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Jerry Falwell's Use of Theological Methodology for Making Political Claims: A Critique

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JERRY FALWELL'S USE
OF THEOLOGICAL METHODOLOGY
FOR MAKING POLITICAL CLAIMS:
A CRITIQUE

A Thesis Submitted
in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Designation
University Honors

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Introduction

The connection between politics and religion has fascinated me for some time now. When it came time to choose a thesis topic, I knew that I wanted to write about something involving the relationship between these two subjects. After conversations with a host of different individuals, I realized that the real issue that interested me was the relationship between conservative politics and conservative Christianity. I wondered why the two were so similar in their rhetoric and beliefs. Previously to the researching and writing of this paper, I had done only casual reading in this specific area. I knew little about the formation of the “Religious Right” and its evolution through time. At the recommendation of my advisor, Dr. Jerome Soneson, I decided to explore the life of Jerry Falwell and his impact in the area of politics and religion. My knowledge was limited concerning this man as well. In fact, I knew Jerry Falwell only as the man that thought a Teletubby could be homosexual.

After a semester of research, I developed five questions to which I wished to find answers: 1) What were the specifications of Jerry Falwell’s theological methodology? 2) How did Jerry Falwell use this methodology to make political claims? 3) Was Jerry Falwell consistent with this use of theological methodology in politics? 4) Was Falwell’s use of theological methodology valid? 5) Was this use of theological methodology congruent with the principles of our Constitution? The first two questions address the background information regarding Jerry Falwell’s political and religious action. The final three address the relationship between Falwell’s politics and theology, therefore comprising the critique portion of the paper. I feel that these five questions categorize and help address the larger question I asked before my research had started: why are conservative American politics and conservative Christianity so similar?

In this paper, I will explore each of these questions in depth. Describing Falwell's theological methodology entails detailing both his biographical background and the background of the faith tradition in which he participated. Relating this methodology to politics required that I first show that Falwell does indeed use his theology for political claims and then the ways in which he does so. Specifically, I explored the formation of Falwell's lobbyist group, The Moral Majority, and the ways it uses religion in politics. Examining the consistency of this process necessitated that I look at the different claims that Falwell made and the reasoning he gave to support such claims. Falwell often made political claims based on different Biblical passages, themes, and messages. I wished to see if he was consistent with these claims, given his own criteria for Biblical interpretation. To test the validity of his methodology, I researched Falwell's interpretation of American history and government. I researched his assertions regarding our Founding Fathers and the Constitution. Falwell often gave support for his involvement in politics with claims that it was congruent with the actions of our Founding Fathers. My goal was to find out if he was correct in saying this, and if not, the reasons he would have for making such claims. Finally, I wanted to explore the ethics of his use of theological methodology for political claims. Were they positive or negative? Were they congruent with the ethical system in place in our government?

My intentions with this entire project were first and foremost to present Falwell and his theological methodology in an unbiased way. I then wished to critique Falwell and his claims objectively. I do not intend, at any time, to attack the specific ideas in which Falwell believed. Each issue I address would take its own separate paper to consider fairly. However, I do feel that it is necessary to address the different issues about which Falwell made claims. This, I feel, helps provide sufficient background information for a thorough critique.

In this thesis paper, I will make the following claims. Jerry Falwell does use his theological methodology to make political claims. The use of this theological methodology is inconsistent within his stated framework of Biblical interpretation. It is also invalid, owing to his narrow view of the history of the United States. Finally, I will show that his use of theological methodology for making political claims lacks principle, as defined by the US Constitution and its legal interpretation.

What were the specifications of Jerry Falwell's theological methodology?

One cannot begin to understand Jerry Falwell's theological methodology without first understanding the world in which he was raised. Falwell was born on August 11, 1933 along with his twin brother, Gene (Strober & Tomczak, 1979). Though conservative Christianity was common in his native Virginia, Falwell was hesitant to embrace it. His father was an alcoholic and largely absent from his childhood. His mother made Falwell go to church every Sunday. Despite this, he was considered somewhat of a troublemaker as a youth. He even states that he was the leader of a gang in his hometown (Strober & Tomczak, 1979). Falwell was also a very bright young man. He received honors as the valedictorian of his high school graduating class (Strober & Tomczak, 1979). However, he was not able to attend his graduation because of a prank he pulled his senior year: stealing and passing out free lunch passes to the football team (Snowball, 1991).

