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► **To cite this version:**

Blandine Chelini-Pont, Robin Presthus. Debating the Religious Right's Trump Endorsement and Gender: Macho Descriptive Identity or Substantive Pragmatism?. *Strictly Observant: Religion, Gender and the State* Wolf Institute. Westminster College, Mar 2019, Cambridge, United Kingdom. hal-02272508

HAL Id: hal-02272508

<https://amu.hal.science/hal-02272508v1>

Submitted on 27 Aug 2019

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CONFERENCE STRICTLY OBSERVANT RELIGION, GENDER AND THE STATE

25-26 March 2019

Woolf Institute

Westminster College

Cambridge

Debating the Religious Right's Trump Endorsement and Gender: Macho Descriptive Identity or Substantive Pragmatism?

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I. Presentation of the Paradox

It is late 2015 and GOP nominees are carving up the conservative electorate in hopes of consolidating a base significant enough to win the ticket— the climate is not entirely unlike the late 19th century Scramble for Africa. One thing is certain, in recent years garnering the coveted Evangelical vote (which, incidentally, generally encompasses not only Evangelicals, but also conservative Catholics) has been indispensable to the winning the Republican nomination. Though Trump now enjoys the unwavering support of religious conservatives, it is important to note the

significant shift in support between April and September 2015,¹ when religious conservatives donned their MAGA caps and joined the Trump bandwagon, so to speak.

The paradoxical support of a leader whose past and present has been marred by sexual misconduct and a seemingly unrepentant tendency toward misogyny, by an electorate which exalts the sacred call to fidelity and respect in marriage, can be understood through two hypotheses on gender and political representation.

First, the Descriptive Identity hypothesis posits that the Macho archetype that characterizes Trump somehow resonates with conservative Evangelical and Catholic observants. It appears that the Trump candidacy has coincided with a masculine revival among conservative Christians in the U.S which started in the 1970s with antifeminist Phyllis Schlafly and her famous STOP ERA campaign. This revival is characterized by a strict demarcation of gender roles, particularly focusing on masculinity, which encourages the acceptance and expression of men's natural tendencies toward war, conquest, and domination and women's innate propensity toward fragility, vulnerability, and sentimentality.

The Substantive Pragmatism hypothesis posits that, in light of their painful losses concerning same-sex marriage and expanding abortion rights, conservative Christians endorsed the candidate most capable of defending their interests in the Executive, regardless of how much (or little) the candidate looked, talked, or thought like them. This hypothesis positions the recent flurry of Evangelical literature on gender not as a revival of some 'traditional' or static religious conceptualization of gender, but rather as a hitherto unarticulated assertion of 'natural truths' via religious arguments. This assertion can be considered as both reactive and nevertheless, rational counter-discourse on who men and women are, according to God and the Gospel, juxtaposed with what is perceived to be the current movement legislating moral deviance in American society: The Gender revolution.

Let us first consider the case of the Descriptive Identity Hypothesis.

II. Descriptive Identity Hypothesis

This hypothesis was inspired by the unsurprisingly strong coalition between Republicans and white evangelicals for the past thirty years, brought to a head by Trump's 2016 candidacy 2016.

¹ Pew Research study: *Shift in support, Evangelicals and Trump between April and September*.

80% of white evangelicals voted for Donald Trump, according to a Pew Research Center post-electoral survey. In addition, during the same period, Republican Congress members remained 100% Christian and 70-75% Protestant, in fact the mid-term 2018 elections brought no changes to the religious landscape of congress, except for one Republican Jewish senator. But, nevertheless, how was it possible that the Evangelicals, who arguably measure highest in religiosity when compared to the rest of the American religious landscape, the electorate so committed to moral and family values, could have supported Donald Trump, as soon as the primaries began?

How could the endorsement of America's most fervent electorate remain so unabashed in the face of Trump's incessantly reasserted toxic masculinity and disregard for human respect— two character traits which would seem to be diametrically opposed to their own ethos? How could they have accepted as their political champion an irreligious man, who has been married several times, who is known for marital infidelity, sexual predation, objectifying women, racist rhetoric, and disdain for the poor? The same question can be asked of conservative Catholics who disapproved of Trump during the primaries (March 2016/April 2016), before changing their position in September, despite their leaders several calls to not to vote for Trump.

