

The Motivation Behind White Evangelical Pro-Life Legislation in the Trump Era: Apocalypticism and Persecution

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of BA within
Philosophy and Religion at the University of Sheffield.

By Lia Freeman - 200169017
Supervisor: Dr J. C. Meredith Warren

Final draft submitted 26 January 2023

Word Count: 4,907

I certify that this dissertation is based on my own original research
and contains no material from any other source which is not
referenced.

(signed)Lia Freeman.....

Acknowledgements

The idea for this dissertation came shortly after I returned home to the US for summer, when Roe v Wade was overturned in June 2022. Shaken by the speed with which rights can change, I began to wonder about the deeper story behind the swinging pendulum of political parties.

Thank you to my dissertation supervisor Dr Meredith Warren, who helped shape the idea for the apocalyptic and persecution narratives. This dissertation would not be clear without her guidance and patience.

Thanks to one of my best friends, Lauren, who converted to Catholicism shortly after high school. We approach conversations with completely different perspectives on reality, but we manage to have some of the most profound discussions.

Thanks to both my parents, Dave and Nicole, for supporting me in my dream to attend university in England. I also want to recognise my mom for helping edit the final draft.

Contents

Abstract (Page 3)

Introduction (Page 4)

Chapter 1: Apocalyptic Narrative (Page 7)

1.1 Chapter Introduction (Page 7)

1.2 Dualism and Battle Imagery in the Book of Revelation (Page 7)

1.3 Apocalyptic Elements in Modern Pro-Life Movements (Page 10)

Chapter 2: Persecution Narrative (Page 13)

2.1 Chapter Introduction (Page 13)

2.2 Persecution in the Book of Revelation (Page 13)

2.3 Analysis of the Persecution Narrative in Abortion as Holocaust (Page 15)

Conclusion (Page 19)

Bibliography (Page 20)

Abstract

This dissertation explains the motivations behind the white evangelical pro-life movement in the Christian right and its impact on Trump-era abortion policy in the US. Evangelicals are a politically active group, especially influential during Trump's presidency. During this time, abortion policy became more restrictive and the Supreme Court more hostile to abortion. There are two overlapping narratives – the apocalyptic and persecution narratives – that inform how white evangelicals see abortion. Evangelicals understand abortion as both an evil in the coming apocalyptic battle for salvation and a persecuting force against them. I show dualisms and battle imagery in the writings of the pro-life organisation Faith2Action as evidence for the apocalyptic narrative. I also analyse modern comparisons of abortion to the Holocaust to demonstrate the persecution narrative. These examples demonstrate evangelical pro-life activity as resistance to perceived oppression. I conclude anti-abortion policy in the US is significantly faith-based. The consequence of these findings is that the pro-choice and pro-life movements often see abortion through different perceived realities, making rational political discussions about abortion nearly impossible.

Introduction

The white evangelical Christian right impacts abortion laws and pro-life legislation in the United States due to the influence of two narratives. First is the apocalyptic narrative, which involves the belief abortion is among the sins that will send God's wrath down on humanity and signals the Second Coming of Christ. The second closely related narrative is persecution, which frames abortion as an oppressive force that threatens evangelicals. The persecution narrative is also exemplified through white Christian nationalism, informing the view that abortion is an attack on white evangelical identity. The apocalyptic and persecution narratives inform each other, fueling faith-based pro-life activism from evangelicals acting as 'warriors' to protect the unborn and their faith. I argue the impact of these narratives resulted in the restrictive anti-abortion policy marking the Trump era. This is one example of the impact evangelical Christianity has in a country with supposed separation of church and state.

To demonstrate how these narratives motivate evangelical pro-life activism I first explain the prominent role evangelicals hold in US politics and the pro-life movement. Evangelical Christianity falls under Protestantism. Its defining features include the 'born-again' experience which involves a personal conversion or commitment to Jesus Christ, an emphasis on biblical authority and spreading the Gospel, and acceptance of Jesus as humanity's saviour (Trangerud 2022: 204). Frances Fitzgerald (2017: 623) defines the modern Christian right as 'a faction within the Republican Party', which formed as Republicans took up conservative Christian causes over time. I discuss the evangelical Christian right because the majority of evangelicals align with conservatives especially on pro-life policy (Gasaway 2019: 297; Alder and Schäublin 2020: 2). Evangelicals were largely politically inactive and indifferent to abortion until New Right leaders teamed up with evangelists such as Jerry Falwell and the Moral Majority in the 1970s. They mobilised evangelicals around abortion to secure conservative votes (Mason 2002: 109). A minority of

liberal evangelicals do not identify with the Christian right. Most consider themselves pro-life, but they focus on policies to reduce abortion, unlike conservatives who aim to restrict it (Gasaway 2019: 308).

