect a conception without any actual carnal grappling,” Graham attempted to smuggle in political advice and personal will for the outcome of the election while also appearing to not indulge in any deliberate politics.³⁵ Fearful of driving away his supporters, as well as driven by a self-serving fear of marring his public image and political influence, he reassured his supporters, the media, and Nixon, “that I deplore all forms of religious bigotry!”

Billy Graham was not the last critic to be quelled for his opinions over the Catholic matter. Liberal Protestant minister Dr. Norman Vincent Peale provided Graham an ominous example of the potentiality that public support for Nixon coupled with criticism of Catholicism could do to one’s public reputation. A prominent and outspoken liberal Protestant minister, Peale attracted particular ire from fellow liberal Protestants when with the support of a number of NAE members, he publicly denounced Kennedy at the National Conference of Citizens for Religious Freedom (NCCRF), which had been vouched as an organization that had “supported freedom from political intentions...” After Peale ended the conference with an official statement that concluded that Kennedy could not “resist the determined efforts of the hierarchy of his church...to breach the wall of separation between church and state,” many liberals denounced Peale for having

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Marshall Frady, Billy Graham: A Parable of American Righteousness (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1979), 442.

“loosed the floodgates of bigotry clothed in the respectability of apparently rational argument.”³⁶ In private correspondence to Nixon, Peale was equally forthcoming with advice, often glibly reassuring the Vice President that he thought that “Kennedy should direct the destiny of the millions of our citizen” was both an improbably and seemingly impossible scenario.³⁷ Initially pledging public support for Nixon’s candidacy, Peale was adamant in his public and private loyalty to the Republican candidate. “I spent an hour with Billy Graham...” Peale told Nixon in an August 1960 correspondence, “and [we] feel that we must do all within our power to help you [in your campaign.]”³⁸ Providing vocal public support and private advice, Peale urged the Vice President to make religion a key issue to the election; he considered that if broad anxieties were played upon, the majority of Americans would vote for the candidate they could most relate with, which would presumably be the Protestant one. “I would like to see that you are in church each Sunday,” the minister suggested, “... it will appeal to the loyalties of great honest masses of our people.”³⁹

Dr. Peale did not limit himself to only privately counseling the Vice President; pledging his loyalty to the candidate “no matter what the cost.” Peale continued to denounce the Catholic Church openly and question Kennedy’s loyalties to the government. In a written manifesto published in the August 1960 edition of *Newsweek*, Peale accused Kennedy of working directly for the Catholic

³⁶ Carty, 80.

³⁷ Peale, Norman Vincent Letter to Richard Nixon, August 1, 1960. Folder Peale, Norman Vincent, Box 583, General Correspondence, 1946-1962, Series 320, Richard Nixon Library and Birthplace Foundation, Yorba Linda, California.

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Ibid.

Church. “Faced with the election of a Catholic, our culture is at stake... [and] it is inconceivable that a Roman Catholic president would not be under extreme pressure by the hierarchy of his church to accede to its policies.” Peale went so far as to suggest that the election of a Catholic might even end free speech in American for good.⁴⁰

Almost immediately, Peale was criticized for his comments, coming under fire from liberal politicians and religious leaders alike. Labeled as a bigot, Peale and his fellowship were attacked for believing “[an] argument which would rule out a Roman Catholic just because he is a Roman Catholic.” It smacked of both bigotry and “a violation of the constitutional guarantee of no religious test for public office.”⁴¹ The backlash against Peale was particularly damning; the minister eventually withdrew from the public eye after both conservative and liberal religious and political leaders spoke out against his rhetoric. Lambasted in a formal statement supported by over one hundred religious leaders, Peale was publicly ridiculed for his statements, and faced financial losses for his comments. Several newspapers, including *The Philadelphia Inquirer* ceased syndication of Peale’s national column, and he resigned from his position as his church’s administrative head. While he would later publicly repudiate his anti-Catholic remarks and endorse the “right for every American to elect a person of any religious affiliation,” he would continue to hold deep anxiety over the role of Catholics in the United States, and privately considered Kennedy a threat. Counseling a friend to record the election date as a watershed moment, Peale said,

⁴⁰ “The Religious Issue: Getting Hotter and Hotter,” *Newsweek*. Sept 19, 1960.

⁴¹ “The CAMPAIGN: The Power of Negative Thinking, *TIME*, September 19, 1960.

“Protestant America got its death blow on November 8th.”⁴² Despite his beliefs, the minister would spend many years after the 1960 election attempting to rebuild his reputation as other than a religious bigot. “Religious freedom is finished [in America],” the minister asserted later in his career, “People today just read the headlines and ‘think’ with their emotions. So religious freedom is out the window.”⁴³

Peale’s fall from public grace within both political and religious circles pointed to the inherent danger religious figures faced when they moved too far into the political arena. The flat-footed dedication Peale had pledged to Nixon’s candidacy placed the popular minister in a state of public scrutiny, and signaled the first problematic signs for conservative Protestants and Nixon’s campaign. While Peale, Graham, and conservatives saw their public participation in electing Richard Nixon as essential to the preservation of American Protestant Christian values, their public encouragement and open resistance to Kennedy did the opposite, unintentionally mobilizing liberal Protestants and Catholics to defend the election of a Catholic president.

For both Graham and Nixon, the Peale ordeal was a lesson in the use of subtlety; endorsing a candidate as adamantly and as zealously as Peale had done, worked twice-fold in providing ample examples for Democrats to use against the Republican campaign, as well as in unifying a coalition of liberal Protestants, Catholics, and mainstream Americans against conservative Nixon supporters.

⁴² Carty, 65.

⁴³ “N.Y. Pastor Here: Religious Freedom Ending—Norman Vincent Peale,” *The San Francisco Chronicle*, November 10, 1961. Folder 73: Religion, Box 19, Vice-Presidential Collection, Richard Nixon Library and Birthplace Foundation, Yorba Linda, California.

Graham acknowledged the problem of becoming too public and outspoken; with his intended loyalties known, Graham had to soon modify his public stance on the campaign. “I have come to the conclusion,” Graham said to reporters in a late October interview, “that my main responsibility is in the spiritual realm and that I shouldn’t become involved in partisan politics.”⁴⁴ Retracting previous statements given to the press that he might come out to endorse Nixon, Graham did a quick about-face after the Peale ordeal stating that he would have “nothing more further to say on the subject of politics.”⁴⁵

Privately, Graham justified his actions to Nixon as imperative for the safety of both himself and the Republican candidate. “We have already witnessed what the Press did to Peale,” he reminded Nixon, “Not only would the [press and liberal religious and political leaders] crucify me. They would eventually turn it against you, so I must be extremely careful. I have been avoiding the American press the last few weeks like the plague. But when I arrive home next week, I will make statements that will by implication be interpreted as favorable to you without getting directly involved. As the campaign moves on, I may be forced to take a more open stand if I feel it will help your cause, but we shall wait for the developments.”⁴⁶

Graham’s reticence to get publicly involved with the campaign after the Peale incident did not indicate that the preacher had departed completely from

⁴⁴ Graham, Billy Dr. telegraph to Richard Nixon. “AP Article, Graham not endorsing candidate,” October 30, 1960. Folder: Graham, Billy. Box 299, General Correspondence, 1946-1962, Series 320, Richard Nixon Library and Birthplace Foundation, Yorba Linda, California.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ Graham, Billy Dr. Letter to Richard Nixon, September 24, 1960. Folder Graham, Billy Dr., Box 299, General Correspondence, 1946-1962, Series 320, Richard Nixon Library and Birthplace Foundation, Yorba Linda, California.

counseling Nixon on campaign matters; he soon shifted his attention from the public eye to one of specifically private counsel. Many scholars, including Sociologist William Martin, have suggested that Graham's primary motivation for continuing to support Nixon despite the risk of his reputation was personal gain, continued access to the White House, and political power. An already strong relationship had been solidified in the 1950s between Graham and President Eisenhower. The minister consulted frequently on both religious and political matters. It was assumed then, that the Nixon administration would be a continuation of such privileges, and supporting the Republican candidate would mean that Graham would enjoy a close personal and professional relationship with the most powerful public office in America.

The minister's actions seem to justify Martin's claims: Graham's reluctance to express negative views on Kennedy publicly and his refusal to take a solid public stance on which candidate he supported, provided him the opportunity to preserve his reputation as a nationally respected public figure. In a private letter to Nixon, Graham justified his withdrawal as a way to both protect both Nixon and himself. "I am detaching myself from some of the cheap religious bigotry and diabolical whisperings that are going on..." he explained to Nixon, "I am not so much opposed to Kennedy as I am for you."⁴⁷ "At all costs," he urged his friend, "you must continue to stay a million miles from the religious issue at this time."⁴⁸

⁴⁷ Graham, Billy Dr. Letter to Richard Nixon, September 1, 1960. Folder Graham, Billy Dr., Box 299, General Correspondence, 1946-1962, Series 320, Richard Nixon Library and Birthplace Foundation, Yorba Linda, California.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

Other motivations outside of personal self-interest also drew Graham to continue his participation with Nixon's campaign; while he publicly denounced the use of Anti-Catholic rhetoric, and had a history of promoting a Protestant evangelical message of tolerance, his perception of Kennedy was conditioned by a history of nativist assumptions. For example, he believed that Catholics would vote, as a whole, together, and that by appealing to the Protestant constituency, Nixon would be able to unite it against the Catholic candidate. He never suggested that Nixon appeal to Catholic voters, and rather pushed a political strategy that urged the Vice President to work against them. In comparison to Peale, whose political actions were influenced by his perception of the Roman Catholic Church as, "power hungry and contemptuous [in] attitude," Graham's personal fear of Catholic manipulation was tempered by his political savvy.⁴⁹ Unwilling to burn political bridges, scholar Thomas Carty pointed out, Graham was willing to keep any concerns silent, as not to be perceived in the same way Peale had.