The hypothesis of scholar Kristin Du Metz (Calvin College) in her article "Donald Trump and militant masculinity" in the review *Religion and Politics*, January 17, 2017, caught our attention. She posited that many Evangelicals did not vote for Trump despite their beliefs, but because of them! She asserted that Donald Trump's macho attitude was behind his great success with the evangelical public as well as, to a lesser extent, with many conservative Catholics, following in the steps of Phyllis Schlafly, one of the most famous antifeminist and Catholic conservatives of the past who, describing Trump at the extreme end of her life just before she passed, as "an old-fashioned gentleman who prioritizes family."

Trump's Attitude: Make America Macho Again

During the Presidential campaign and consistently ever since, Donald Trump has demonstrated his virility through verbal and behavioral aggression, inciting violence (talking about pulling out his gun in New York), and making personal attacks against his enemies. His aggressiveness compliments his sexism: He didn't hesitate to mock women either in the media or politics that he deemed "without sex appeal." He was caught, during the campaign, by incontestable records, legitimating sexual predation, in the style of a vulgar *mafioso* saying, "I'm automatically

attracted to beautiful—I just start kissing them. It’s like a magnet. Just kiss. I don’t even wait. When you’re a star, they let you do it. You can do anything. Grab ’em by the pussy.”²

Otherwise, Trump’s noisy and repetitive rhetoric on “making America Great Again,” as well as (we are made to understand) respected and intimidating, was also coupled with his ostentatious respect for "strong" countries and strong men alike, such as Putin or Erdogan, an admiration he has continued to publicly disseminate, since he became President, all the while showing little respect and confidence for democratic leaders of longstanding allied countries. He denigrates what he calls the weak/open European Union and weak/feminine Germany (referring to Chancellor Merkel’s leadership).

During his campaign, Donald Trump, then counseled by Steve Bannon (a man now working as a freelance lobbyist for European populists) labeled his political adversaries as defeatist liberals and unpatriotic Americans, while at the same time denouncing his international enemies (China and Muslims in general, and Mexican immigrants in particular).

How could such a narrative attract Evangelical voters? Kristin Du Metz asserts that there is indeed some echo of Trump’s Macho attitude within the "masculinist" culture demonstrated by far-right evangelicals, or groups presenting themselves as Evangelical, in current American media.

The Roots and Growth of Christian Masculinism

We do not know to what extent this culture is truly evangelical, because we are not sociologists specialized in American Evangelicalism, but rather historians of ideas. We can, however, find some traces of a Christian masculinist movement in religious milieus in the beginning of the 1970s and can trace its growth since then. This movement is rooted in a religious and cultural reaction against radical feminism and anti-Vietnam pacifism from the sixties and the seventies. At first, an antifeminist or “feminine” reaction surfaced, primarily through the work of Catholic activists, in defense of motherhood, as motherhood was seen, not as an undue burden for women not desiring it, but as the spiritual purpose of the feminine sex (see Clara Booth Luce, Phyllis Schlafly). In addition to that movement, an Evangelical reconceptualization of sexual difference emerged, asserting gender roles intended by God for each sex. Its theoretical framework was

² Arrowood, Emily (October 7, 2016). "The Very Definition of Sexual Assault". U.S. News. Accessible online: <https://www.usnews.com/opinion/articles/2016-10-07/hot-mic-catches-donald-trump-bragging-about-sexual-assault>

furnished by Dr. James Dobson's writings and vision of the protective/dominating male archetype as the result of a so-called "Judeo-Christian concept of masculinity."