Joshua Wilson (2020: 378) shows high political engagement of white evangelicals: since 2012, they have constituted a quarter of voters but are only 15-20% of the US population. White evangelicals are more likely than other religious groups to say the Bible should at least have some influence on US law, and if the Bible conflicts with public opinion, the Bible should take priority in shaping law (Smith, Rotolo and Tevington 2022). Pew Research Center states 81% of white evangelical Christians voted for Trump in the 2016 election, considerably higher than any other religious group preferring Trump (Martínez and Smith 2016). Alder and Schäublin (2020: 1-2) note how evangelicals' special access to the White House influenced policy debate, with biblical rhetoric reflected in Trump's public speech. A 2018 New York Times article describes how long after the election, members of Trump's Evangelical Advisory Board were going to the White House daily for 'listening sessions' on faith-based legislation, policy briefings, and prayer sessions (Weiland 2018). Not only did Trump aim to please his large evangelical following, but evangelical leaders consistently informed policy-making.

I focus on the motivations of white evangelicals over other racial or religious groups both because of their political influence within the Christian right and their strong opposition to abortion. 73% of white evangelicals believe abortion should be criminalised for all or most situations. In comparison, 60% of Catholics, 61% of white non-evangelical Protestants, and 71% of Black Protestants believe abortion should be *legal* for all or most situations (Blazina 2022). News articles published during or shortly after Trump's presidency note how although many evangelicals recognise Trump's immorality and some evangelical leaders opposed him, Trump's appointment of pro-life Supreme Court justices and enactment of conservative

policy fostered continued support from the Christian right (Zauzmer 2018; Weiland 2018; McCammon 2020). A pro-life Supreme Court made key decisions during the Trump era. Chermerinksy and Goodwin (2019: 66) argue an increasingly anti-abortion Supreme Court twisted previous law to fit with their pro-life views after they voted against a California law requiring healthcare facilities to post notices about abortion availability for low-income women in 2018. In an analysis of abortion legislation enacted during Trump's administration, Wilson (2020: 382) concludes that while the number of state abortion laws only moderately increased, conservative state legislators introduced more *restrictive* abortion policies and abortion bans anticipating Roe v Wade's reversal. These restrictive policies and the appointment of Justice Brett Kavanaugh set the stage for the Supreme Court to overturn Roe v Wade in June 2022, triggering many state abortion bans (Wilson 2020: 383; Kitchener and others 2022). Democrats also pushed more pro-choice legislation, revealing escalation of the abortion issue along party lines (Wilson 2022: 386).

Understanding the influence evangelicals have in US politics begs the question I address in the following chapters: what is motivating pro-life activism from white evangelicals and what are the implications for how US abortion policy is influenced by faith? The first chapter discusses the apocalyptic narrative and the second the related persecution narrative. I start each chapter with a thesis and then discuss how the apocalypse and persecution themes arise from the New Testament's Book of Revelation. Next, I show these themes at work in modern pro-life rhetoric by looking at the apocalyptic language in the pro-life Faith2Action website and the persecution mentality in the comparison of abortion to the Holocaust. The presence of these religious narratives in the mainstream pro-life movement show how evangelical anti-abortion activism, motivated by the belief that abortion is an evil in the battle between God against Satan, impacts anti-abortion policy.

Chapter 1: Apocalyptic Narrative

1.1 Chapter Introduction

This chapter argues an apocalyptic narrative motivates evangelical pro-life activism by showing how two key features of apocalypticism—dualism and battle imagery—are reproduced in modern pro-life rhetoric. The Book of Revelation, widely regarded as an apocalypse, is filled with dualisms and battle imagery (Collins, J. 1979: 3). Revelation’s apocalyptic narrative positions evangelicals on the ‘good’ side in the apocalyptic battle which ultimately results in God’s judgement against the sinners. Evangelicals include abortion, among other political issues, as an evil working against them in this cosmic battle for salvation. In section 1.2, I explain the criteria for apocalypses, the role of dualisms and battle imagery in apocalypses, and analyse the Book of Revelation for these elements. To show the apocalyptic narrative in evangelical pro-life activism, I analyse the writing of pro-life organisation Faith2Action for dualism and battle imagery in section 1.3. Faith2Action is the focal point for restrictive laws banning abortion after foetal heartbeat detection, showing the impact of apocalypticism on mainstream pro-life policy (Faith2Action: About Us).