Still, Graham recognized that the religious issue could not be ignored; the minister acknowledged the tricky balance the Vice President's campaign and supporters had to play against a rapidly mobilizing liberal Protestant and Catholic constituency that worked against them. Kennedy's tactic, Graham warned, would be a comprehensive push to sway popular Protestant sentiment, portray Nixon's supporters as both religiously and culturally undemocratic and prejudiced, and would gain sympathy with the mainstream: "I am now convinced that some of the Democratic leaders deliberately planned to use the religious issue to put their

⁴⁹ Carty, 54-55.

crowd in the White House.”⁵⁰ Graham predicted that the Kennedy campaign was not only aiming to split apart the Protestant vote, but also to solidify the Catholic vote and “present Mr. Kennedy as a persecuted martyr, thus working on the sympathies of the people,” effectively obscuring the primary issues of the campaign.⁵¹

Ironically, Graham’s critique of the Democrat’s spin tactics, echoed similar advice he counseled to the Vice President; in the same way he warned that Kennedy was mobilizing a Catholic bloc against him, Graham still privately lobbied Nixon, as well as other Republic leaders, to generate a Protestant bloc vote against Kennedy. “With the religious issue growing deeper,” Graham suggested to then President Eisenhower, “I believe you could tip the scales in a number of key states from Kentucky to Texas.”⁵² In the same way Kennedy exploited conservative Protestant weaknesses and mobilized Catholics and liberal Protestants against them, Graham urged both Nixon and Eisenhower to exploit nativist anti-Catholic tendencies in the so-called Southern Bible Belt, where conservative Protestant fundamentalism flourished. Graham also counseled Nixon to exploit rampant suspicions that many conservative Protestants both in the south and around the nation, had over a Catholic President. “Dramatize the religious issue,” Graham urged, “without mentioning it publicly.”⁵³ Fixated on the potential for Catholics to support Kennedy’s campaign based only on religious loyalties,

⁵⁰ Graham, Billy Dr. Letter to Richard Nixon, September 27, 1960. Folder Graham, Billy Dr., Box 299, General Correspondence, 1946-1962, Series 320, Richard Nixon Library and Birthplace Foundation, Yorba Linda, California.

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² Carty, 57.

⁵³ Ibid.

Graham failed to acknowledge in his own actions, the hypocrisy in attempting to mobilize and manipulate Protestant fears and loyalties.

Warning Nixon in subsequent correspondence, Graham outlined what was suspected to be Kennedy's plan of action to split the Protestant vote. "Senator Kennedy is taking the religious issue extremely seriously," he warned, "and has employed a clever brilliant Protestant attorney... who is going to organize Protestants for Kennedy. I am informed that a debate is going on within [their] camp as to if this should be an open move or kept underground."⁵⁴ As Graham had predicted, Kennedy, along with Protestant elder James Wine, arranged meetings with large groups of anti-Catholic pockets throughout the nation. In September of 1960, Kennedy organized a Houston meeting, where he faced his opponents, answering their criticisms with unambiguous answers about his allegiance to the United States rather than the Vatican. He made it clear that, as President, his role would be to serve the whole country, and not pander to the wishes of the Catholic Church; if there came a time in which he faced a conflict between the Vatican and the U.S he would give precedence to his obligation to the United States or, if need be, vacate his office. Kennedy's forthcoming remarks were tactically successful. Not only did he address widespread doubts over his political and ideological loyalties, but also brought to light the prejudice that was coming from religious Nixon supporters. The Houston meeting indicated a pivotal turning point in a winning campaign. As Graham originally suggested, Nixon and

⁵⁴ Graham, Billy Dr. Letter to Richard Nixon, September 1, 1960. Folder Graham, Billy Dr., Box 299, General Correspondence, 1946-1962, Series 320, Richard Nixon Library and Birthplace Foundation, Yorba Linda, California.

his supporters could no longer afford to stay a “million miles away,” from the topic of religion.

Still wary at the idea of advising the President to plunge head first into the religious issue publicly, Graham in late September, proposed that Nixon put his competition on the defensive by having top Republicans acknowledge and criticize Kennedy’s strategies. It was imperative to point out that Democrats had and continued to lead Protestants and Catholics into a political trap by highlighting religious prejudice. “It must be said over and over,” he reminded Nixon, “and not by you. I think it would be most important to get the President to say it. It would not hurt him in the slightest and it would dramatically turn the tide by showing both Catholics and Protestants [where] they’ve been led...”⁵⁵ He also suggested that widely respected Republicans other than Eisenhower, such as Thomas Dewey, Nelson Rockefeller, and Senator Jacob Javits, speak out against the Democrats “type of bigotry that uses religion deliberately for political ends.”⁵⁶ Unlike Nixon, who had a tendency to be off-putting with his personality to many mainstream Americans, Graham figured the suggested list would present a more palatable message to the public. The preacher was so sure of himself that he confidently stated that, “no one could ever accuse them of religious bigotry or prejudice.”⁵⁷

While he advised Nixon to avoid publicly embroiling himself in the religious issue, he did not shy away from doling out criticism over the Vice

⁵⁵ Graham, Billy Dr. Letter to Richard Nixon, September 24, 1960. Folder Graham, Billy Dr., Box 299, General Correspondence, 1946-1962, Series 320, Richard Nixon Library and Birthplace Foundation, Yorba Linda, California.

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ Ibid.

President's character. Nixon's own religiosity was ambiguous at best, and many Americans were unsure exactly where Nixon stood in terms of church, God, and salvation. Church historian Winthrop Hudson believed that the Vice-President's faith had "been shaped more by the contemporary cultural climate than by any church," and reflected, "the general cultural conviction" that although religion was a good thing, it was in the end "a purely private affair which had few implications for the political order."⁵⁸ While he was raised Quaker, Nixon would admit that he was not a strictly observant Christian. The most important religious distinction, the Vice President contended, was if a person believed in God or didn't, rather than the more messy contentions over church authority and loyalty. This ambiguity was not lost to the general public; many constituents questioned Nixon's resolve to be a good, practicing Christian, and many wavered in their support of him because Nixon was not public enough with his religious devotion.

As early as the winter of 1959, Nixon had been garnering criticism over his religious ambiguity. Despite their friendship, Billy Graham was forward with his friend in his criticism: "There are many reasons why I would strongly urge you to attend church regularly and faithfully from now on."⁵⁹ Part of his advice stemmed out friendly concern; becoming publicly religious would benefit Nixon by solidifying religious constituents. "I am convinced that you are going to have the backing of the overwhelming majority of the religious minded people in America," the preacher reassured the Vice President, "It would be most

⁵⁸ Winthrop Hudson, "The Religious Issue in the Campaign," CC77 (Oct. 26, 1960), in Faith and the Presidency, pg 271.

⁵⁹ Graham, Billy Dr. Letter to Richard Nixon, November 17, 1960. Folder Graham, Billy Dr., Box 299, General Correspondence, 1946-1962, Series 320, Richard Nixon Library and Birthplace Foundation, Yorba Linda, California.

unfortunate if some of your political enemies could point to any inconsistency.”⁶⁰ Nixon was urged to place himself in situations that suggested his religious piety and to infuse it into his political rhetoric. “You should begin talking about spiritual things with greater emphasis than you have been,” Graham urged the Vice President time and time again, “I have received many letters from heart-sick Christians over your neglect to put emphasis on spiritual matters.”⁶¹ Nixon was urged to openly speak about his spirituality during debates, interviews and public appearances. “Speak out more strongly about the need of spiritual revitalization and dependence on God, and prayer...” Graham suggested, “...A few statements along that line would convince tens of thousands of the uncommitted.”⁶²

In one instance, the preacher sent a manuscript for the Vice President to read from during one of his nightly television appearances. “I would suggest...that you state that whoever is the next President of the United States... will not have the ability to cope with the awesome problems facing the world, alone. He must have God’s help.”⁶³ The preacher’s suggestions not only intended to pull at the emotional heartstrings of Nixon’s viewers, but also to reiterate the religiosity of the candidate: “State frankly that you are a firm believer in God, that He directs the destiny of men, and that you put this election in His hands and that you are praying the prayer, ‘Thy will be done.’”⁶⁴

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ Graham, Billy Dr. Letter to Richard Nixon, November 2, 1960. Folder Graham, Billy Dr., Box 299, General Correspondence, 1946-1962, Series 320, Richard Nixon Library and Birthplace Foundation, Yorba Linda, California.

⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁴ Ibid.

Graham's advice did not fall on deaf ears. Nixon soon took the preacher's advice to heart by attending weekly church services throughout the District of Columbia, which was met with media and public attention that Graham insisted that Nixon desperately needed. "Since the nomination, the press, of course, covers me on Sundays..." Nixon told Graham after a August 1st *Washington Post* article posted a picture of him attending a Washington DC church service, "...consequently, pictures have appeared showing me going to church with Pat and the girls virtually ever week."⁶⁵ Public interest in Nixon's sudden personal religious revival was not met by all positive reviews.⁶⁶ The Vice President was both amused and frustrated when he recounted to Graham an occurrence where a Kennedy supporter accused him of deliberately injecting the religious issue into the campaign by making his church-going activities a public spectacle to the media. He lamented: "This shows that you just can't win on that issue!"⁶⁷

In other instances, Nixon still refused to address the religious issue head on; when urged by his staff to speak out against Kennedy and the Democrats' use of "reverse bigotry," the Vice President felt that drawing public attention to the issue would "substantially set back" the cause of religious tolerance. When Graham offered to publish an article in *Life* magazine endorsing the candidate

⁶⁵ Nixon, Richard, Letter Copy to Dr. Billy Graham, August 29, 1960. Folder Graham, Billy Dr., Box 299, General Correspondence, 1946-1962, Series 320, Richard Nixon Library and Birthplace Foundation, Yorba Linda, California.

⁶⁶ *The Washington Post*, which published the picture of Vice President Nixon and his family attending the Metropolitan Memorial Methodist Church services, also ran an adjoining article titled "Nixon Oversleeps and Attends Late Church Services in the Capital." Despite his best efforts, Nixon was continually portrayed in the media as both a reluctant and disingenuous participant in his public church activity.