Elsewhere, the anti-communist culture from Catholics and evangelicals played an important role in the public support of many religious leaders of the continuation of the Vietnam war. Considering the war to be a clear demonstration of the communist threat against freedom and faith, during the Nixonian withdrawal from Vietnam and recognition of Communist China, many Catholics and evangelicals considered the withdrawal a cowardly abandonment and an affront to the righteous American army and its noble determination to contain and destroy communism. A new discourse thus emerged, advocating for strong and courageous men, not the long-haired youth with no respect for authority, but real men to defend the country and the entire world from the evils of communism. With that discourse, according to Ann Loveland,³ the evangelicals consummated their special relationship with (and engagement in) the U.S. army.

The STOP-ERA Movement (1972-1975) exemplifies the conjunction of both antifeminist and new male valorization discourse, developed by the first interdenominational Christian coalition ever attempted. It would soon be called the Religious Right. According to Donald Mathews and Jane DeHart,⁴ a new interdenominational Christian movement, animated by a Catholic anti-feminist activist, Phyllis Schlafly and some future founders of the Moral Majority including Howard Philips then activist in the short-lived movement called the *Christian Voice*. STOP ERA would succeed in stopping the Equal Rights Amendment, whilst this amendment was considered as absolutely consensual before their campaign of counter-communication

Rejecting the previous amendment as civilizational regression, the STOP-ERA Movement depicted it as destroying a woman's femininity, forcing them to be like men, to be competitive, career-oriented, sexually promiscuous, inattentive to their children and family, eligible for wartime service and for all of the physically arduous work typically reserved for men. Masculinizing women, as ERA intended, would have been a matter of national security. ERA would have usurped from men their role of protection and provision and would have jeopardized American defense.

Promise Keepers and Evangelical Masculinist Literature

In the 1990s, the issue of gay-rights and new publicly-supported theories on the social construction of gender roles, awakened a religious counter-mobilization, reaffirming and reasserting

³ *American Evangelicals and the US Military. 1942-1993*. Louisiana State university Press. 1996

⁴ *Sex, Gender and the Politics of ERA*. OUP. 1992.

gender roles in concert with a wider attempt to reestablish a Christian society, ripped from its roots and foundations by secularists, homosexual activists, feminists, and liberals.

Part of this mobilization, the *Promise Keepers* movement, an evangelical campaign led by James Dobson (and others) organized a rally in Washington D.C. of about 800,000 men in 1997. Dobson said, "Promise Keepers is a men's ministry committed to igniting and uniting men to become warriors who will change their world through living out the Seven Promises."

Several bestsellers, written by well-known evangelicals, developed the ideological framework of the *Promise Keepers* movement. *Bringing up Boys* by Dobson in 2001, with over one million copies sold, accused a liberal education system of a "war on boys," waged by the noisy band of feminists and others, who "attack[ed] the essence of masculinity" and wanted to make girls like boys and boys like girls, meaning "feminized, emasculated, and wimps." *Future Men*, written by Douglas Wilson in 2002, argued that boys need to be educated as warriors, because masculinity necessarily comports domination, "like Adam, men were created to exercise dominion over the Earth." Wilson invented a kind of fist-fighting theology, including an indispensable training in how to use weapons. *Wild at Heart*, by John Eldredge (2001) affirmed that the difference between men and women lies in the soul. The soul of a man is "profoundly militaristic" because "God created men to long for a battle to fight, and an adventure to live, a beauty to rescue." Eldredge concludes, "If we believe that man is created in the image of God, we must remember the Lord is a warrior." Aggressiveness is then part of masculine design. *King Me: What Each Son Wants from his Father* was written in 2005 by Steve Farrar, asserted that the Twin Towers rescue workers who gave their lives in the rescue mission would not have been so heroic had they not been raised as "true men" with "true virility" (and Christian) values:

"When those two planes hit the Twin Towers on September 11, what we suddenly needed were masculine men (...) Feminized men don't walk into burning buildings. But masculine men do. That's why God creates masculine men to be masculine... the trend today is to major and minor on the warrior, but in the trenches, you don't want tenderness..."