1.2 Dualism and Battle Imagery in the Book of Revelation

Typically, Christians and non-Christians alike understand biblical justification for abortion stemming from specific verses. One such verse is Jeremiah 1.5, which reads: “‘Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, and before you were born I consecrated you; I appointed you a prophet to the nations.’”¹ While this verse supports evangelicals’ belief that life begins at conception, it does not show the overarching influence of Revelation’s

¹ all translations from the Bible are from Coogan, Michael D. (ed.) and others. 2010. *The New Oxford Annotated Bible: New Revised Standard Version With The Apocrypha*, 4th edn. (New York NY: Oxford University Press)

apocalyptic narrative on evangelicals' worldview and anti-abortion stance (Compelling Truth n.d.). Revelation is a prophecy about the end of the world given by a man named John (Wainwright 1993: 11). Revelation predicts Jesus Christ's return to Earth and apocalyptic battle between opposing forces. White evangelicals typically have a premillennialist interpretation of Revelation, meaning they believe Christ will return before the establishment of a thousand-year Christian kingdom on Earth and God's final judgement of humankind (Gorski and Perry 2022: 69; Mason 2002: 73). Many evangelicals view destructive world events as a sign of Jesus's impending return (Gorski and Perry 2022: 69). A 2010 Pew Research Center survey shows 58% of white evangelical Christians believe Jesus's return will occur sometime in the next 40 years (Rosentiel 2010).

Revelation is part of the apocalypse literary genre, of which dualism and battle imagery are key features (Collins, J. 1979: 3). When I discuss the apocalyptic narrative informing evangelical views on abortion, I am referring to the narrative grounded in Revelation because of its importance to evangelicals. Apocalypse means 'revelation' in Greek, and ancient apocalypses follow a general narrative framework (Collins, J. 1979: 2). The necessary features include but are not limited to: a divine intermediary delivering revelatory messages to a human recipient, divine salvation and afterlife as the final destiny for the faithful, and the existence of another reality beyond the Earthly realm (Collins, J. 1979: 9). John Collins's (1979: 7), framework for apocalypses shows dualistic and battle components of apocalypses, also found in Revelation. On the cosmic timeline where there is eschatological judgement from God upon sinners/oppressors there is opposing eschatological salvation for the followers of God. This judgement often takes the narrative form of defeating evil through battle (Koester 2014: 106). Additionally, otherworldly characters and settings are cast into a binary of good or bad (Collins, J. 1979: 7).

The apocalyptic narrative in the Book of Revelation is structured through dualism and battle imagery, and I analyse the former first. Revelation's conflict is between two diametrically opposed sides—the faithful vs the sinners. Craig Koester (2014: 116) notes for every positive character in Revelation there is a corresponding negative one, for example God vs Satan, Jesus 'the Lamb' vs the beast, and the true prophets of God vs the false prophets of Satan. Multiple visions describe the struggle for domination between agents of God and Satan, in which following the persecution of the faithful, the oppressors are punished while the faithful are saved (Collins, A. 1984: 112). God's faithful are marked with a 'seal on their foreheads' (Revelation 7.3). On the opposing side are those following the beast, who God punishes to avenge martyrs who sacrificed themselves for God (Revelation 6.9-10; 13.3). Ultimately God's order wins, with visions of the martyrs in Heaven praising God for his fair judgement (Revelation 19.1-7). In a historical-critical analysis of Revelation, Adela Yabro Collins (1984: 142, 160-61) argues the dualistic structure of these literary elements simplifies complicated relationships in the cosmic world and Revelation can be viewed as a mythic narrative designed to overcome conflict. I argue the simplification of the cosmic extends to the simplification of real-life situations on Earth as Revelation positions Christian readers on God's side. Revelation is not just a story. It has the ability to structure evangelicals' worldviews because of their belief in the existence of this cosmic dualism and their duty within it. Opposing evil requires aligning oneself with God.

The dualistic conflict in Revelation is depicted through battle symbolism, giving evangelicals an active position in the fight against evil. For example, the whore representing Babylon is said to be 'drunk on the blood of the saints and the blood of the witnesses to Jesus' (Revelation 17.6). Koester (2014: 675) says this resembles other biblical battle imagery describing warriors and creatures drunk with the blood of the defeated. Revelation features violent retribution for the martyrs as angels release catastrophic events upon sinners,

ranging from torturous stinging locusts to fires and plagues (Revelation 9.3-5; 9.18-19; 16.8-11). Followers of Jesus are continually referred to as conquerors over evil (Revelation 2.7, 11, 17; 3.5; 12.11). The final battle scene depicts Jesus defeating the beast and earthly army on behalf of the army of heaven with the sword of truth, a metaphor for the word of God (Koester 2014: 253). Adela Collins (1984: 129-130) argues Revelation is socially radical and shows how John interprets Christian conflict with Rome as holy war. Although Christians do not fight in the final battle, Revelation emphasises the value of the faithful's willingness to die for God. So, God's judgement delivered through battle in Revelation orients evangelicals in a greater cosmic battle, calling them to metaphorical arms—uncompromising faith—to defeat the forces of evil. Dedication to the anti-abortion cause is one way evangelicals express uncompromising faith and align themselves with good, as I show in the next section.