⁶⁷ "Since the nomination...covers me on Sundays." Letter, RN to BG. August 29, 1960.

near the end of the campaign, Nixon again vetoed the idea, refusing to use the religious issue strategically to win voters.

Under the veneer of polite counsel, Graham was concerned for his own reputation as well:

The only reason I mention it now, is that I have referred to you several times in my broadcasts lately and practically came out publicly in full support of you... saying that you were the best qualified and best trained main in America for the presidency. The wire services immediately picked it up and it was on the front page of many newspapers in America. As a result, I have received a number of letters criticizing me for this action and among them were several criticizing you for not going to church regularly.⁶⁸

Even as early as this advice, which Graham gave to Nixon in November of 1959, the preacher was aware of the influence the campaign had on his own public persona. If his advice to the Republican candidate partially drew from concern over Nixon successfully winning the election, he was equally worried about his own popularity.

Graham's counsel did not limit itself to the religious issue alone. Given a wide breadth of credibility on the topic of religion, Graham felt comfortable enough to start advising the Vice President on other topics outside of his expertise. In an October 17, 1960 letter, which was marked and underlined as "confidential and urgent," Graham outlined suggestions concerning aspects of foreign policy for the Vice President's consideration. First, he instructed Nixon to take a strong position that was critical of Cuba, which had recently turned communist. "Kennedy is scoring heavily on this point," he reminded, "... when [he] talks about Cuba and the Congo..."⁶⁹

⁶⁸ Graham, Billy Dr. Letter to Richard Nixon, November 17, 1959.

⁶⁹ Graham, Billy Dr. Letter to Richard Nixon, October 17, 1960. Folder Graham, Billy Dr., Box 299, General Correspondence, 1946-1962, Series 320, Richard Nixon Library and Birthplace Foundation, Yorba Linda, California.

Graham wanted Nixon to convince President Eisenhower to take a “strong and dramatic action” on Cuba. When Kennedy criticized the Republican administration about the loss of Cuba and the Congo to communism, the preacher counseled Nixon to mention that the countries that were lost under a Democratic administration: “I believe there are at least twenty countries,” Graham reminded Nixon about the hypocrisy of the Democratic Party, “This would be tremendously impressive and would shut the mouth of your opponent on this point.”⁷⁰ Despite Graham’s inexperience in foreign policy, Nixon was impressed enough with his suggestions to take them seriously. In a memo to aides Len Hall and Bob Finch, he noted, “. . .that it makes a hell of a lot of sense. I would like to know how you both feel this can be implemented—it certainly ought to be done!”⁷¹

While foreign policy was a clear departure from Graham’s primary field of expertise, his concern and counsel over issues pertaining to Cuba and the containment of communism was not necessarily unexpected. First, part of the minister’s interest in counseling Nixon on issues other than religion stemmed foremost from personal fulfillment; he reveled in a role that provided him an outlet of influence, power, and importance. Beyond this, Graham’s concern over foreign affairs reflected a broadly shared conservative American concern over the threat of communism both abroad and domestically.

⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁷¹ Nixon, Richard Memo to Len Hall and Bob Finch. October 5, 1960. Folder 73: Religion, Box 19, Vice Presidential Collection, Richard Nixon Library and Birthplace Foundation, Yorba Linda, California.

Graham was not the first to offer counsel and lobby for influence over foreign policy issues; Christian groups prior to the election of 1960 were mobilizing both directly and indirectly with the government to influence and inject Evangelical principles into foreign policy decisions. Similarly, the government was an equal participant in using faith as a way to rally together constituents. During the Eisenhower administration and up until the 1960 election, both Nixon and the rest of the Eisenhower administration were working alongside conservative Protestants, individuals and organizations alike.

The Eisenhower administration used religious rhetoric both to influence religious constituents throughout the nation, and to use the fervent anti-communist beliefs with conservative Protestant communities to its advantage. Religion was an important and essential quality that the Eisenhower Administration integrated into their foreign policy; historian William Inboden argues that religious faith helped the Administration properly draw a line of division between the free world and the communist world, and it appealed as a powerful device in bolstering domestic support for anticommunism, while also undermining communist regimes abroad.⁷² At the same time Eisenhower began to outline the spiritual stakes of his argument, conservative Protestants were beginning to use the White House to garner their own goals. Together, the two groups worked to counteract the threat of communism both abroad and domestically, while using each other to further their own agendas.

⁷² William Inboden, Religion and American Foreign Policy, 1945-1960 (Cambridge: New York, 2008), 258.

Eisenhower's motives for utilizing religion in his administration, was influenced as much by its usefulness as a political tool as it was by his moral compass. The President genuinely seemed to believe that by counteracting communism through religion, one was protecting "the entire fabric of man's moral and spiritual aspirations woven together with the kind of political and economic arrangements that will best support and advance those aspirations." In this case, the United States and the rest of the "free world," were linked to the moral and spiritual jurisdiction of religion. In a subsequent speech, the President outlined in no uncertain terms, the necessary connection between religion and democracy: "What is our battle against communism if it is not a fight between anti-God and belief in the Almighty? Communists know this. They have to eliminate God from their system. When God comes in, communism has to go."⁷³

Because communism was a "godless" immoral philosophy, a national call to religious and spiritual observance provided Americans the perfect tool to combat it. Conservative Protestants' basic fear of a growing trend of secularism within the nation was in part driven by the fear of an encroaching communist influence. If the rejection and absence of God defined what communism was, then a trend towards a secular American society could only create an atmosphere in which the ideology could take hold. Much of the widely circulated Christian, anti-communist literature urged American Christians to become moral soldiers in a righteous battle between good and evil: "A consecrated Christian cannot sit idly by and let his Lord be denied. He loves his Savior and he will not see his faith

⁷³ Inboden, 259.

perverted... The challenge is here. Will it be the Cross and Christ and freedom, or will it be Communism with slavery and fear?"⁷⁴

The Eisenhower administration similarly associated itself closely with the religious climate of the 1950s. Injecting religious rhetoric similar to the way Graham would urge Nixon to do during the 1960s election, Eisenhower invoked the idea of a national obligation to religion; he urged Americans to rededicate themselves to traditional moral and spiritual practices.⁷⁵ By worshiping regularly, supporting religious groups, and most importantly, getting involved in religious outreach organizations, Americans would be doing their part in counteracting secularist threats. In part to the Administration's efforts, coupled with the atmosphere of the 1950s, there was a significant increase in church attendance and membership, renewed popularity in religious film, television and literature, and a popular response to Evangelical crusades like Billy Graham's Chicago revival in 1962.⁷⁶ Most importantly, Protestants, both liberal and conservative, were, by 1954, organizing lobbies and non-profit organizations that concerned themselves specifically with foreign policy, trade and anti-communist political agenda.

Eisenhower's efforts to expand and adapt civil religion to meet the threats of the Cold War reflected broader goals on part of the Administration as well. Concerned with social and economic tensions and fissures within the nation, Eisenhower believed that the government had an indispensable, yet circumscribed

⁷⁴ Grace Kuckuck, "Jesus Christ or Karl Marx?" (Lecture given at Ministers Fellowship, Winona, Minnesota. April 22, 1953.) Folder 73: Religion, Box 19, Vice-Presidential Collection, Richard Nixon Library and Birthplace Foundation, Yorba Linda, California.

⁷⁵ Smith, 255.

⁷⁶ Ibid.

role to play. Rather than exploiting and manipulating the divisions with administrative power, Eisenhower believed that he could mitigate them, be they religious, economic, social or political, by enlisting the support of private citizens and organizations in a strategy of public relations. Through social and moral influence, Eisenhower hoped that he could create a domestic consensus that would help undermine the international credibility of communism. In his 1953 Inaugural Address, Eisenhower defined the importance of American faith in global constructs: “While the faith we hold belongs not to us alone but to the free world, destiny has laid upon our country the responsibility of the free world’s leadership.”⁷⁷ With the United State’s religious doctrine defined as universal, Eisenhower justified the role of religious organization’s role in international affairs.

Organizations such as the Foundation for Religious Action in the Social and Civil Order (FRASCO), and the National Council of Churches (NCC) were prominent players in providing and influencing the Eisenhower administration’s foreign policy régime in much the same way Billy Graham was in his personal and professional relationship with Nixon. FRASCO, which considered itself to be an “all-faith action organization,” focused much of its effort to combat and counteract the influence of communism both abroad and domestically. The organization’s ideology was similar to what was being espoused from both conservative religious leaders and within church literature. “[We] reject the contention that “capitalism (will) be inevitably superseded by communism...” the organization stated in a 1959 newsletter, “... The tide of tyranny will be turned

⁷⁷ Inboden, 261.

back. It is our calling and our golden opportunity as children of God and as free persons to reverse this tide and bring about a new birth of Freedom.”⁷⁸ With this ideology in mind, FRASCO justified Christian social action as a way to bolster American social defenses as well as stave off communism worldwide.