It was in college that Falwell would begin his work in organized religion. Originally planning to work in mechanical engineering, Falwell changed majors, schools, and careers after a conversion-experience at a local church (Strober & Tomczak, 1979). Falwell underwent what is referred to as an altar-call. This involves a church service where individuals are questioned about their salvation. Anyone concerned about this is then asked to speak privately with a pastor, commonly resulting in that person being saved, or converted to Christianity (Strober & Tomczak, 1979). Falwell's conversion experience resulted in him transferring from Lynchburg College in Virginia to Bible Baptist College in Missouri where he helped teach Sunday school classes at a local church (Strober & Tomczak, 1979). Between the classes Falwell was taking and his work in the church, Falwell's religious views began to develop. Upon graduating,

Falwell returned to Virginia to open his own place of worship, Thomas Road Baptist Church (Strober & Tomczak, 1979).

As the head of a church, Falwell was very ambitious. It did not take long for Thomas Road's attendance to grow to one of the largest in the nation. This allowed Falwell to fund his own television show, *The Old-Time Gospel Hour*, and college, Lynchburg Baptist College (Strober & Tomczak, 1979). With these two additions, Falwell garnered national attention. This was largely owing to both the style of worship he practiced and also the principles that he preached.

Stylistically, Falwell, and other Christian preachers like him, practiced a very up-tempo church service. There was a large amount of singing, a long, impassioned sermon, and encouraged crowd participation (Strober & Tomczak, 1979). This, combined with a welcoming atmosphere and an emphasis on the promise of salvation, attracted many people in the area to come to Falwell's church.

Falwell preached and practiced within a sect of Christianity known as Fundamentalism, a faith tradition that grew out of opposition to liberalism and secular relativism within the church (Dobson & Hindson, 1981). This faction of Christianity relies on the "fundamentals" of the Christian faith. These "fundamentals" are often described historically as follows:

1. The inspiration and infallibility of Scripture.
 2. The deity of Christ (including His virgin birth).
 3. The substitutionary atonement of Christ's death.
 4. The literal resurrection of Christ from the dead.
 5. The literal return of Christ in the Second Advent
- (Dobson & Hindson, 1981, p. 7).

Falwell authored the "future-word" of *The Fundamentalist Phenomenon* by Dobson and Hindson, which he entitled: *An agenda for the Eighties*. In it, he stated his

allegiance with Fundamentalist Christianity quite plainly: “I have always made it clear that I am a Fundamentalist-Big F” (Dobson & Hindson, 1981, p. 219). Falwell also based his church upon many of the same ideals, as evidenced in the Thomas Road Baptist Church Statement of Doctrine (Harding, 2000). This statement not only professed loyalty to Fundamentalist Christianity, it also explained, in detail, what Falwell meant by each separate belief.

This included belief in the infallibility of scripture. Falwell’s church doctrine “affirm(s) that the Bible, both Old and New Testaments, though written by men, was supernaturally inspired by God so that all its words are the written true revelation of God” (Harding, 2000, p. 278). Falwell expanded on his statement in his autobiography, *Strength for the Journey*. In it, he stated that the authors of the Bible can be trusted because it was “God who inspired them. They do not contradict each other. They do not make mistakes or tell lies” (Falwell, 1987, p. 150). Falwell also commented on how God used the Bible, stating that God “is able to speak to us through the Bible and give us direction and guidance in our daily lives” (Falwell, 1987, p. 150). Falwell used the Bible in a variety of ways. He considered it “historically...accurate; geographically...correct; (and) theologically...without error” (Falwell, 1987, p. 150). This interpretation led Falwell to derive larger themes from the Bible as a whole. This included the origin of sin in the world, mentioned Biblically in Genesis 3: 1-21 (New International Version). As Falwell’s church doctrine stated:

Adam, the first man, willfully disobeyed God, bringing sin and death in the world.