1.3 Apocalyptic Elements in Modern Pro-Life Movements

The apocalyptic features of dualisms and battle imagery can be found in the rhetoric of mainstream pro-life organisations, such the right-wing pro-life group Faith2Action analysed in this section. The view of abortion as a sign of apocalypse is a phenomena that gained traction following the US defeat in the Vietnam war, as the Christian right pushed abortion to the top of the evangelical agenda (Mason 2002: 109; 124). The importance of apocalyptic thinking in evangelical political activism has not waned. Alder and Schäublin (2020: 1) conclude evangelicals' focus on the apocalypse is a 'driving force in US political decisions'. Apocalyptic symbolism in the pro-life movement is shown by Mason (2002: 108), who notes apocalyptic conflict is often cast as a war of light vs dark. This dualistic imagery is found in the pro-life novel *Gideon's Torch* and other mainstream pro-life material. Mason (2002: 129) argues this symbolism helps construct pro-life ideology as a 'dramatic narrative

about the prophesied culmination of the forces of darkness'. In my analysis, I explain how the dualism and battle imagery on Faith2Action's website are examples of the apocalyptic pro-life narrative pointed out by Mason (2002: 129). Faith2Action illustrates how apocalyptic pro-life ideology finds its way into modern politically influential groups, and the apocalyptic rhetoric continues to be replicated as a result of this apocalyptic mentality within the pro-life movement. The rhetoric also reveals the reach of the apocalyptic narrative, mobilising evangelicals to the cause and motivating policy-making. I aim to show the importance of the apocalyptic narrative and its influence on abortion for evangelicals in particular.

Faith2Action is a Christian organisation successful in passing restrictive abortion laws during the Trump administration. Faith2Action's founder, Janet Folger Porter, is associated with evangelical pastors such as Dr. Rick Scarborough (Faith2Action 2022: About Us; Truth and Liberty Coalition n.d.). Porter is also the creator of the Heartbeat Bill, which renders abortion illegal once a foetal heartbeat can be detected at around six weeks (Faith2Action 2022: About Us; Shaw 2022: 858). More foetal heartbeat bills started passing in states during the Trump era, revealing the mainstreaming of near-total abortion bans and the move to overturn Roe during this time (Wilson 2022: 382-384). Heartbeat bills are currently passed in 15 US states (Broward County Right to Life n.d.). This type of bill is very restrictive because many women do not realise they are pregnant by six weeks and some do not allow abortion in the case of rape (Shaw 2022: 859, 862).

The Faith2Action website frames the political fight against abortion as a dualistic battle between 'child killers' and defenders of life. A section on the homepage titled 'Quick Update' discusses recent pro-choice policies passed in a few states. It reads: "The battle continues: Child-Killing Until Birth passed on the ballot in Michigan, California, and Vermont..." (Faith2Action 2022: Home). Killing a child is an obvious moral wrong and calling abortion 'child-killing' immediately places a nuanced issue into the category of

unquestionable evil. The quote implies joining Faith2Action's side will position one on the good side in this 'battle' against abortion. Candida Moss (2013: ch 8) points out pro-lifers often position themselves as martyrs struggling for the faith. Martyrdom rhetoric is frequently cast as battle language, justifying a hostile stance to perceived enemies (Moss 2013: Introduction). I argue Faith2Action has a similar effect using battle language by stating Porter won the 'Defender of Life' and 'the Guardian of Life' awards (Faith2Action 2022: About Us). The words 'defender' and 'guardian' situate Porter as defending or guarding the unborn against a hostile force. This reinforces polarisation of the abortion issue beyond abortion itself, involving a battle between advocates for and against it. The first sentence of the 'About Us' page states Porter is the 'Founder and President of Faith2Action-formed to WIN the cultural war for life, liberty, and the family' (Faith2Action 2022: About Us). To frame life and family on the righteous side of the war implies enemies are attacking these values, and Faith2Action takes an active stance against these enemies. The site as a whole shows abortion is one of those threats. Additionally, evangelical Christian founder of Focus on the Family James Dobson is quoted saying: 'Janet Porter is a frontline warrior whom I respect highly. She has done as much to protect the sanctity of life as anyone I know' (Faith2Action 2022). The term 'frontline' can mean the foremost position, but when paired with 'warrior' Dobson is likely comparing Porter in a spiritual sense to those nearest to the opposition in military battle (Merriam-Webster).

Collectively, the language discussed casts the abortion conflict in a binary apocalyptic conflict—the righteous Christian warrior working to protect the innocent unborn against the sinful advocates for abortion rights. The use of dualistic and battle symbolism is not just representative of the apocalyptic narrative within pro-life movement. It shows how apocalypticism both motivates aggressive anti-abortion legislation and is used as rhetoric to mobilise believers to the cause.