FRASCO’s close relationship with the Eisenhower Administration and its long-standing dedication to Eisenhower’s foreign policy, stemmed from the fact that the organization was created in direct consultation with the President. Initially, Eisenhower encountered a significant problem in finding a mainstream religious organization that was willing to cooperate with his campaign. Mainline Protestant organizations such as the NCC, were internally fragmented on the issue of theology and politics, with disagreement between liberal and conservative Protestants making the organization as a whole unpredictable. Utilizing Evangelical support could be equally resistant and troublesome; theologically, evangelism could be resistant to Eisenhower’s hopes of promoting close cooperation between Protestants, Catholics and Jews. When approached after his inauguration with the proposition of helping create a new religious organization that furthered the goals of the administration, Eisenhower was more than willing to cooperate and provide White House support. The country’s existing religious organizations, particularly Christian ones, were too fragmented internally to create a united religious campaign; the most effective method, Eisenhower

⁷⁸ Newsletter addressed to Richard Nixon from FRASCO. October 1, 1959. Folder Foundation for Religious Action, Box 271, General Correspondence, 1946-1962, Series 320, Richard Nixon Library and Birthplace Foundation, Yorba Linda, California.

figured, would be to form an organization that would work with the White House from its inception.⁷⁹

What would become FRASCO, founded by ministers Edward Elson and Charles Wesley Lowery, represented a tangible effort into put to action Eisenhower's rhetoric. Its purpose, Elson outlined, was "an official desire... to achieve the moral and spiritual rehabilitation of the nation," as well as to "[inculcate] basic American convictions... to launch a counter-offensive on Communism."⁸⁰ FRASCO was one the first religious organizations to work nearly hand in hand with the White House, from conception, to formation and inaction. Despite a leeriness of blurring the boundaries between church and state, the White House did support the organization. Privately, Inboden notes, White House officials were privately describing FRASCO's conferences and outreach programs as "excellent material for propaganda."⁸¹

The organization's first objective was to strengthen American values domestically as a way to prevent the impending threat of communist influence. The most effective way to do this, FRASCO proposed, was to create a comprehensive education program that would integrate and emphasize what were felt to be fundamental American moral values. At the organization's national conference in 1954, members proposed structural changes to the field of education. Proposed was a three-pronged plan that called for (1) a policy of "integration teaching," which required a factual treatment of religious topics in courses of study, (2) teachers' required study of the function of religion in public

⁷⁹ Inboden, 282.

⁸⁰ Inboden, 279.

⁸¹ Inboden, 281.

schools, and (3) a \$60,000 experimental fund provided by the government and tax-payers, to effectively “prepare teachers to deal with religion, natural and social sciences, and the humanities.”⁸²

This “message of united spiritual action” would be circulated in the form of books, pamphlets, and a teaching curriculum, all of which would be funded by government programs. One of the proposed lesson plans entitled “A Creed for America,” would teach students in public schools and Sunday church programs about the virtues of what defined a successful and “good” American: one who was both religious and patriotic.⁸³ Another potential plan was the commission of a “Church and Nation series” pamphlet which would present to readers a tangible example of the “spiritual and moral aspects of the world struggle” through first hand accounts by national and world leaders.⁸⁴ All of these tools would extol the positive virtues of the American life, while simultaneously highlighting the negative points of communism.

To some extent, FRASCO realized its goals pertaining to its domestic strategy. The Eisenhower Administration made a public effort to back the organization. At the same conference in which the education agenda was proposed, the President gave a keynote address to the crowd. Recapping highlights of the conference, it was noted, “...the President referred to the Foundation as a dedicated, patriotic group, and said he would watch with keen

⁸² “HIGHLIGHTS: First National Conference on The Spiritual Foundations of American Democracy.” November 8-10, 1954, Washington, D.C. Located in Folder Foundation for Religious Action, Box 271, General Correspondence, 1946-1962, Series 320, Richard Nixon Library and Birthplace Foundation, Yorba Linda, California.

⁸³ Newsletter addressed to RN from FRASCO. October 1, 1959.

⁸⁴ Ibid.

interest the outcome of its work... and meet the challenges of Communism from without (sic).”⁸⁵ Along with the Eisenhower’s public support, FRASCO found tangible results with many of their goals. The organization and the Department of Defense worked in tandem to produce a bookshelf called *Democracy vs. Communism* that subsequently was made into an abridged Reader’s Guide for personal circulation.⁸⁶ While many detailed domestic proposals did not come to fruition, FRASCO’s working relationship with the White House and other branches of the government signaled that religious organizations were being consulted and treated as legitimate and influential players in governmental policy.

FRASCO focused much of its energy on establishing strategically based cells in countries. “Another example of an exciting and timely project...” the foundation noted in a newsletter, “is being carried out in... Latin America, where a group of residents have established a FRASCO community.”⁸⁷ Once established, the small groups would take on the task of spreading anti-communist information throughout communities; in the case of the Latin American cell, educational information called, *Conflicting Faiths: Christianity versus Communism*, was released into the general public.

FRASCO also lobbied both the Vice President and the Operations Coordinating Board (OCB) arm of the National Security Council for support and recognition. The OCB was responsible for coordinating and reporting on the implementation of NSC policy, as well as gathering intelligence and producing reports on the public relations impact of various government programs. Because it

⁸⁵ “HIGHLIGHTS,” November 8-10, 1954.

⁸⁶ Newsletter addressed to RN from FRASCO. October 1, 1959.

⁸⁷ Ibid.

was one of the essential providers of data and opinions from which the NSC advised on policy, garnering OCB's favor was integral for the Foundation to implement any part of its suggestions

FRASCO proposed that the NSC and the President fund private religious groups attempting to stave off communism abroad. "Time to save men's freedom in Southeast Asia is getting shorter," FRASCO claimed in a 1954 proposal, "In addition to the American diplomatic, military, economic and informational activities underway and planned...[they] should foster on an emergency basis any additional activities which could lessen [communism]." ⁸⁸ With the government already preoccupied around the world, FRASCO believed that it would be providing "improved organization and the strengthened coordination of indigenous religious groups" to help supplement American foreign aid. Religious field activities, FRASCO proposed, "should be started as a private effort and not as an official government undertaking." This was presumably proposed with Protestant religious influence in mind. Well aware that the White House did not want to overstep the public perception between church and state, the most effective way of implementing religious foreign policy was by traditionally supporting private Christian organizations through grants. FRASCO asked for this very thing, suggesting that the OCB "[provide] immediate funds, about \$50,000, to a private group to undertake this activity." ⁸⁹

⁸⁸ "Proposal to OCB." September 1954. Folder Foundation for Religious Action, Box 271, General Correspondence, 1946-1962, Series 320, Richard Nixon Library and Birthplace Foundation, Yorba Linda, California.

⁸⁹ Ibid.

The Vice President and his staff received the organization's ideas positively, going so far as to take one of its many drafts and add revisions to its contents to make it more palatable once it was presented to the OCB. Overall, Nixon seemed willing to support the organization's efforts, praising the proposal as something that would contribute substantially to both the goals of the Eisenhower administration and the goals of FRASCO. With this "mutual understanding" in mind, Nixon wrote to Walter B. Smith, one of the aides to Secretary of State, John Foster Dulles, that "It would seem to me that there is great value in an operation of this type, provided it is realistic and reliably sponsored. We can, at comparatively small cost, get an important and necessary activity performed by a private organization, if they can be given some initial assistance and encouragement."⁹⁰

Nixon and Eisenhower were willing to back FRASCO's proposal to the OCB and National Security Council because it dovetailed with the administration's own willingness to tap into private religious resources as a way to fight communism. In the same way Eisenhower used broadly defined Christian rhetoric to rally American citizens together, the administration was enthusiastic in backing FRASCO's own private expansion worldwide. Funding a private Christian organization that espoused similar goals as the government provided the administration a way to outsource its agenda without investing too much time and energy into the venture itself. Ever so careful to not overstep the line between

⁹⁰ Nixon, Richard Letter to Walter B. Smith. September 10, 1954. Folder Foundation for Religious Action, Box 271, General Correspondence, 1946-1962, Series 320, Richard Nixon Library and Birthplace Foundation, Yorba Linda, California.

church and state, funding FRASCO's plan for transnational expansion provided a private venue for which the Administration could see its policies and practices implemented without having responsibility over specific actions. FRASCO, in turn, gained a powerful ally that was willing to support its efforts abroad. It was a mutually beneficial relationship.

While FRASCO petitioned for government funding to help subsidize private religious outreach programs, the National Council of Churches (NCC), an ecumenical partnership of primarily liberal Protestant denominations, lobbied the White House to not only to push religious social reforms, but also to support foreign economic policy. The NCC had a long history of involvement in both domestic and foreign policy, with activism pertaining to an array of topics, including the civil rights movement and women's advocacy. The personal success of political figures such as John Foster Dulles was also made through associations and work within the NCC; be it through activism or through individual influence, the organization had long-standing ties to government involvement. Like FRASCO, the NCC was able to create a mutually beneficial relationship in the process.

The NCC's initial justification for involving itself in the development of economic policy was driven by a theological belief that an American presence abroad, was necessary in halting the spread of communism. Expanding American economic authority abroad, gave the NCC a venue in which to exploit the organization's influence as well. Expanding international trade, as Eisenhower wished to do, "reflected our interest in man's welfare in other countries as well as

in our own.”⁹¹ The NCC supported the United States’ involvement in bolstering weak foreign economies; “Some countries may be able to produce many commodities efficiently but have serious shortages in other essentials,” the NCC pointed out in its organizational platform. “Still other lands have such a low level of production that most of their citizens live in poverty, disease and illiteracy.”⁹² With a primarily liberal ideology, the NCC found a way to gain access and to the White House, without accepting all of Eisenhower’s foreign policy views.

The NCC, which usually made itself the thorn in the side of the Administration, provided genuine assistance in backing some of the White House’s foreign policy plans. Frustrated with the lack of support in his foreign assistance programs, Eisenhower saw the NCC particularly useful; not only would the organization help bridge the gap between liberal minded Protestants and the White House, but the organization would also help in mobilizing the churches. “Many church people, for example have not looked at our programs for assistance in [a good light]...” Arthur Flemming, Eisenhower’s close friend and administrative official reminded the President, “When we are able to bring such people to the place where they see the relationship between the application of spiritual values and these programs, we are tapping a source of real power.”⁹³

One of the most striking examples of this mutual relationship between the NCC and the Eisenhower Administration came in 1955. From then until 1958, the

⁹¹ “International Aid and Trade: A Statement of Policy.” (St. Louis; The General Assembly of the National Council of the Churches of Christ, 1957), 1. Located in Folder Foundation for Religious Action, Box 271, General Correspondence, 1946-1962, Series 320, Richard Nixon Library and Birthplace Foundation, Yorba Linda, California.

⁹² Ibid.

⁹³ Inboden, 287.