As a result, all persons are sinners from conception, which is evidenced in their willful acts of sin; and they are therefore subject to eternal punishment, under the just condemnation of a holy God (Harding, 2000, p. 278).

Falwell also supported the idea of Christ as a deity and his virgin birth. His doctrine read:

We affirm that the Lord Jesus Christ is the second person of the Trinity. Eternally begotten from the Father, He is God. He was conceived by the Virgin Mary through a miracle of the Holy Spirit. He lives forever as perfect God and perfect man: two distinct natures inseparably united in one person (Harding, 2000, p. 277).

For Falwell, the substitutionary atonement for Christ's death and Christ's resurrection went hand in hand. This was because Falwell considered the entire Bible to be about Christ: "The Old Testament presents Christ as the One who is to come. The New Testament presents Christ as the One who has come" (Falwell, 1987, p. 149). His church doctrine explained the meaning of Christ's life, the central figure in the Bible:

We affirm that Jesus Christ offered Himself as a sacrifice by the appointment of the Father. He fulfilled the demands of God by his obedient life, died on the cross in full substitution and payment for the sins of all, was buried, and on the third day He rose physically and bodily from the dead. He ascended into heaven where He now intercedes for all believers (Harding, 2000, p. 278).

Finally, Falwell fully believed in Christ's return in the Second Advent, the Biblical prediction that Jesus will come back to Earth to judge mankind. Falwell stated that the "last book of the Bible, the Revelation of St. John the Divine, creates a beautiful and yet terrifying picture of those last days when God will reveal Himself in judgment and in grace to all creation" (Falwell, 1987, p. 149). This was explained in further detail in his church's statement of doctrine:

We affirm that the return of Christ for all believers is imminent. It will be followed by seven years of great tribulation, and then the coming of Christ to establish His earthly kingdom for a thousand years. The unsaved will then be raised and judged according to their works and separated forever from God in hell. The saved having been raised, will live forever in fellowship with God (Harding, 2000, p. 278-279).

Falwell saw his life and the lives of his followers as instruments to carry out the tasks set before them in the Bible: “A Fundamentalist believes in evangelism and discipleship through the local church as the proper fulfillment of the Great Commission of our Lord” (Dobson & Hindson, 1981, p. 220) This was in reference to Matthew 28: 16-20, commonly referred to as “The Great Commission,” in which Jesus commands his disciples to baptize the masses in Christ’s name. Falwell felt his congregation’s main purpose on Earth was to bring people to “salvation in Christ” (Falwell, 1987, p. 196). He trained his church members to “witness” to community members that had not yet been saved by means of phone calls, mail, and door-to-door visits (Falwell, 1987). Witnessing meant telling a person about the story of Jesus Christ’s life, death, and resurrection, or as Falwell put it, “the greatest story ever told” (Falwell, 1987, p. 200). All the while, Falwell reminded his church members that they were doing the work of the lord and that Jesus had commanded them to “take witnessing seriously” (Falwell, 1987, 217). In Falwell’s eyes, saving the eternal lives of others was of utmost importance because of the imminent apocalypse, meaning that all humans that did not believe in Jesus Christ as their savior would burn in Hell (Strober & Tomczak, 1979).

Falwell viewed the world he lived in as a corrupt place. In an outline addressing the key obstacles of the church’s mission, he lists the country’s current stances on the issues of abortion, school prayer, sex education in schools, pornography, homosexuality, the traditional family,

racial injustice, world hunger, artificial insemination, selective breeding, genetic engineering, euthanasia, national defense, the communist threat, the state of Israel, and the lack of a national Christian presence as causes for concern (Dobson & Hindson, 1981). However, more than that, he viewed them as signs that our country was in danger, calling it the “impending crisis of the hour” (Dobson & Hindson, 1981, p. 188). Citing *The Detroit Free Press*, Strober and Tomczak quoted Falwell as saying “If America gets by with her sin, God will owe an apology to Sodom and Gomorrah” (1979). This reference is to Genesis 19:1-29 in which God destroys the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah for their sexual deviancy and violence. For these reasons, Falwell supported a church movement called “Separatism,” the idea that Fundamentalist Christians should disassociate with the world. Fundamentalists based this movement on many Biblical verses, including:

“Do not be yoked together with unbelievers. For what do righteousness and wickedness have in common? Or what fellowship can light have with darkness?” (2 Corinthians 6:14)

“I urge you, brothers and sisters, to watch out for those who cause divisions and put obstacles in your way that are contrary to the teaching you have learned. Keep away from them. For such people are not serving our Lord Christ, but their own appetites. By smooth talk and flattery they deceive the minds of naive people” (Romans 16:17-18);

“If anyone comes to you and does not bring this teaching, do not take them into your house or welcome them. Anyone who welcomes them shares in their wicked work” (2 John 10-11).

Falwell supported this movement as well, especially as a separation of Church and State. In a sermon entitled “Ministers and Marches,” Falwell commented that the

“government could be trusted to correct its own ills” (Falwell, 1987, p. 337). As he saw it, a “Christian’s best contribution to social change was his or her faithfulness to (their) primary goals: studying the Word, preaching the Gospel, winning souls, building churches and Christian schools, and praying for the eventual healing of the nation” (Falwell, 1987, p.; 338).

For years, Falwell preached these messages of the Bible to his church in Lynchburg, Virginia. However, over a period in the 1970’s Falwell decided that simply working in the church was not enough. In 1973, the United States Supreme Court declared the Roe v. Wade decision, legalizing abortion nationwide (Harrison & Gilbert, 1991). Because of this decision, Falwell felt he must abandon his previous stance on Separatism (Harding, 2000). This was not an easy choice for Falwell. Not only would he be rebelling against the beliefs of his Fundamentalist Christian community, he would also be going back on years of teaching and scriptural interpretation. As Falwell put it: “I didn’t want to embarrass myself, my church, or even my Lord by wading into those political waters” (Falwell, 1987, p 339.) However, Falwell also “doubted seriously that America would survive the judgment of God because of this ‘national sin’” (Falwell, 1987, p. 340). Because Falwell viewed the Bible as God’s guide to daily living, he looked to it for direction. In it, he found a story that suggested he had been wrong about his past Separatist beliefs. Ironically, it was a story that Falwell had always thought to mean that the Church and State should remain separate entities. The story can be found in three different gospels, including Matthew 22, Mark 12, and Luke 20 (Falwell, 1987). I have included the version from Matthew below.

Then the Pharisees went out and laid plans to trap (Jesus) in his words. They sent their disciples to him along with the Herodians. “Teacher,” they said, “we know that you are a man of integrity and that you teach the way of God in accordance with the truth. You

aren't swayed by others, because you pay no attention to who they are. Tell us then, what is your opinion? Is it right to pay the imperial tax to Caesar or not?" But Jesus, knowing their evil intent, said, "You hypocrites, why are you trying to trap me? Show me the coin used for paying the tax." They brought him a denarius, and he asked them, "Whose image is this? And whose inscription?" "Caesar's," they replied. Then he said to them, "So give back to Caesar what is Caesar's, and to God what is God's." When they heard this, they were amazed. So they left him and went away (Matthew 22:15-22).

Falwell had originally interpreted this as Jesus saying there were two worlds, God's and Man's, and that "both worlds (were) to be kept separate" (Falwell, 1987, p. 344). However, further reading showed Falwell that there were in fact two more meanings to the story. The first, according to Falwell, was that Jesus had provided a "clever answer" (Falwell, 1987 p. 343). Both the Pharisees, a Jewish group that opposed Jesus, and his followers could be satisfied with his response. Yet, the second meaning showed more insight and more importantly, led Falwell to political action. As Falwell saw it, even though humans do live in two worlds, "the world of God takes precedence over the world of man" (Falwell, 1987, p. 344). This meant, according to Falwell, that "if the law of man actually comes into conflict with the law of God, we disobey man's law and pay the penalty" (Falwell, 1987, p. 344). Clearly, this new reading of scripture did not support the idea of Separatism. Falwell felt that God was using "this [new] truth to challenge (him) into political action" (Falwell, 1987, p. 344). Shortly after this rereading of scripture, he pursued the path to which he felt God had led him: using religion for political gain.