Chapter 2: Persecution Narrative

2.1 Chapter Introduction

This chapter argues the persecution narrative, closely related to the apocalyptic narrative, motivates evangelical pro-life activism by framing evangelicals and the unborn as victims of abortion. This narrative, along with the perceived oppression present in white Christian nationalism, informs the view that abortion is an evil threatening the white Christian population. In section 2.2, I show persecution imagery in the Book of Revelation and explain how this impacts evangelicals' identification as victims. In section 2.3, I reveal the persecution narrative at work in modern pro-life rhetoric by analysing Kanye West's and former Arkansas governor Mike Huckabee's comparisons of abortion to the Holocaust. The prevalence of the abortion to Holocaust comparison, especially considering its use by influential political and pop culture figures, demonstrates the influence of the persecution narrative in pro-life politics. I also note the prevalence of white Christian nationalism within white evangelicalism, and how white supremacists claiming racial victimhood further informs the movement's view of abortion as a weapon against white Christians. Finally, I explain how the persecution narrative reinforces and reflects the apocalyptic narrative as it separates the world into the 'oppressors' on the side of evil and the 'persecuted' Christians on the side of the righteous.

2.2 Persecution in the Book of Revelation

The theme of persecution in Revelation is reflected in literary imagery and in the predicted persecution of Christians. The ultimate message is faith conquers persecutors. Jean-Pierre Ruiz (2010: 2169) notes the beast John witnesses rising from the sea in chapter 13 represents the Roman Empire and its oppression of Christian saints. Persecutors are also

equated with the devil, for example in Revelation 2.10: ‘Beware, the devil is about to throw some of you into prison so that you may be tested’. The rest of the chapter explains that remaining faithful to God in the face of this deathly persecution will lead to salvation. Koester (2014: 276) says the devil’s actions in 2.10 symbolise the sporadic persecution of Christians by the Romans. The first chapter in Revelation compares John’s persecution to that of Jesus: “I, John, your brother who share with you in Jesus the persecution and the kingdom and the patient endurance” (Revelation 1.9). Christians see Jesus as the original martyr who died unjustly and sacrificed his life for Christianity, and inspiring Christians like John to remain faithful in the face of suffering (Moss 2013: Introduction). Adela Collins (1984: 113) says references to the ‘endurance’ of the faithful in Revelation 1.9 and throughout Revelation shows the importance of staying with God. It also implies future persecution that must be endured. Persecution is overtly predicted in other passages (Revelation 2.10; 13.5-7).

Despite historical doubts that Christians were widely persecuted by the Romans, the persecution narrative in the Book of Revelation remains essential to the Christian identity as a persecuted group who must use their faith to overcome oppression. Persecution is a major theme in Christianity. The New Testament is filled with stories about persecution and the popular media is propagating this theme today (Moss 2013: ch 8). Persecution is defined as unjustified punishment towards members of a particular group due to their membership in that group (Moss 2013: Introduction). However, many scholars note the long-held Christian belief that early Christians were widely and continuously persecuted by Romans for their religion is a myth. Although Christians faced sporadic harassment, real persecution was limited to a few years (Collins, A. 1984: 69; Moss 2013: ch 4; Koester 2014: 65). The imagery in Revelation reflects the social crisis between Christians and Rome, perceived by the author as persecution, while calling Christians to renew their faith faced with future persecution (Collins, A. 1984: 71; Koester 2014: 96, 98). Moss (2013: Introduction) argues in

recent times disagreement or even nonviolent conflict is interpreted by Christians as religious persecution. This is because current events are seen as the predicted persecution in Revelation. Regardless of the extent to which Christians were actually persecuted, Revelation is truth to the faithful. I show in the next section this narrative allows them to continue framing non-oppressive issues like abortion as persecution.

2.3 Analysis of the Persecution Narrative in Abortion as Holocaust

The persecution narrative is present in modern pro-life rhetoric through the comparison of abortion to the Holocaust, and in this section I offer two examples of this comparison from evangelicals Kanye West and former Alabama governor Mike Huckabee. Candida Moss (2013: ch 8) shows how the Christian persecution myth polarises thinking about abortion in modern times, because it divides the world into the ‘persecuted’ Christians acting in defence of the voiceless against worldly persecutors. My analysis in this section argues the persecution narrative does not just frame abortion as a persecuting force, but explains how evangelicals justify co-opting empathy from real persecution. The prominence of West and Huckabee, both who supported Trump, is a testament to how the mainstreaming of the persecution narrative is motivating anti-abortion action within the conservative pro-life movement (The Kids Guide n.d.).

In a discussion between Lex Fridman (2022) and Kanye West about using engineering for evil during the Holocaust, West went on to compare abortion to the Holocaust:

We’re still in the Holocaust. A friend, a Jewish friend of mine said, come, go visit the Holocaust Museum. And my response was, let’s visit our Holocaust Museum, Planned Parenthood.