NCC campaigned in support of the Organization for Trade Cooperation plan (OTC), which President Eisenhower initially presented to Congress. The OTC's primary function would be to work as a mechanism for the administration of trade rules and to serve as a forum for the discussion of trade matters between a transnational nexus of nations.⁹⁴ Supporting the General Agreements on Trade and Tariff (GATT) agreement already in practice, the OTC moved to streamline and expand United States' trade. The President justified the organization's creation as a symbol, which would demonstrate to the free world "our active interest in the promotion of trade among the free nations. We would demonstrate our desire to deal with matters of trade in the same cooperative way we do with military matters... and with financial matters..."⁹⁵ Economically, implementing the OTC would structurally link together both developed and developing nations in a protective bloc against Soviet encroachment. With it, Eisenhower hoped to expand American markets to developing countries, and to "assist in the flow of capital... and expand production... throughout the free world, especially in its undeveloped areas."⁹⁶

The NCC lobbied, to Congress and supported Eisenhower's goal of rallying a domestic religious consensus. "You may be interested to know," NCC president Edwin T. Dahlberg wrote to Vice President Nixon in 1958, "that we have sent a policy statement, with a covering letter, to every member of Congress. We are encouraging our constituency to express their convictions to their

⁹⁴ Dwight D. Eisenhower. "Special Message to the Congress on United States Membership in the Proposed Organization for Trade Cooperation," April 14, 1955. Found in *The American Presidency Project*, Santa Barbara, CA.

⁹⁵ Ibid.

⁹⁶ Ibid.

Representatives and Senators as well...’’⁹⁷ The NCC also worked within its organization, pressing its membership to publicly advance the White House’s cause, and pressuring many of its member churches to come out in public support. This in turn, helped the Administration build a loyal constituency, which became increasingly important to Richard Nixon as the 1960 election neared. Nixon expressed his gratitude to the NCC prior to starting his campaign, praising the organization for “bringing [your] values to the attention of the Congress and constituents...’’⁹⁸

By the end of the 1950s organizations like the NCC and FRASCO were mobilizing to create internal grassroots movements within their ranks as a way to help bolster the Eisenhower Administration’s goals. While the partnership between Billy Graham and Richard Nixon was important in establishing and strategically expanding upon the conservative Protestant base, it was not the first time the White House and Protestant organizations had worked in tandem. Eisenhower’s goal to create an American spiritual unity was to some extent, successful. The perceived threat of Soviet communism caused many Americans to display their spirituality openly. There was a rise in church attendance, and in the participation of religious organizations in politics. In part, Eisenhower’s commitment to creating an American spiritual revival, and his willingness to work with Protestant organizations to achieve his goals, laid the groundwork for the

⁹⁷ Dahlberg, Edwin T. Rev. Letter to Richard Nixon, March 31, 1958. Folder National Council of Churches, Box 249, General Correspondence, 1946-1962, Series 320, Richard Nixon Library and Birthplace Foundation, Yorba Linda, California.

⁹⁸ Nixon, Richard letter to Rev. Edwin T. Dahlberg, April 7, 1958. Folder National Council of Churches, Box 249, General Correspondence, 1946-1962, Series 320, Richard Nixon Library and Birthplace Foundation, Yorba Linda, California.

support Nixon would utilize in his bid for the Presidency in 1960. Many of the conservative members of the FRASCO and NCC groups would come to make up the theological conservative coalition that would attempt to lead Nixon to victory.

Two nights before the 1960 election was to take place, Billy Graham sent an urgent and disconcerting letter to the Vice President. “The latest Gallup Poll shows that 79 percent of the Catholics are voting for Kennedy,” he said, “while only 60 percent of the Protestants are voting for you.”⁹⁹ Lagging behind in the polls and with waning support from many Americans, Nixon desperately looked for a remedy to capture support so close to Election Day. While Graham warned Nixon of the poll discrepancy, he attempted to placate his friend, reassuring that “there is another thing in your favor, and that is the prayers of millions of Christians... There is an unseen battle waging that does not show up in the polls and statistics.”¹⁰⁰

When Americans voted, Graham’s predictions were only partially true; there was indeed an unseen battle, which resulted in one of the closest Presidential election races ever. The final electoral vote, 303 to 219 in the Democrat’s favor, showed an extremely tight race in which Kennedy received a mere 120,000 more

⁹⁹ Graham Billy Dr. Letter to Richard Nixon. November 2, 1960. Folder Billy Graham. Box 299, General Correspondence, 1946-1962, Series 320, Richard Nixon Library and Birthplace Foundation, Yorba Linda, California.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid.

popular votes than the Vice President out of more than 68 million cast.¹⁰¹ The religious voting habits were equally revealing; while Kennedy carried 34% of the white Protestant vote, it was clear that the Democratic candidate faced massive defections from Protestants who considered themselves actively religious. Only 25% of Baptists and 31% of Methodists gave Kennedy their vote.¹⁰² Overall, Kennedy was able to win the election despite the fact that Protestant voters outnumbered Catholics three to one; the Democratic candidate was still able to eke out a win without the support of a major constituency and attracted enough of the Catholic vote, convincing a portion of the Protestant community to support him as well.

Scholars have continued to debate the reason for Nixon's loss. Despite the Republican candidate's attempts at affirming his own religiosity, his refusal to discuss or criticize the role of religion in the election, and the well-cultivated relationship with theological conservatives, he was unable to win over enough voters. While many reasons have been pinpointed to Nixon's failure -- such as the faltering economy, Nixon's personal abrasive nature, poor Republican campaign strategy or the influence of the civil rights movement -- religious tensions and the issue of how it was treated during the election is an equally important factor in explaining Nixon's ultimate problems.

First, the internal fracturing within the Protestant movement was one of the main contributors to Nixon's defeat. Historians Shaun Casey and Thomas Carty both have suggested that the widening political divide that shook the

¹⁰¹ Smith, 271.

¹⁰² Casey, 201.

country affected the internal cohesiveness of faith communities; liberal and conservative Protestants battled each other over issues of religious and social tolerance and ultimately split in disagreement over intellectual and theological differences expounded by the Presidential election. This split, both Carty and Casey contend, was ultimately detrimental to Nixon's ability to win over a cohesive Protestant alliance and enough of a factor for Kennedy to produce a win. Carty points out that the internal debate between the idea that a Catholic president would undermine the separation and church and state and the counterargument that the partnership between government and religious institutions would extend individual freedom and civil rights was at the crux of the deterioration within the Protestant movement.¹⁰³ Because of this, Nixon lacked a solid Protestant foundation to draw from. Instead, liberal Protestants mobilized against conservative ones and never provided the Republican party a loyal foundation. While only 34% of Protestants, overall, voted for Kennedy, the internal infighting between Protestants garnered enough liberal Protestant support to tip the balance in his favor.

Nixon's handling of the religious issue, and the actions he made in regards to it, also provide a partial explanation for his defeat. The Vice President believed that if he "neutralized" the religious issue and refused to discuss it, both publicly and privately amongst his staff, he would save himself from attracting attention to Kennedy's Catholicism, as well as avoid the potentiality of being labeled as anti-Catholic; instead, as Carty points out, his strategy appeared to make him apathetic towards anti-Catholicism when he failed to speak out against it. Nixon's attempt

¹⁰³ Carty, 68.

to keep himself above the fray of bigoted squabbling and prejudiced accusations backfired against him.

Kennedy was successful because he managed to pursue and push for a pluralistic philosophy in his candidacy; he consciously sought out the support of minorities and defined pluralism as respecting the group identities instead of assimilating them. Nixon, and the administration he came from, refused to recognize denominational or ethnic differences as important and rather, pulling from Eisenhower's own strategy, emphasized common beliefs and traits.¹⁰⁴ By ignoring and ostracizing anti-Catholic critics instead of speaking out against them, Nixon's silence on the issue made him appear uninterested in religious intolerance. On top of this, Nixon was sending equally mixed signals to his constituents; while he was refusing to speak about the religious issue, he was still clandestinely plotting with Protestants on how to exploit it.

Nixon's mixed signals also affected the relationship with his supporting constituents; while Kennedy fielded questions regarding his religion and was willing to answer them honestly, Nixon remained reticent, which frustrated many of his supporters who wanted clarification on where the Vice President stood. In one instance close to Election Day, conservative Protestant supporters grew restive over Nixon's contradictory stance on public funding to parochial schools. While Kennedy had publicly opposed public funding, Nixon had advocated federal grants to sectarian schools, and then refused to budge on his stance. When he attempted to remedy the situation by stating that it would be "up to each State to decide whether Federal funds given to each State should be used for both

¹⁰⁴ Carty, 96.

public and private schools,” he made the situation worse by leaving the door open for use of federal monies to Catholic schools.¹⁰⁵ Casey argues that if Nixon had replied differently, he may have very well won the election. While this claim may overstate the importance of a specific event, it is clear that Nixon overall, failed to use the religious issue to his advantage.

Liberal and conservative Protestant supporters, like Billy Graham and Norman Vincent Peale, provided mixed signals on where prominent religious leaders stood regarding Nixon’s platform. Like Nixon, Graham’s reticence to pick a definitive strategy, sent mixed signals to religious supporters and unintentionally helped mobilize liberal Protestants against the Republican campaign. Akin to Nixon, Graham’s silence on the issue of Catholicism, yet his private encouragement of Peale’s overt public opposition to Kennedy’s religion, provided further problems; while he did not agree with Peale, he also refused to come out in public opposition against him. Like Nixon, Graham was reticent to express his reservations in public, though he was more than willing to encourage both Nixon and then President Eisenhower to exploit the religious issue as a way to undermine Kennedy’s campaign. Not willing to clarify his own statements, or speak out against other conservative Protestants, Graham, and religious leaders like him, did not make attempts to show that they were not bigots. In the end, Nixon, Graham, and Peale provided fodder that the Kennedy campaign used to bring into question, their level of tolerance.

¹⁰⁵ Casey, 197.