How did Jerry Falwell use this methodology to make political claims?

Because of laws concerning tax exemption, there were limits on Falwell's ability to use his church for political means (Williams, 2010). Falwell knew of these limits all too well. In 1973, the same year of the Roe v. Wade decision, the Securities and Exchange Commission charged the Thomas Road Baptist Church with tax fraud (Strober & Tomczak, 1979). This not only delayed Falwell's foray into politics, it also made him much wearier of his tax-exempt status. Because of the government's stance on the separation of Church and State, religious organizations remain largely tax-exempt (Crimm & Winer, 2011). However, when such organizations begin to voice their opinions and take action in the political realm, this exemption becomes invalid. Falwell's previous struggles involved the church's failure to obtain proper paperwork or keep their ledgers up to date (Strober & Tomczak). To avoid any further tax troubles, Falwell decided to form a "nonpartisan political organization to promote morality in public life and to combat legislation that favored the legalization of immorality" (Dobson & Hindson, 1981, p. 188).

More than simply avoiding tax troubles, Falwell saw his venture into politics as a chance to "rebuild America to the greatness it once had as a leader among the leaders in the world" (Dobson & Hindson, 1981, p. 186). However, even though Falwell had created an entirely new organization, many people still felt Falwell was violating the separation of Church and State. This criticism came not only from Separatists that were shocked to see Falwell politicize his church but also from Americans that supported the constitutional separation of religion and government (Falwell, 1987). Specifically, they were referring to the US Constitution's 1st Amendment, its common interpretation, and court cases deciding its meaning. The amendment begins with these words: "Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion,

or prohibiting the free exercise thereof” (U.S. Const. amend. I). People have taken this to mean many things, including the idea that Church and State should be separated. In 1947, this idea was supported in a 5-4 Supreme Court ruling stating: “The First Amendment has erected a wall between the Church and State. That wall must be kept high and impregnable” (Abernathy & Perry, 1977, p. 175). Because Falwell interpreted the separation of Church and State in terms of how he viewed the Founding Fathers, he did not consider his actions to be a violation of the statute.

Falwell felt he had already answered the Separatists in their condemnation of his political actions. His new reading of the Matthew 22 showed him that God wanted him to pursue a political course (Falwell, 1987). However, he also had an answer for those critical of his constitutional right to seek political action, one that he was confident in based on the history of the United States. Falwell agreed that “to our nation’s forefathers, especially Thomas Jefferson and his colleagues from our state of Virginia, the separation of Church and State had been designed to keep the government from interfering with the church” (Falwell, 1987, p. 337). Yet, Falwell did not think that this separation worked both ways. He went on to say that: “Never during the founding years of this great democracy had our forefathers meant to distance the government from the truths of the Christian faith or to prohibit Christians from applying Biblical principles in their influence on the state” (Falwell, 1987, p. 337). To Falwell, the separation of Church and State simply prevented the government from limiting religious freedom. This meant that the state could not mandate one religion for all of its citizens or demand a given religion follow certain rules. Nevertheless, Falwell also believed that our Founding Fathers were significantly impacted by Christian principles. These principles, Falwell felt, helped them create a government that “was to protect the God-given rights of the people” (Falwell, 1980, p. 69).

In Falwell's eyes, the current state of the US fell far short of the Founding Father's intentions. He stated that "Americans (had) embraced the very...government the Founding Fathers urged them to fear and hold in check" (Falwell, 1980, p. 70). Because Falwell saw the nation's founders as Godly men, the country's deviance from their intended state was a move away from God as well as the Founding Fathers. This abandonment had dire consequences according to Falwell. He was "convinced that we need a spiritual and moral revival in America if America is to survive the twentieth century" (Falwell, 1980, 264). Falwell's answer to the United States' distancing itself from its original morals resulted in his creation of a lobbying group. Falwell called it the Moral Majority.