West is Black, but propagates a predominantly white evangelical narrative—abortion as Holocaust. He was recently pictured wearing a ‘white lives matter’ T-shirt and shares views about Jewish control of the media that are prevalent in white nationalism, giving

context as he subscribes to other largely white narratives (Ophir and others 2020; Cartner-Morley 2022; Fridman 2022). The comparison he makes above is an example of the persecution theme in the white pro-life movement under discussion. Adela Collins (1984: 154) points out the persecution in Revelation represents the social crisis of Christians in Rome, encouraging Christian identification with persecution to deal with their troubles. Evangelical identification with persecution in Revelation extends to identification with and co-option of persecution in real life. West identifies the persecution of another group, takes an issue threatening to him, and replaces the persecution of Jewish people with that issue (abortion). For one, abortion cannot be compared to persecution, because it describes the unjustified hatred and attack of a group based on religion or some other shared attribute (Moss 2013: Introduction). Abortion is not a targeted attack against fetuses because of their identity as fetuses. Furthermore, West using the trauma of the Jewish community for his own purposes is a kind of self-victimisation. He implies America, beyond the unborn, is victimised by saying ‘we’re’ in the Holocaust and Planned Parenthood is ‘our’ version of the Holocaust.

The comparison of abortion to the Holocaust is not isolated to West. It started long before *Roe v Wade*, with German Catholic leaders making the comparison in the 1940s (Roesch 2022: 906). It is now used by modern evangelical pro-life political figures. One example is former governor of Arkansas and Baptist minister Mike Huckabee. Huckabee (2022) has 1.8 million followers on Twitter (@govmikehuckabee) and regularly posts anti-abortion commentary. He also recently commented on the overturn of *Roe v Wade* on Fox News (2022), showing the extent of his reach. In 2014, he conflated abortion and the Holocaust in a speech to other conservative pastors:

If you felt something incredibly powerful at Auschwitz and Birkenau over the 11 million killed worldwide and the million and a half killed on those grounds, cannot we feel something extraordinary about 55 million murdered in our own country in the wombs of their mothers? (Right Wing Watch Blog 2014)

Huckabee claims abortion is *worse* than the Holocaust by comparing the higher numbers of ‘murdered’ fetuses to those who died at Nazi concentration camps. Mason (2003: 117) argues the pro-life comparisons of abortion to Holocaust she analyses are able to co-opt the trauma of the Holocaust by placing abortion as the apex of evil on a timeline of events. For evangelicals, the persecution narrative justifies saying abortion is worse than the Holocaust because abortion is viewed as one of the ultimate manifestations of Satan’s oppressive forces in the 21st century, victimising Christians in particular. I argue this occurs not by timeline but identity in Huckabee’s example. He claims victimhood for himself and other Christian listeners, insinuating part of the reason abortion is worse is because it is happening in ‘our own country’. Listeners should feel more moral outrage over abortion because abortion threatens their own people, and this is the apex of evil.

Abortion as persecution is also exemplified through the crossover between evangelicalism and white Christian nationalism. Gorski and Perry (2020: 18-20) reveal white evangelicals are higher than other ethno-religious groups on the Christian nationalist scale, arguing white conservative Christians often associate Christianity with whiteness. White Christian nationalists are also more likely to re-interpret Christian history in a way that emphasises their victimhood (Gorski and Perry 2020: 26). Trump-era anti-immigration and anti-minority rhetoric mobilised white nationalists (Andaya 2019: 13). Andaya (2019: 13) argues regressive reproductive politics in the Trump era are part of white nationalists’ exertion of control, responding to fears about the Other and perceived ‘loss of foundational [American] principles’. Additionally, discussions about abortion increase at times when citizenship and race is hotly debated in post-colonial countries (Baird 2006: 200-203). In Ophir and other’s (2022: 17) analysis of the trends in abortion discussions on the white nationalist website Stormfront, they conclude the largely Christian-based discourse viewed abortion as moral for non-whites and immoral for whites. Reproductive injustice and the need

for abortion disproportionately affects women of colour, but Stormfront's users inverted this reality and painted whites as victimised by abortion. White Christian nationalists not only ignore the reasons for racial reproductive injustice but flip the story to victimise themselves, mirroring what is happening in the comparison of abortion to the Holocaust through co-opting the trauma of another group. White fears about other racial groups combined with the tendency to victimise themselves adds another element to the evangelical pro-life movement because abortion is seen as a weapon against one's own 'superior' racial group. Abortion is seen as an attack on white Christian identity.

Although I have distinguished the apocalyptic and persecution narratives in chapter 1 and 2, the narratives are two sides of the same coin. Moss (2013: ch 8) argues Christians' self-victimisation helps them justify the division of the world into evil and good, which is what is happening with the isolated issue of abortion. Evangelicals seeing the unborn and themselves as persecuted relies on the belief that there are oppressive Satanic forces. Seeing abortion as an evil in an eschatological battle results in perceiving abortion as a persecuting force. The cosmic nature of the abortion question justifies radical rhetoric for evangelicals, such as the comparison of abortion to Holocaust. The narratives also explain how shocking comparisons such as this have become common. However, regardless of the reality one is in, co-opting the persecution of another group is unjustified.