In many ways, it can be said that Nixon's 1960 campaign was not all blundering, and there were many positive attributes that must be noted; first, Nixon's religious strategy was one of the first of its kind, and it foreshadowed the rise of the religious Right. Robert Dallek points out that Kennedy's small margin of victory showed that despite outcry against bigotry, many Protestants still had a, "unyielding fear of having a Catholic in the White House."¹⁰⁶ The election was also a watershed moment for theological conservatives; the internal breakdown between liberal and conservative Protestants provided theological conservatives the ability to disassociate themselves and create a movement of their very own, outside the realm of liberal Protestants.

After the 1960 Presidential bid, and a later ego-crushing loss during the 1962 Gubernatorial election in California, Nixon subsequently withdrew from the public eye, but the presence of conservative Protestant support in his life did not wane. All through his political eclipse, Graham continued to have an active presence in the day-to-day life of the ex Vice President. Billy Graham was influential in convincing the then reticent Nixon to run for President again. In public settings, the minister continued to extol his friend as "the most experienced Republican for the type of conflict we have today."¹⁰⁷ In 1968, when Nixon was in the final deliberations of running for President again, Graham urged him to run. Even when Nixon told his friend that he was "attempting to avoid the political limelight," Graham made sure to mention him in his religious rallies. "There is no American I admire more than Richard Nixon," the preacher announced to his

¹⁰⁶ Robert Dallek, *An Unfinished Life: John F. Kennedy 1917-1963* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 2003), 296.

¹⁰⁷ Frady, 446.

audience in a 1968 rally.¹⁰⁸ In the same way he supported Nixon in gaining access to the White House in 1960, Graham again began to maneuver himself, with the hope of influencing his friend to run. By doing so, Graham was again setting himself towards a position of great influence.

It was again Graham who convinced Nixon that the political and social tide of the nation was turning to the right. He was the first to introduce the idea of the ‘Silent Majority’ to Nixon: “A big segment of the population is very committed and aware. They are not out there carrying placards and demonstrating...But they are out there across the country...a great unheard-from group somewhere... who are probably going to be heard from loudly at the polls.”¹⁰⁹ Marshall Frady argues that Graham provided perhaps the first announcement of the Silent Majority, and was possibly the first person close to Nixon who confirmed that the movement was a viable and untapped resource. Unlike in the 1960 election, where Graham was reticent to come out in public support for the Republican candidate, this time, the minister was quick to endorse Nixon in hopes that he would be a valued asset in endorsing voters, “This country is in the greatest crisis since the Civil War...” Graham reasoned, “...and I do believe I could influence a great number of people.”¹¹⁰

NCC executive Dan Potter observed that even without explicitly endorsing Nixon, Graham was playing a pivotal role in the election:

Billy has tremendous power...I think he uses this with a degree of discretion. But such power in a single individual... I say it’s frightening. Because I think that Billy’s presence, in terms of Nixon’s election, has a real influence. And when he sits by a prospective [candidate], even though he tries to be in every way a friend of all Presidents and Kings,

¹⁰⁸ Frady, 447.

¹⁰⁹ Frady, 449.

¹¹⁰ Frady, 450.

he has to guard this very carefully. Because he does have a power of a person who is a symbol to millions of persons who watch his every move, and even a casual gesture becomes a significant signal. I think he is partially aware of the truth of this and therefore his influence is rather tremendous.¹¹¹

Nixon himself weighed the preacher's opinions heavily, and took his counsel so seriously that he even offered him the chance to sit in and option his choice for the nominee's running mate. "You'll be interested in this," Nixon had told Graham when he made the offer to him at the Republican convention, "it's part of history!"¹¹²

Running a campaign that utilized the Silent Majority, the conservative, religious citizens that Graham described as being, "not the vocal radicals... [who] don't believe in taking the country by violence... but who are out there across the country..." Nixon learned from the mistakes of 1960, and capitalized on the social polarizations among the nation's people, its races and its regions.¹¹³ Stephen Ambrose argues that Nixon made it into a "us verse them," contest, pitting the Silent Majority, middle-class, white, hawkish, "forgettable Americans," against the radical rabble of the counterculture, anti-war protestors, doves and the poor.¹¹⁴ The theological conservatives who had stood by Nixon in the 1960 election were now more powerful, more influential, and with Graham as a prime example, more integrated into the campaign and Presidency. Whereas Nixon had not understood the religious issue during the 1960 campaign, in 1968, he used it to his advantage. In this sense, the relationship between theological conservatives

¹¹¹ Martin, 352.

¹¹² "Evangelists: The Politician's Preacher," *Time*, October 4, 1968, pg. 58. Folder 73:Religion, Box 19, Vice-Presidential Collection, Richard Nixon Library and Birthplace Foundation, Yorba Linda, California.

¹¹³ Frady, 449.

¹¹⁴ Stephen Ambrose, *Nixon: The Triumph of a Politician 1962-1972*, V.II (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1989), 222.

and the Nixon Administration had changed; whereas in the 1960 election, Nixon had worked with conservative Protestant supporters who were dealing with internal discord within their own community, the Republican candidate masterfully strategized his constituents to work in his favor in 1968. Far from the passivity Nixon had when dealing with religious issues in 1960, the President-elect's relationship with conservative Protestants became much more strategic; in some ways, Nixon began to manipulate the movement to further his initiatives

Only months into his term as President, Nixon continued to utilize the conservative religious community by keeping an active presence noticeable at the White House. Almost immediately, Graham was integrated into the White House community; the pastor continued his private friendship with the President, flying out on occasion to attend board meetings of the Richard Nixon Foundation, or simply to play golf. But while these personal visits tended to be mostly camaraderie, Graham's role soon morphed into something akin to an extra officer in Nixon's Cabinet. The pastor reveled in the attention, and was quick to give his opinions. Even before Nixon was elected, Graham was pitching his own suggestions for Vice Presidential selections when he recommended Mark Hatfield. "He's a great Christian leader," Graham pointed out, "...He's taken a more liberal stance on most issues than you, and I think the ticket needs that kind of balance."¹¹⁵ In 1970, he suggested, albeit in tandem with the rest of Nixon's close advisors, to rebuke the "the news media for imposing a leadership of the American public, which they do not want, and for making heroes from radicals...

¹¹⁵ Frady, 451.

both black and white.”¹¹⁶ While it is not certain how seriously Graham’s advice was taken, it is clear that the pastor felt comfortable enough to be willing to give it often, both privately and publically.

The continued conservative religious presence did not stop at Graham’s influence. Like most of his recent predecessors, the President attended church prayer luncheons and breakfasts, and including standard references to God and spirituality in his speeches, but unlike with past administrations, he focused an unprecedented amount of attention on his White House church services. While other Presidents had sponsored them sporadically, from the first Sunday after his inauguration, Nixon held regularly scheduled religious services with Billy Graham among them as preacher. Throughout the majority of his presidency, Nixon and his staff put much consideration and time in both formatting and attending the Sunday events.

In part, the services were for the President’s benefit as much as for creating a positive public perception amongst his supporters. With the 1960 election accusations of his religious ambiguity still prevalent in his mind, holding weekly services provided a way to define Nixon religiously. Ever supportive, Billy Graham praised his decision, pointing out that it was better for Nixon to attend White House services than “not going to church at all...”¹¹⁷ While many were critical of the events, citing it as “civil religion,” Graham felt more positive. “I don’t think there was any political connotation. There might have been, but I

¹¹⁶ Frady, 452.

¹¹⁷ Ibid.

think Nixon was being very sincere. He wanted to set an example for the country.”¹¹⁸

Graham’s support for the Sunday services were driven equally by a self-serving interest as it was for the sake of Nixon’s public image. Participating in the weekly event provided the minister a position of influence. Designed with the pomp and circumstance of most presidential events, the Sunday breakfast provided Graham a venue in which to feel powerful. In one account by then North Carolina governor Bob Scott, “Billy came through the door with all his own entourage, and you’d have thought he was some high office-holder...It seemed he’d gotten caught up in that aura of power—just completely caught up in it all.”¹¹⁹

Graham’s influence on Sunday services extended beyond the duties of providing the morning sermon; memos regarding the services dealt with a number of issues, which ranged from possible speaker recommendations, the frequency of services, denominational representation, and the format of each meeting. He recommended many of his Evangelical colleagues, and also urged the President to schedule prominent black ministers and Catholic and Jewish clergy.¹²⁰ More importantly, Graham’s suggestions over Sunday speakers hinted at the larger role he played in helping to secure a coalition that gave Nixon a triumphant second-term victory. With the Nixon camp providing an all out effort to woo conservative religious groups, expanding the conservative Protestant vote (as well as winning

¹¹⁸ Ibid.

¹¹⁹ Frady, 455.

¹²⁰ Wilkinson, Charles B. Memo to Billy Graham, January 24, 1969, Folder RM (Religious Matters) 2-1 “Religious Services in WH, Begin 3/31/69-,” SF RM Box 6, WHCF, Nixon Presidential Materials Staff, National Archives and Record Service.

over conservative Catholics and Jews) became one of the administration's top priorities. Graham proved to be an important and willing liaison between Nixon and a wealth of other conservative Protestants. Nixon's staffers also saw the potential that Graham could bring; Special Counsel to the President, Charles Colson urged: "Use Graham's organization."¹²¹

Graham's assistance was not limited to serving as outreach liaison to conservative leaders and voters. The President's search to solidify a definite electoral majority had ramped up since the 1968 election, and his administration wanted to make inroads into the South. During the election, Nixon had focused his attention on wooing the support of Southern voters; pledging his reliability on the slate of issues from busing for integration to the Supreme Court, Nixon was able to convince GOP southern delegates to support him. The "southern strategy" that the Administration concocted focused then on winning over Southern Democrats, who more often than not, were white, conservative, and religious.