The Moral Majority held the following stances: it was "pro-life, pro-family, pro-moral, and pro-American" (D'Souza, 1981, p. 114). Falwell expanded on these broad descriptions in his *Agenda for the Eighties*. Pro-life: "We believe that life begins at fertilization." Pro-family: "We feel that homosexual marriages and common-law marriages should not be accepted as traditional families." Pro-moral: "We oppose the illegal drug traffic in America...We oppose pornography." Pro-American: "We support the state of Israel and Jewish people everywhere...We believe that a strong national defense is the best deterrent to war" (Dobson & Hindson, 1981, p. 189-190). These were necessary positions upon which Falwell thought the majority of Americans, not just Fundamentalists, could agree. For this reason, Falwell stated that his organization was not a religious group but instead a "special-interest group of millions of Americans who share the same moral values" (Dobson & Hindson, 1981, p. 191).

Though Falwell made this claim, it becomes obvious that it was simply not true. Each issue that Falwell addressed on behalf of the Moral Majority was also something he opposed as a Fundamentalist. Not only was this true, but the very reasons he opposed such issues were

founded in Fundamentalist beliefs. The Moral Majority merely served as a front for which Falwell could take political action without getting his church in any more trouble. This becomes clear when the rhetoric from Falwell is compared with that of the Moral Majority, issue by issue (abortion, homosexual marriage, illegal drugs, pornography, national defense, and an independent Israel).

Abortion, the concern that originally spurred Falwell into political action, was something he saw as a universal evil. In his book, *Listen, America!*, Falwell stated that “no one will disagree the state exists to protect the lives of its citizens” (Falwell, 1980, p. 166). Citizenship began at conception for Falwell, and abortion meant murdering a defenseless citizen. For Falwell, “From the moment of conception any further formation of the individual is merely a matter of time, growth, and maturation” (Falwell, 1980, p. 168). These comments present the more secular arguments that Falwell had in opposition to abortion. The Moral Majority made similar claims.

Few people deny that abortion is tragic on at least some level. In secular terms, the argument about abortion normally comes down to human rights. Those in favor of abortion argue that it is the right of the woman to choose what happens to her body. People arguing against abortion argue that the child is already entitled to the rights of other citizens. Few people actually advocate that women seek out abortions. The Moral Majority stated its opposition to abortion as grounded in respect for the dignity of the human life (Snowball, 1991). Humans (especially Americans) have inalienable rights, including the right to life. The Moral Majority extended these rights into the womb.

However, Falwell also based this argument in Biblical terms. Instead of the issue relating to a citizen's rights, Falwell argued that "The Bible clearly states that life begins at conception" (Falwell, 1980, p. 167). He referenced no specific verses for this argument, only that:

In reality, life began with God, and since Adam it has simply passed from one life cell to another. That is what the Apostle Paul referred to in the Bible when he said, regarding marriage, that two shall become one flesh. When the male sperm and the female egg merge, human life is passed on, and the mother and father become one in that little baby in the womb (Falwell, 1980, p. 168).

This is the signature of the key tactic employed by Falwell. On the surface of the Moral Majority's rhetoric, there seems to be a debatable question: when do humans obtain the rights of American citizens? Further research, however, reveals that the true motivation behind Falwell's claims was strictly religious. According to Falwell, abortion was a sin propagated by America for which all humans would receive judgment (Falwell, 1987). He quoted Matthew 25:46 as describing the fate of those who do not fight abortion: "*And these [the unrighteous] shall go away into everlasting punishment: but the righteous into life eternal*" (Falwell, 1987, p. 351). Falwell argued that abortion was wrong not only because he thought God felt that way, but also because he feared what would God would do to America because of abortion. All the while, Falwell makes sure that the Moral Majority argued its points in secular terms even while the motivation behind such arguments was purely religious.