Conclusion

The apocalyptic and persecution narratives in the white evangelical pro-life movement explain increasingly restrictive abortion policy during the Trump era. These narratives both find biblical support from the Book of Revelation, which evangelicals have a particular interest in. The pro-life website Faith2Action shows the influence of apocalyptic thinking through dualism and battle imagery, framing abortion as evil in a binary eschatological conflict. This black and white view of abortion is reinforced by the persecution narrative, which positions abortion as a persecuting force against evangelicals and the unborn. It allows evangelicals to co-opt the persecution of other groups with their own perceived persecution, exemplified by the comparison of abortion to the Holocaust. High levels of white Christian nationalism in white evangelicalism adds another element of victimisation along racial lines as white nationalist evangelicals view abortion as an attack on their 'superior' racial group. As a whole, the apocalyptic persecution narrative motivates anti-abortion advocates to action as warriors protecting the unborn and their faith under perceived oppression. The presence of these religious narratives during and after the Trump era explains the dissonance that occurs between people in the evangelical pro-life movement and outside it when addressing the real-world nuance of abortion. Any pro-choice arguments about the rationality of legal abortion become irrelevant, as evangelicals view abortion as the evil force in their cosmic reality.

Bibliography

- Alder, Cora, and Emanuel Schäublin. 2020. 'US Evangelicals: From Prophecy to Policy', *Policy Perspectives*, 8.11, 1-4 <<https://doi.org/10.3929/ETHZ-B-000438157>>
- Andaya, Elise. 2019. "'I'M BUILDING A WALL AROUND MY UTERUS': Abortion Politics and the Politics of Othering in Trump's America", *Cultural Anthropology*, 34.1, 10-17 <<https://doi-org.sheffield.idm.oclc.org/10.14506/ca34.1.03>>
- Baird, Barbara. 2006. 'Maternity, Whiteness and National Identity: The Case of Abortion', *Australian Feminist Studies*, 21.50, 197-221 <<https://doi-org.sheffield.idm.oclc.org/10.1080/08164640600736068>>
- Blazina, Carrie. 2022. 'Key facts about the abortion debate in America', *Pew Research Center* <<https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2022/07/15/key-facts-about-the-abortion-debate-in-america/>> [accessed 23 November 2022]
- Broward County Right to Life. [n.d.]. 'Heartbeat Bill Architect Calls for Bill's Passage in Florida', *Broward County Right to Life* <<https://www.browardrighttolife.org/>> [accessed 3 January 2023]
- Cartner-Morley, Jess. 2022. 'Kanye West stirs controversy in 'White Lives Matter' T-shirt at Paris fashion week' *Guardian*. 4 October <<https://www.theguardian.com/music/2022/oct/04/kanye-west-white-lives-matter-t-shirt-paris-fashion-week>>
- Chemerinksy, Erwin, and Michele Goodwin. 2019. 'Constitutional Gerrymandering Against Abortion Rights: NIFLA v. Becerra' *UC Irvine School of Law Research Paper No.* 2019-25, 61-124 <<https://ssrn.com/abstract=3372406>>
- Collins, Adela Yarbro. 1984. *Crisis and Catharsis: The Power of the Apocalypse*. (Philadelphia PA: The Westminster Press)
- Collins, John J (ed.). 1979. *Apocalypse: The Morphology of a Genre*, Semeia 14 (Atlanta: GA: The Society of Biblical Literature)
- Compelling Truth. [n.d.]. 'Abortion - What does the Bible have to say?' *Compelling Truth* <<https://www.compellingtruth.org/Bible-abortion.html>> [accessed 26 January 2023]
- Coogan, Michael D. (ed.) and others. 2010. *The New Oxford Annotated Bible: New Revised Standard Version With The Apocrypha*, 4th edn. (New York NY: Oxford University Press)
- Faith2Action. 2022. *Faith2Action* <<https://f2a.org/>> [accessed 6 December 2023]