Nixon's strategy was two-fold. First, his administration focused on a "suburban strategy," which drew its attention to the South's growing Sunbelt metropolises and invoked a rhetoric of color-blindness, rather than using the overt issue of race to the campaign's advantage. With the Democratic Party in chaos by late 1968, Nixon sought to win over the growing affluent suburban populations, because the most racially intransigent regions usually supported, third party candidate and segregationist George Wallace. Second, Nixon utilized Graham's connections with southern politicians to pull in the President's favor. The Deep

¹²¹ Steven P. Miller, Billy Graham and the Rise of the Republican South (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2009), 153.

South was still largely affiliated with the Democratic Party, with ties to figures ranging from George Wallace to President Johnson. Graham and Nixon argued that winning over conservative Protestants who had historically associated themselves with the Democrats, was possible.¹²²

Graham's assistance in the matter drew on the strength of his own influence in the area. During the 1972 campaign, Nixon used Graham to attempt to thwart the efforts of potential third-party candidate George Wallace. Nixon hoped to utilize Graham's cordial relationship with the Wallace campaign in hopes of convincing him not to run as a third party candidate in the election. "Billy will talk to Wallace whenever we want him to." Chief of Staff H. R. Haldeman wrote to Nixon staffers, "[Nixon] feels our strategy must be to keep Wallace in the Democratic Party and Billy can help us with that..."¹²³

Overall, Graham and Nixon's relationship during the 1972 election, and the support the minister gave in regards to wooing southern voters provided an opportunity to solidify conservative Protestant voters in favor of the Republican Party. After Wallace withdrew from the campaign, following an assassination attempt that left him paralyzed, Nixon was able to show himself as the candidate who extolled American moral and religious values while the Democratic candidate, George McGovern, was portrayed an ultra liberal. Throughout the 1972 election, Nixon emphasized the need "to remember that our primary source

¹²² Miller, 147.

¹²³ Miller, 148.

of support will be among the fundamentalist Protestants, and we can probably broaden that base of support.”¹²⁴

The 1972 election represented the culmination of Graham’s service in bridging the gap between conservative Protestants and the White House, and as a strategist alongside Nixon, in establishing the community as a main staple of a new majority in the United States. It was also Graham who had reminded Nixon that there “was a hunger among many churchgoers for a brand of social involvement more palpable than liberal activism.”¹²⁵ In the aftermath of the 1972 election, the relationship between Graham and Nixon remained as strong as ever. In a February 1973 memo from Nixon to Haldeman, the President insisted that “Billy Graham [be used] in the kitchen Cabinet,” which the Nixon had been assembling for a second-term agenda.¹²⁶ No longer a “silent majority,” Graham and the conservative Protestant movement had become entrenched within the Nixon Administration; the President had not only won a landslide victory, but had captured the solid support of conservative Protestants.

Despite the fact that the Administration incorporated Graham and his constituency into the decision and agenda making process within the White House, conservative Protestants did not have an influential stronghold on the creation of strategy and policy. Assured that the constituency was fully in support of Nixon, staffers began to cherry-pick among conservative religious leaders. Billy Graham’s entrenchment was welcomed because the minister worked well to tailor his opinions to fit with the agenda of the White House. Much of what the

¹²⁴ Miller, 150.

¹²⁵ Miller, 152.

¹²⁶ Miller, 153.

minister said publicly about the President coincided with the administration's own opinions. Because the preacher worked in close contact with the White House and did not wish to compromise the unquestioned influence he gained from the relationship, it was easy for the administration to control what Graham said. Other leaders, more removed from the Administration and less controllable, were treated with wary consideration.

In September of 1971, Presidential aide Harry Dent suggested that Nixon meet and forge ties with popular Pentecostal turned Methodist preacher Oral Roberts. Roberts, a popular and longtime traveling minister, was well known amongst conservative Christian circles as a religious healer and popular televangelist.¹²⁷ While Graham suggested him to Nixon, the President's staff felt mixed over pursuing a relationship. "I have a feeling that Mr. Roberts is considered marginal by a great many people who are suspicious of so-called faith healing..." staffer Dick Moore, wrote on the issue, "I think that the President's strong friendship with [Graham] fully covers this particular base without risk. To add Mr. Roberts might amount to overkill."¹²⁸ Other staffers considered a meeting between the President and Roberts to be beneficial, particularly because of the preacher's radio broadcast. "Recommend a meeting!" one staffer scrawled enthusiastically at the bottom of a circulated memo, "Roberts' fundamentalists and his radio program [are] popular in many areas of [the] south and southwest.

¹²⁷ Dent, Harry Memo to Bob Haldeman. September 15, 1971, Folder Harry Dent 1970 Memos to Haldeman, Nixon Presidential Returned Materials: Contested, White House Special Files, Richard Nixon Library and Birthplace Foundation, Yorba Linda, California.

¹²⁸ Moore, Dick Memo to David Parker. Memo. October 19, 1971, Folder FG6-11-1 Moore Richard 1971-1974, Nixon Presidential Returned Materials: Contested, White House Special Files, Richard Nixon Library and Birthplace Foundation, Yorba Linda, California.

His audience is Wallace-type politically and we can use help...¹²⁹ With the 1972 election quickly approaching, Nixon's staffers weighed the implications of what Roberts could represent for the President's success. In the end, Nixon never met Roberts at the White House, and despite having several phone conversations, in which the preacher continued to express interest in supporting Nixon's campaign publicly, he was never utilized.¹³⁰

Nixon also hoped to court Catholics in the same way he had done with conservative Protestants. The chance came in late 1971, when the Administration came out in support of financial aid to Catholic parochial schools. One Democratic Party official lamented, "The President had done everything but serve Mass to attract Catholic votes." A 1971 study proposed that American Catholics were one-issue voters, and that parochial school aid was the most important issue on their agenda.¹³¹

The debate over federal support of parochial schools had been a long-standing issue; with the advent of Congressional funding and support for public schools, there was a significant discrepancy in the amount of federal aid supporting private schools. Compounding this drop in federal aid was the historic rise in Catholic school attendance; from 1940 to 1960, Catholic elementary and secondary school enrollment increased at a rate three times that of public

¹²⁹ Timmons, Bill Memo to David Parker. Memo. September 21, 1971, Folder Pat Buchanan: Timmons 1971. Nixon Presidential Returned Materials: Contested, White House Special Files, Richard Nixon Library and Birthplace Foundation, Yorba Linda, California.

¹³⁰ Miller, 157.

¹³¹ Nick Thimmesch, "President defends Catholic Schools," *Catholic Bulletin*, July 24, 1970. Copy located in RM Folder, SM Box 2-1, WHCF, National Archives.

schools.¹³² By the 1960s, nine of every ten nonpublic schoolchildren, and one of every nine schoolchildren attended Catholic elementary and secondary schools. From 1963 to 1969, over 1000 Catholic schools closed, reducing overall enrollment by nearly fourteen percent.¹³³ Forced to close down because church funding was not enough to sustain them, close to six million children—nearly 11% of the nation’s pupils—were displaced into the public school system.¹³⁴

Initially Republicans had placed federal support for Catholic schools in their 1968 campaign platform in hopes that the issue would win over conservative Catholic voters. With the Democratic Party coming out publicly against the proposition, Nixon and his Administration hoped that by aligning alongside the Catholic bishops on the issue of federal aid, Catholics would be disillusioned by the Democratic Party and would vote Republican. Nixon had proposed that education vouchers and tuition tax credits be provided to parents. Under this new proposed plan, parents of nonpublic schoolchildren would receive tax refunds to help pay for the cost of their children’s education.¹³⁵ The President had justified his own support for aid to private religious schools because it would bring diversity to the national education system. Nixon believed that this diversity would spur beneficial competition between public and private schools, noting that “...these schools—non-sectarian, Catholic, Protestant, Jewish and other—often add a

¹³² George LaNoue, “Church, State, and the Courts,” *The Nation*, December 15, 1969, pg 658. Copy located in the RM Folder, SM Box 2-1, WHCF, National Archives.

¹³³ “Crisis Hits Catholic Schools,” *U.S. News and World Report*, September 29, 1969, pg. 33. Copy located in the RM Folder, SM Box 2-1, WHCF, National Archives.

¹³⁴ “Excerpts from the President’s Message on Education Reform to the Congress of the United States.” March 11, 1970. Folder RM, SM Box 2-1 WHCF, National Archives.

¹³⁵ “Pay as you go Schooling.” *Newsweek*, August 10, 1970, pg. 49. Copy located in the RM Folder, SM Box 2-1, WHCF, National Archives.

dimension of spiritual value, giving children a moral code by which to live. This government cannot be indifferent to the potential collapse of such schools.”¹³⁶

Nixon also argued that the monopoly of any single school system—public or private—would be detrimental to both the education systems, as well as the country itself. “If most or all private schools were to close or turn public,” the President argued, “the added burden on public funds by the end of the 1970s would exceed \$4 billion per year in operations... an estimated \$5 billion... for facilities.”¹³⁷ Nixon argued that allowing Catholic schools to close would not only prevent a needed diversity of education, but also burden millions of American taxpayers.

Conservative Protestants immediately petitioned to the President to renounce his support for funding. Many cited continued suspicion of the Catholic Church as their main reason for contention. Theological conservatives echoed fears that had been voiced during the 1960 election and worried that the government’s support was a breach in the separation of church and state. Churches across the nation wrote to the administration, voicing communal concerns about the administration’s support. Thousands of paper petitions were sent to the White House asserting their position on the matter: “We respectfully urge you to reconsider the policy...” one church petition stated, “...the American people have always oppos[ed] tax aid for Parochial Schools and overwhelmingly support the traditional American policies of Church-State separation and public

¹³⁶ Nick Thimmesch, “President defends Catholic Schools,” *Catholic Bulletin*, July 24, 1970. Copy located in RM Folder, SM Box 2-1, WHCF, National Archives.