A Consequence of September 11: The Birth of the Christian Warrior Culture

After September 11th, the call for virile heroes among Evangelical mediatized leaders increased. They asserted that America needed strong, heroic men to defend the country both domestically and internationally. In this discourse, the figure of the Christian soldier (a revival of the Crusader) fueled a military imaginary and was strongly influenced by the strong representation of

evangelicals in the US Army.⁵ Biblical references like the conquest of Canaan, were used to legitimize the Afghanistan war and would be used again to during the Iraqi war (2002-2003). Unlike the international anti-Taliban coalition led by the US, which was created by the U.N. Security Council, the unilateral war against Iraq was nevertheless supported by 77% of evangelicals, combining national and religious revenge for a terrorist attack for which Iraq was not responsible, in order to eradicate the global threat that Iraq represented (Weapons of mass destruction), which it did not have. The Southern Baptist Church as well as Jerry Falwell declared “God is pro-war” in 2004 and supported American intervention in Iraq, despite the critics and lack of support of many mainline Protestant churches in the US. Evangelical public opinion has also been more receptive to the harsh punishment of convicted terrorists. They support, more than others, the use of torture in order to dismantle terrorist networks. The Apostle Paul’s famous metaphor, in his *Letter to the Ephesians*, that Christians should take up the “shield of faith, helmet of salvation, and sword of the Spirit”, was used literally on religious posters, to call the entire country to wartime mobilization as well as to represent American soldiers at war against evil. Many considered this to be exaggeration and condemned the posters because of their over-aggressiveness, citing statements accusing liberal Protestants, feminists, and homosexuals to be responsible, more than Islamist terrorists, for American decline and destruction. In 2005, Pat Robertson publicly said that he hoped for a nuclear bomb attack on the State Department, for its reluctance to heed to the excessive demands of the American military in Afghanistan.

Islamophobia was without doubt a deep feeling among American opinion during the 2000s and it was echoed in the Republican party. But it was evangelical leaders who made the harshest proposals, reminiscent of Samuel Huntington’s *Clash of civilization* thesis, that Islam is a violent religion (Franklin Graham 2001), that Muhammad was a terrorist (Falwell 2002), and finally that “there is a worldwide war against Christianity... I definitively hate Islam” (Paul Rand 2016).

To come back to the Evangelical endorsement of Trump, as Evangelical writer Dobson explained, “Well. Boys are boys.” The lack of outrage from famous Evangelical leaders concerning Trump’s heinous and sexist remarks could be understood as the same sense of masculinity. They might agree with Dobson, when he called Christians to "cut Trump some slack." Rev. Robert Jeffress, from the Southern Baptist Church of Dallas insisted, “I want the meanest, toughest, son-of-

⁵ David Seay, Michael L. Weinstein, *With God on Our Side. One Man's War Against an Evangelical Coup in America's Military*, Thomas Dunn Books. 2006.

you-know-what I can find in that role, and I think that's where many Evangelicals are.” Strong man rhetoric appeared to be the most attractive for evangelical voters, mixed with the traditional image of the virile (white) man. Paradoxically, the more Trump’s vulgarity and toxic masculinity were denounced by the Left and the media, the more the supporters of militant masculinity were certain that Trump was the best fit for the job. In this way, it was logical for Trump to mock Hillary Clinton for her inability to do the job, to be the boss, because of her gender and to degrade her (and other Democratic female figures) as unattractive. To conclude, Kristin Du Metz insisted on the fact that evangelicals accepted the Trump’s caricature of manhood as their own, because he appeared at a time when evangelicals felt beleaguered, even persecuted. Issues related to gender, from the cultural sea of change concerning same-sex marriage and transgender bathroom laws, to the Hyde amendment and the contraceptive mandate, are at the center of their perceived victimization. The threat of terrorism looms large, American power isn’t what it used to be, and nearly two-thirds of white Evangelicals harbor fears that a once-powerful nation has become too soft and feminine. In Donald Trump, they believe to have found the leader they have been looking for.