- Fitzgerald, Frances. 2017. *The Evangelicals: The Struggle to Shape America* (New York NY: Simon & Schuster)
- Fox News. 2022. *Mike Huckabee on abortion: 'Every human life has intrinsic worth and value'*, online video recording, Fox News, 26 June
<<https://www.foxnews.com/video/6308529847112>> [accessed January 17 2023]
- Fridman, Lex. 2022. Kanye 'Ye' West Interview | Lex Fridman Podcast #332. Online video recording, YouTube, 24 October 2022
<<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4AWLcxTGZPA>> [accessed 24 November 2022]
- Gasaway, Brantley W. 2019. 'Making Evangelicals Great Again? American Evangelicals in the Age of Trump', *Evangelical Review of Theology: A Global Forum*, 293-311
<<https://digitalcommons.bucknell.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi>>
- Gorski, Philip S. and Samuel L. Perry. 2022. *The Flag and the Cross: White Christian Nationalism and the Threat to American Democracy* (New York: Oxford University Press)
- Huckabee, Mike. 2022, June 24. 'Historic SCOTUS decision that returns abortion issue to states. I still pray for the day when issue is personhood & we apply 5th and 14th amendments to ALL people from conception to natural death', (tweet, @govmikehuckabee)
- Kitchener, Caroline and others. 2022. 'Abortion is now banned in these states. See where laws have changed', *The Washington Post*, updated 23 November
<<https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/2022/06/24/abortion-state-laws-criminalization-roe/>> [accessed 29 November 2022]
- Koester, Craig R. 2014. *Revelation: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*. 38A Anchor Yale Bible (New Haven CT: Yale University Press)
- Martinez, Jessica and Gregory A. Smith. 2016. 'How the faithful voted: a preliminary 2016 analysis', *Pew Research Center*
<<https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2016/11/09/how-the-faithful-voted-a-preliminary-2016-analysis/>> [accessed 23 November 2022]
- Mason, Carol. 2002. *Killing for Life: The Apocalyptic Narrative of Pro-Life Politics* (New York: Cornell University Press)
- McCammon, Sarah. 2020. 'Ginsburg's Death A 'Pivot Point' For Abortion Rights, Advocates Say', *NPR*, September 19
<<https://www.npr.org/sections/death-of-ruth-bader-ginsburg/2020/09/19/914864867/ginsburgs-death-a-pivot-point-for-abortion-rights-advocates-say>> [accessed 25 November 2022]

- Merriam-Webster. [n.d.] 'Front line', *Merriam-Webster.com*.
<<https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/front%20line>> [accessed 14 January 2023]
- Moss, Candida. 2013. *The Myth of Persecution: How Early Christians Invented a Story of Martyrdom*. HarperCollins. Overdrive
- Ophir and others. 2022. 'Weaponizing reproductive rights: a mixed-method analysis of White nationalists' discussion of abortions online', *Information, Communication & Society*, 1-26 <<https://doi.org/10.1080/1369118X.2022.2077654>>
- Right Wing Watch Blog. 2014. *RWW News: Huckabee: Abortion Rights & Gay Marriage Doom America, Legal Abortion Worse Than Holocaust*, online video recording, YouTube, 25 November <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IwG3hVaD7xs>. [accessed 24 November 2022]
- Roesch, Claudia. 2022. 'A Contested Pill: Transnational Controversies over Medical Abortion in Germany, France, and the United States', *Journal of Contemporary History*, 57.4, 895-916
<<https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/epub/10.1177/00220094221099850>>
- Rosentiel, Tom. 2010. 'Public Sees a Future Full of Promise and Peril', *Pew Research Center* <<https://www.pewresearch.org/2010/06/22/public-sees-a-future-full-of-promise-and-peril/>> [accessed 23 November 2022]
- Ruiz, Jean-Pierre. 2018. 'Revelation' in *The New Oxford Annotated Bible: New Revised Standard Version With The Apocrypha*, ed. by Michael D. Coogan and others (New York NY: Oxford University Press), pp. 2153-2180.
- Shaw, Joshua. 2022. 'The ethical indefensibility of heartbeat bills', *Bioethics*, 36, 58-864
<<https://doi.org/10.1111/bioe.13068>>
- Smith, Gregory, Michael Rotolo, and Patricia Tevington. 2022. '45% of Americans Say U.S. Should Be a 'Christian Nation'', *Pew Research Center*
<<https://www.pewresearch.org/religion/2022/10/27/45-of-americans-say-u-s-should-be-a-christian-nation/>>
- The Kids Guide. [n.d.]. *The Kids Guide* <<https://thekidsguide.com/president-trump/>> [accessed 25 January 2023]
- Truth and Liberty Coalition. [n.d.]. 'Dr. Rick Scarborough', *Truth and Liberty Coalition*.
<<https://truthandliberty.net/bio/dr-rick-scarborough/>> [accessed 2 January 2023]

Wainwright, Arthur W. 1993. *Mysterious Apocalypse: Interpreting the Book of Revelation* (Eugene: Wipf and Stock Publishers)

Weiland, Noah. 2018. 'Evangelicals, Having Backed Trump, Find White House 'Front Door Is Open'' *The New York Times*, February 7
<<https://nhclc.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/27/2021/03/Evangelicals-Having-Backed-Trump-Find-White-Ho-use-%E2%80%98Front-Door-Is-Open-The-New-York-Times.pdf>> [accessed November 24 2022]

Wilson, Joshua C. 2020. 'Striving to Rollback or Protect *Roe*: State Legislation and the Trump-Era Politics of Abortion', *The Journal of Federalism*, 50, 370-397
<<https://doi.org/10.1093/publius/pjaa015>>

Zauzmer, Julie. 2018. 'As Trump picks Kavanaugh for the Supreme Court, evangelicals rejoice: 'I will vote for him again'', *The Washington Post*, July 9
<<https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/acts-of-faith/wp/2018/07/09/as-trump-picks-a-supreme-court-justice-evangelicals-rejoice-i-will-vote-for-him-again/>> [accessed November 29 2022]