¹³⁷ “Excerpts from President’s Message...”

funding for Public Schools only.”¹³⁸ Housewives, blue-collar workers, middle-class families, and working couples all wrote to the President to voice their concerns over the issue. Others opposed to the Administration’s intended actions were angered by what they perceived to be a complete disregard for the need of public educational funding. One Nixon supporter in Ohio lamented the preferential treatment Catholic schools received in comparison to public ones in the area, pointing out, “public schools are closing because of lack of funds [too.] We are first in the nation in aid to parochial schools and nearly last in the nation in support of our public schools!”¹³⁹

Nixon’s response to conservative Protestant protest was not consolatory. While he met with many of the movement’s leaders, such as Billy Graham, to privately discuss his political motives, the President did not do much to soothe them. In one bid, Nixon urged preacher Fred Rhodes to speak at the Southern Baptist Convention in 1971. As he was noted in being a “staunch Nixon loyalist,” Rhodes’ role was presumably to mend any hard feelings that had been garnered by his support for parochial schools.¹⁴⁰ And while the Administration made some attempts at allaying any fears the constituents had, Nixon and his staff never reversed their opinions on the Catholic schools issue. Because the administration had such a positive rapport with the conservative Protestant coalition, with Billy Graham providing continued access to a multitude of conservative religious

¹³⁸ Petition to RN again Financial Aid to Parochial Schools. From Cicero, Illinois. July 15, 1970. Folder RM, Box 3-1, WHCF, National Archives.

¹³⁹ Letter to RN from Mrs. Helmut Krueger. March, 4, 1970. Folder RM, Box 3-1, WHCF, National Archives.

¹⁴⁰ Invitation to Fred Rhodes. Deborah Sloan to Hebert Butterfield, August 3, 1971, Folder RM 2-1 “Religious Services in WH, 6/1/71-8/31/71,” SF RM Box 15, WHCF, National Archives.

leaders that were willing to work in favor of the President's agenda, Nixon's staffers seemed less worried to offend because it was assumed that overall, despite the Catholic issue, theological conservatives held the Nixon Administration in high regard.

In a glibly written memo circulated amongst White House staff members in September of 1971, Pat Buchanan laid out an honest and straightforward campaign plan for the 1972 election. The new objective was to win over historically affiliated Democratic constituents who were within reach; Catholics and Southern conservative Protestants were targeted as the main focus, though it was assumed that Catholics would be more of a challenge to obtain. "The President should go after the Catholic vote..." he advised, "and my recommendation has been that the Administration... stop concentrating on the 'media minorities' (Black, Mexican Americans, Spanish-speaking)." Because these groups were largely Democratic and "tough to crack," Buchanan suggested that white minorities—primarily Catholic and European—would provide easier to win over. Once it was realized that white minority voters were equally as powerful as Black or Hispanic, the President's reelection campaign would become more efficient. "There are as many Italian-Americans in the Bronx as there are Black Americans in Harlem..." he pointed out, "When we begin to recognize [this], we will better begin to serve the President's interests." In a similar analogy, Buchanan summed up that "Queens Democrats" were a "hell of a lot easier to get" than were "Harlem Democrats."¹⁴¹

¹⁴¹ Memo from Pat Buchanan to Ehrlichman, Haldeman and Colson. September 23, 1971. Folder 3-1 "Pat Buchanan," Box 10, WHCF, National Archives.

Nixon's strategy on winning over Catholics focused on white, middle class Catholics in the same way the southern strategy practiced rhetoric of racial color-blindness. Both plans aimed to widen their voter constituency, and in both instances, Nixon presented himself as a political moderate. In both stratagems, Nixon appealed to the idea of states' rights; in the instance of Catholicism, the President justified federal aid as a way to promote a diversity of educational options and to prevent a federal budget crisis. The case of Southern strategy referred to integration obliquely through the references to states' rights. Overall, both plans of action focused on enlarging the voter base, and did not place precedence of one constituency over the other. Because Nixon and Graham had firmly cemented conservative Protestant support, he felt no risk in pursuing Catholic voters.

Unlike the 1960 election, where the overwhelming majority of Catholics were destined to vote for a Catholic Democrat, many Catholic voters had begun to drift away from the party by the eve the 1972 election. "They have taken on middle class values," a memo called *The Catholic Vote* pointed out, "[They] fill [sic] at ease and alienated from the Eastern, liberal, ADA type leadership of the Dems. They feel more 'at home' with the Republicans like Eisenhower, President Nixon, Gov. Rockefeller and Senator Buckley."¹⁴² To bring this valued Catholic middle class into the Republican fold, Nixon believed a "Master Stroke" was needed.

¹⁴² Memo from Thomas Melady to Pat Buchanan. September 20, 1971. Folder 3-1 "Pat Buchanan," Box 10, WHCF, National Archives.

The Administration's support for parochial school aid was also aimed as a strategic move to split apart the Democratic Party's main constituency. In the same way abortion and hard-line anti-pornography laws divided Catholics, as well as other denominations into liberal and conservative factions, Nixon's staff predicted that aid for parochial schools would create a similar divide. Buchanan used Nelson Rockefeller's gubernatorial strategy as the springboard for the administration's own. "When [he] came out in favor for parochial aid... he won over Catholic Democrats in greater numbers than ever..." Buchanan rationalized, "while his upstate Protestants grumbled about aid to Catholic schools, they had 'no place else to go.'"¹⁴³

Many conservative Protestants voiced their concerns and anger over Nixon's strategy, but not with enough virulence to raise the concerns of the administration. Nixon provided enough religious conservative presence in the White House to sate the fears of those within the conservative Protestant community. While Buchanan acknowledged that aid to Catholic schools would "lose some votes," he also recognized that perceptions changed. The influence of anti-Catholic prejudice had diminished as an important factor in the polling habits of many conservative Protestants. The same voters had nowhere else to turn even if they were displeased; the Democratic Party had become associated with the increasingly militant and disruptive anti-war and youth culture. It was the Republican Party, even in moments of disagreement, which dovetailed with

¹⁴³ Memo from Pat Buchanan to Ehrlichman, Halderman and Colson. September 23, 1971.

conservative religious values. “The WASPS,” Buchanan noted, “have no where else to go.”¹⁴⁴

Conservative Protestants at the very least felt that they had enough influence in the White House to keep the Nixon Administration from straying too far away from their interests. Billy Graham continued to exert a significant amount of influence, providing the conservative coalition a continued connection to the President. Graham himself, while ever present in religious affairs, remained silent on the issue of aid to Catholic schools. Perhaps the preacher was too busy promoting Nixon’s strategy in the South, or he had learned from his experience during the 1960 election to remain strategically silent on the issue of Catholicism. What is known is that Graham provided no protest in Nixon’s attempt to woo Catholics, and he continued to faithfully stand by and promote the President’s agenda.

By the end of the 1972 election, and definitively, by the end of his Presidency, Richard Nixon and his Administration had effectively solidified an ever growing Catholic constituency and a wholly dedicated conservative Protestant voting base. Using his long-standing relationship with Evangelical preacher Billy Graham, Nixon was able to utilize the religious leader’s connection to ensconce a solid and lasting Republican link within the religiously conservative coalition. Nixon’s successful bid at winning over Catholic voters showed that the President was assured enough that conservative Protestants were so heavily in his favor, that he could branch out without the risk of alienating them. For Graham, the 1972 election was the height of his involvement in politics. Though he

¹⁴⁴ Memo from Pat Buchanan to Ehrlichman, Halderman, and Colson, September 16, 1971. Pg. 2

previously acted as a conduit between past presidents and conservative Protestants, his work during the Nixon Administrations hit an all time peak. Driven in part by his desire for fame, social acclaim, and the want of political influence, Graham helped the administration solidify a long-standing connection with the white, conservative, Protestant establishment.

The relationship between Nixon and Graham had much larger implications; in key respects, it helped to further construct the relationship that would subsequently make up the Christian Right. During the 1950s and 60s, Graham provided a voice for a fractured and fledgling conservative Protestant coalition, helped make the movement a vital component of Eisenhower's administrative goals, as well as during Nixon's campaign. It could also be said that without Graham, Nixon may have not had the confidence or the reassurance in knowing there was a voting constituency that would back him. When author John Pollock asked Richard Nixon to recall the role the preacher had played during his Vice Presidency and Presidency, the former President presented Graham as a crucial component to the successful elements of his administration. "Billy exerted a powerful influence with leaders on both sides," Nixon recalled, "and was always a tower of strength whenever I needed moral support in achieving very important [goals]..."¹⁴⁵

At large, Nixon and Graham's decisive rapport spoke to the larger, ever crucial relationship that conservative Protestants and the Republican Party had.

¹⁴⁵ Letter to Reverend John Pollock from RN. December 30, 1986. Folder 4: Special People A-K. Graham, Billy and Ruth, Post-Presidential Correspondence, Richard Nixon Library and Birthplace Foundation, Yorba Linda, California.

Forged out of Eisenhower's political strategy to promote anti-communism and create a domestic religious moral consensus within the United States, the conservative Protestant movement grew out of the fragmentation of a broader Protestant community. Graham's own enduring legacy with Republican administrations, even after Nixon's disastrous fall from grace during the Watergate Scandal, spoke to the enduring connection the movement had created.

What then, does this story—the tale of the personal connection between a Republican President and one of the most famous American religious leaders of the 20th century—tell us about the narrative of theological conservatives in the United States? For one, it shows that conservative Protestants were willing and assertive participants in the political arena. Equally opportunistic as the White House, theological conservatives didn't always dictate but did have a strong voice and influence on Presidential policy and agenda. Equally important, the relationship shows the inherent importance of Nixon's role in cultivating the rise of what would be known as the Christian Right. As early the late 1950s, Nixon was working to incorporate conservative Protestants into his agenda; in this case then, Richard Nixon becomes an important key player in the historical narrative of the germination, rise, and subsequent status of conservative Protestants in American politics. After being "...too long shut out of the White House," Nixon and Graham provided an open door for which theological conservatives could enter.¹⁴⁶

¹⁴⁶ Robert Marus, "Reagan political years paralleled right's rise." *Christian Century*, June 29, 2004, pg 2.

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