III. Substantive Pragmatism Hypothesis

Erecting an Electorate: The Mobilization of Religious Conservatives

The end of the Regan presidency in 1989 marked the end of a conservative golden age in American politics and was illustrated solemnly by the disbanding of the Moral Majority—the organizational motor responsible, in large part, for consolidating the Evangelical electorate. Yet, despite the organization’s institutional end and failure to reverse the Supreme Court decisions banning school prayer and authorizing abortion, its leader, Jerry Falwell, proclaimed victory saying, “our mission is accomplished,” and later “The religious right is solidly in place and... the religious conservatives in America are now in for the duration.”⁶ Conservative Christians, who had been notably absent from the political stage since their humiliating defeat during the Scopes Monkey Trial of 1926 (over the teaching of Evolution in public schools), had successfully reemerged as a formidable force in American politics and had outgrown their initial organizational network. Over the next twenty years they would continue to exercise political influence through increasingly

⁶ Peter Steinfels, “Moral Majority to Dissolve; Says Mission Accomplished,” *New York Times*, June 12, 1989.

sophisticated, articulate, and well-funded media networks, society and culture ministries⁷, and political action committees.

The culture wars continued and time proved that the mobilization of religious conservatives accomplished during the 1970s and 80s, not only among their own churches (which became the largest and some of the most sophisticated⁸ in the country), but also in the political arena (every Republican presidential candidate since Reagan has sought out the Evangelical endorsement) was there to stay. Despite a highly mobilized electorate, after the two-term Obama White House, it was unclear how effective Evangelicals had been in realizing their political objectives. The Bush-era limits on abortion were lifted, same-sex marriage was legalized in 2016, and Obama-care, including public financing of abortion and contraception, had become the law of the land. For a socially-conservative electorate, primarily issue-based, Evangelicals had little to celebrate in 2016 and much to consider as they scrutinized the numerous nominees vying for their, still indispensable, endorsement.

Infirming the Descriptive Identity Hypothesis

A nuanced look at the reasons why conservatives voted Trump reveals three arguments which weaken the descriptive identity hypothesis. First, the highly polarized nature of the current American political climate, especially concerning presidential politics, makes it nearly impossible for non-swing groups to escape the two-party dichotomy. Unlike traditional swing groups, which are significantly less partisan, religious conservatives have always been characterized by a high level of partisanship because of their commitment to social issues like abortion, traditional marriage, and religious liberty. The question in a GOP primary is not whether or not white Evangelicals will vote democrat or republican—they are already a “safe” electorate, but rather, which republican candidate will white Evangelicals endorse?

Polarization in American politics over the last few decades has not been without consequences, many of which impacted 2016 voter behavior. Quantitative research^{9,10} has shown that polarization is responsible for the increasing lack of civility in politics as well as the rising levels

⁷ The dissolution of the Moral Majority in 1989 marked the point where many conservative Evangelical ministries seeking to influence politics were no longer deemed to qualify as charitable organizations with 501(c)(3) status, as they had previously, and instead continued their advocacy as social welfare organizations with 501(c)(4) status.

⁸ In terms of organizational networks (Para-church organizations, publishing houses, and educational institutions).

⁹ Iyengar, Shanto, GauravSood, and Yphtach Lelkes. 2012. “Affect, Not Ideology: A Social Identity Perspective on Polarization.” *Public Opinion Quarterly* 76:405–31.

¹⁰ Mason, Lilliana. 2015. “‘I Disrespectfully Agree’: The Differential Effects of Partisan Sorting on Social and Issue Polarization.” *American Journal of Political Science* 59:128–45.

of animosity between members of the opposite party. The vilification of the opposing party has made members prisoners to their party because “no good American could vote for X.” Polarization has segregated the electorate and skewed perceptions of the ideology of the other party. A May 2016 Pew Research study showed that while both democrats and republicans view their own party’s ideology as moderate, they view the opposing party as much more ideologically extreme.¹¹ The prevalence of polarization in American politics today weakens the Descriptive Identity Hypothesis. Evangelicals endorsed Trump not because they thought that he incarnated their values and convictions, but because the civic/ideological bridge that they would have needed to cross in order to vote for anyone else had already been burned.