This is also true with the issue of homosexuality. The Moral Majority "oppose[d] 'special rights' for homosexuals who have chosen a perverted life-style rather than the traditional life-style" (Dobson & Hindson, 1981, p.189). In the view of the Moral Majority, "The entire homosexual movement [was] an indictment against America and [was] contributing to its

ultimate downfall” (Dobson & Hindson, 1981, p. 203). The Moral Majority feared that if homosexuality were to be considered normal, the country’s collective morality would be in question. For this reason, they opposed all legislation that would improve homosexual minority rights. This included the “‘Gay Rights’ bill, H. R. 2074, [which] would require every employer to employ a minority of homosexuals commensurate with the population in that area” (Dobson & Hindson, 1981, p. 204). Such legislation was most often proposed by Democrats or “The Left”. For this reason, the Moral Majority also produced literature claiming that liberals were attacking the traditional family and other conservative values (Snowball, 1991). Though they never mentioned Christ or God specifically, an inspection of Falwell’s reasoning for such views again quickly uncovers his religious intentions.

Falwell openly quoted the Bible as the foundation of his argument against homosexuality. In *Listen, America!* he referenced both of the following verses:

Do not have sexual relations with a man as one does with a woman; that is detestable
(Leviticus 18:22)

If a man has sexual relations with a man as one does with a woman, both of them have done what is detestable. They are to be put to death; their blood will be on their own heads (Leviticus 20:13).

To Falwell, homosexuality was not just about being non-traditional. He stated that it was “detrimental to the basic tenet of Christian society, the home. The home must be protected, and America must turn around before she suffers the wrath of God” (Falwell, 1980, p. 186). Again, his motivation for combatting homosexual rights stems not only from his view that it was anti-Christian but also that its prolonged presence would incur God’s negative judgment.

This theme of abandoning God and risking his anger also applies to his views on illegal drugs and pornography.

The Moral Majority stressed that these two issues affect children, in turn affecting the future of our country (Snowball, 1991). They supported this view with statements relating both issues to our country's perceived decline. The Moral Majority claimed that the "Proliferation of pornography into our society is striking evidence of our decadence" (Dobson & Hindson, 1981, p. 202). They claimed it was a nationally opposed issue with "nearly 80 percent of Americans" against its use (Dobson & Hindson, 1981, p. 201). They also likened all types of pornography with "child abuse" and "child seducers' manuals" (Dobson & Hindson, 1981, p. 202). In the same way, any type of drug use was seen as dangerous. They stated that "America [was] presently in the midst of a drug epidemic" (Dobson & Hindson, 1981, p. 189). Falwell echoed these views with an emphasis on Biblical support and Godly consequences.

Falwell thought that ridding America of pornography would bring it back to God. He claimed:

Pornography is that cancer that is changing the character of our republic. It is the responsibility of decent people to wake up and halt its advancement. We must bathe this country in prayer so that in the years ahead we can not only clean up America but also provide an environment and an atmosphere in which our children and our grandchildren can grow up loving God (Falwell, 1980, p. 200).

Just like the statements of the Moral Majority, Falwell's personal stance on pornography was that it affected children adversely. Additionally however, he stated that these adverse effects were the children not knowing God. He also felt that pornography, like all the other 'sins' he argued against, had dire consequences for mankind. He quoted James 1:14-15

to support his stance: “*but each person is tempted when they are dragged away by their own evil desire and enticed. Then, after desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, gives birth to death*” (Falwell, 1980, p 200). For Falwell, pornography was not just a nationally opposed issue; it posed an unnecessary risk of death. Likewise, Falwell viewed drugs as a serious concern for children: “Thousands of young people have died from drug overdoses” (Falwell, 1980, p. 234). Though most people would agree that anyone dying from a drug overdose is heartbreaking, Falwell framed these tragedies in a Biblical fashion. He rarely quoted specific verses with regards to drugs and alcohol. However, Falwell did make the claim that the Bible would prevent children from drug use:

Parents must teach their children firm biblical principles so that they will not be tempted when they are exposed to drugs or yield to peer pressure...A home founded on God’s Word will provide the love and guidance needed to avoid a life in drugs and despair (Falwell, 1980, p. 239).

As with the other issues, Falwell made sure that the Moral Majority attacked these two subjects on secular grounds. However, as the founder of the Moral Majority, it is beyond coincidence that his motivation behind these stances was rooted in religion.