Second, many voters—not just evangelicals and other religious conservatives, reported that their 2016 ballot was not so much “a vote for,” but rather “a vote against.” This explication has been applied to voters both on the left and the right who, far from believing their candidate to be the perfect politician, believed to be voting for the lesser of two evils. Numerous political commentators predicted that Clinton’s extensive political career (inevitably flecked by the scandal and unpopular political decisions that come with a lifelong career in politics) would alienate her from moderates and independents. Beyond Clinton not appealing to minorities and working-class whites in the same way that Obama did, conservative Christians perceived her as a pro-abortion, pro-LGBTQ, far-left democrat, wanting to limit religious liberty. To put it simply, from the moment they were born-again (politically speaking) in the 1970s, religious conservatives have been decrying and combating the moral degradation of American society through the ballot box, and a vote for Clinton would have been a vote against the realization of that goal. The evangelical endorsement of Trump must not be understood in such a reductivist way as to imagine that it was only, as the term suggests, an endorsement, but also, and perhaps more significantly, a disapproval of the alternative.

Finally, poll data¹² measuring the evangelical endorsement of Trump early on¹³ in the Primary season reveal interesting nuances when analyzed according to the attendance variable, a fundamental indicator of religiosity. The study found that “Trump received much more support during the GOP primaries from Republicans who do not attend religious services every week” (28 % steady supporters and 36% skeptic) when compared to those who attend weekly (15% steady

¹¹ <http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2016/08/23/partisans-see-opposing-party-as-more-ideological-than-their-own/>

¹² <http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2016/07/21/churchgoing-republicans-once-skeptical-of-trump-now-support-him/>

¹³ Between December 2015 and April 2016.

supporters and 57% skeptics). These data indicate that among the *most* religious, Trump was viewed less favorably than other GOP candidates. A second study¹⁴ showed that in the beginning of the primary season (March 2016), among evangelicals who attended church weekly or more, Ted Cruz lead by 16 percentage points over Trump. The 94% Evangelical endorsement of Trump only occurred after Trump had won the Republican nomination. These data infirm the descriptive identity hypothesis because if evangelicals believed Trump to truly embody their religious values and interests, then one would expect the most fervent believers to have supported his candidacy since the beginning of the primary. Supporting him only after he won the GOP nomination merely demonstrates that given no other options, they would rather support Trump than Clinton.

The Solution of Substantive Pragmatism:

After Trump's win of the GOP primary, the world watched with bated breath as a *bonafide* miracle stupefied political onlookers: a supermajority of conservative Christians put their support behind Trump for the general election. It appeared, to most, that one of two phenomena had taken place. Either American evangelicals had "sold their soul to the Devil" and allied themselves to someone diametrically opposed to the religious and social values that they had spent the last nearly fifty years preaching to the rest of America; or evangelicals found in Donald Trump the macho, tell-it-like-it-is maverick that the rest of America was either too damned or too dumb to elect themselves. Making generalizations about the motivations behind voter behavior in a single election and then applying them to roughly 62.2 million people¹⁵ involves some inherent risks, but evidence gives reason to believe that rather than a simple case of misogynistic hypocrisy, the real story behind the evangelical endorsement is a bit more complex. Let us consider the evidence for what might be termed, the substantive pragmatism hypothesis.

Let us begin with the second part of the qualification. The evangelical endorsement of Trump was foremost a choice of pragmatism and strategy in the face of political necessity. In recent years, American evangelicals have experienced heavy losses in most of their fundamental policy battles and less-than-desired support from their Republican representatives. One of Trump's earliest and most outspoken evangelical supporters, Jerry Falwell Jr., president of Liberty University and son

¹⁴ <http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2016/04/04/trump-has-benefited-from-evangelicals-support-but-hes-not-the-first-choice-of-the-most-committed/>

¹⁵ The Pew Research Center's 2014 Religious Landscape Study estimated the number of U.S. adults that identify with the term evangelical to be roughly 62.2 million, or about 25.4% of the total population. <http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2018/03/01/5-facts-about-u-s-evangelical-protestants/>

of the co-founder of the Moral Majority, Jerry Falwell Sr., criticized past evangelical-Republican alliances calling for a new more dependable partnership, “after Ronald Reagan – and even with Reagan a little bit – the Republicans betrayed evangelicals. When they were in office, they didn’t take actions that were consistent with their campaign rhetoric.”¹⁶ Trump promised sympathy and unconditional advocacy of their interests in the Executive, tailor re-making his policy views and deepest personal convictions to fit what evangelicals needed to see in their presidential candidate.

Founder of *Focus on the Family*, and one of the most influential Evangelical leaders of the past thirty years, James Dobson, endorsed Donald Trump in June 2016 after Trump promised to appoint Pro-Life justices to the Supreme Court. In an interview with *Christianity Today*, Dobson explained his logic:

“I’m not under any illusions that he is an outstanding moral example,” and that “In many ways, this is a single-issue election because it will affect every dimension of American life: the makeup of the Supreme Court... The next president will nominate perhaps three or more justices whose judicial philosophy will shape our country for generations to come.”¹⁷

Since the mobilization of evangelicals and conservative Catholics in the 1980s, the guiding principle has been constant: “rescue America from moral decay.” If we accept Dobson’s logic, as at least one quarter of the American electorate did, ensuring Supreme Court justices would be sympathetic to Evangelical interests was worth a Trump endorsement. It was pragmatism or purity, and it seems like at least this time around, American evangelicals chose to vote for pragmatism.

The above quote from Dobson also reveals a second truth, which defends the claim of *substantive* pragmatism in the hypothesis. Dobson acknowledges the moral disconnect between evangelical teachings and Trump’s apparent moral bankruptcy, but decides that such an unholy alliance is necessary for the survival of the country “for generations to come.” Other evangelical leaders suggest that the President can be pardoned as long as he continues to hold up his end of the political bargain. Tony Perkins, the president of the evangelical activist group, *The Family Research Council*, speaking of Trump’s sex scandal with porn actress Stormy Daniels, said, “We kind of gave

¹⁶ Interview with *The Guardian*. October 2018. Accessible online: <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2018/oct/09/christian-leader-jerry-falwell-urges-trump-support-hes-a-moral-person>

¹⁷ “James Dobson: Why I Am Voting for Donald Trump.” *Christianity Today*. <https://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2016/october/james-dobson-why-i-am-voting-for-donald-trump.html>

him—‘All right, you get a mulligan. You get a do-over here.’ And later concerning the president’s effectiveness in representing evangelical interests:

“I don’t think this president is using evangelicals. ... I think he genuinely enjoys the relationship that had developed. He has found, I think—and he’s a very transactional president. Trust is important to him. Loyalty is important to him, and I think in this transaction, he realizes, ‘Hey, these are people I can count on, because they don’t blow with the political winds,’” he says. “It’s a developing relationship, but I’ll have to say this: From a policy standpoint, he has delivered more than any other president in my lifetime... Whenever the policy stops, and his administration reverts to just personality...that’s where I believe the president will be in trouble.”¹⁸

To this day, Trump continues to enjoy strong approval ratings from evangelicals and has received their highest praise for his appointment of two pro-religious liberty justices to the Supreme Court and his commitments on Israel, abortion, and religious liberty. Analysts all agree, the 2016 election brought about many unexpected results, not in the least was the massive evangelical support for Trump. The 2016 election marks a clear change in the way evangelicals work with GOP politicians. In the past, candidates needed to look like evangelicals (Bush, Romney, Reagan) in order to represent them effectively. There is no telling what 2020 and 2024 will hold for evangelicals in politics, but for the time being, it seems as though a purely substantive model of representation is coherent with the expectations of America’s most religious electorate, as long as the candidate makes good on his or her promises.

¹⁸ Tony Perkins interview with *Politico* in January 2018. Accessible online: <https://www.politico.com/magazine/story/2018/01/23/tony-perkins-evangelicals-donald-trump-stormy-daniels-216498>