Falwell often spoke of the downfall of America and the wrath of God for the nation. As I have already stated, Falwell believed that America “was founded by godly men upon godly principles to be a Christian nation” (Falwell, 1980, p. 29). He supported this view with his interpretation of United States history and several themes from the Bible. Such Biblical passages promoted the idea that governmental powers were put in place by God. Falwell quoted Romans 13: 1-5 to reinforce this view:

Let everyone be subject to the governing authorities, for there is no authority except that which God has established. The authorities that exist have been established by God. Consequently, whoever rebels against the authority is rebelling against what God has instituted, and those who do so will bring judgment on themselves. For rulers hold no terror for those who do right, but for those who do wrong...Therefore, it is necessary to submit to the authorities, not only because of possible punishment but also as a matter of conscience (Falwell, 1980, p. 15).

To Falwell, the United States owed its international power to God. All governments were put in place by God and were tools for his using. Falwell believed that the ideas he opposed were undermining God's intentions for America. He thought that instead of the government serving God, Americans had "made a god of government" (Falwell, 1980, p. 16). Instead of using the government to follow God's will, they were using it to support sin. In addition to correcting the evils he saw within the United States (homosexuality, abortion, drug use, pornography), Falwell also felt that America's position abroad needed to be strengthened. Because America had been founded by Christianity, its prominence worldwide was important. This owed to the fact that Falwell felt evangelism was the primary responsibility for Americans as individuals and the nation as a whole. The best way to accomplish this, according to Falwell, was a strong national defense and presence abroad.

The Moral Majority viewed communism as the leading threat to the American way of life. At the time, the United States was engaged in the "Cold War" with the Soviet Union, a nation that practiced communism instead of democracy. The Moral Majority supported the view of communism as threatening with a quote Alexander Solzhenitsyn, the Nobel Prize winning author and former Soviet political prisoner: "The communist ideology is to destroy your

society...The primary, the eternal concept is humanity. And communism is anithumanity” (Dobson & Hindson, 1981, p. 214). The Moral Majority claimed that Communism took away the freedoms upon which America was founded. The Moral Majority supported a strong national defense as the best way to counteract this denial of freedoms (Webber, 1991). They claimed that America had been steadily “declining in its military power for the past fifteen years” (Dobson & Hindson, 1981, p. 212). This trend, they felt, was strengthening the Soviet Union’s power worldwide. For the Moral Majority, an American military disarmament was “the final step of...ultimate surrender of our freedoms and liberties” (Dobson & Hindson, 1981, p. 213)

Falwell also warned his followers of the dangers of a weak national defense. He similarly viewed communism as a threat to the United States. However, his personal basis for this argument had little to do with personal liberties. Instead, it focused directly on God. Falwell described Karl Marx “as the nineteenth-century ‘father of communism’” (Falwell, 1980, p. 82). He quoted Marx as saying: “There is no God. When Communists deny God, they simultaneously deny every virtue and every value that originates with God” (Falwell, 1980, p. 82). For Falwell, the denial of God meant the denial of life’s purpose. Nothing could be worse to Falwell than a government that denied God; especially given the fact that he thought God gave governments their power. Falwell viewed the current troubles in America as signs that communism was in danger of taking control. He stated that “when communism takes over a nation, the first thing that happens is that the churches are shut down, preachers are killed or imprisoned, and Bibles are taken away from the people” (Falwell, 1981, p. 87). Falwell feared communism because it was an attack on God. More than that though, Falwell opposed communism because it meant that Fundamentalist Christians could not spread the word of God.

He states: “Evil forces seek to destroy America because she is a bastion for Christian missions and a base for world evangelization” (Falwell, 1980, p. 106). As Falwell’s original purpose for his church was to bring individuals to “salvation in Christ,” Communism meant the end of the Church itself (Falwell, 1987, p. 196).

Because Falwell believed that Man’s mission was to spread the gospel, he felt that the United States should be a tool to facilitate this process. Communism, as Falwell saw it, was a world without God and therefore a government against God’s plan (Webber, 1991). If it spread to the United States, communism would end the chance of the people of world discovering Jesus Christ and being saved. This, in turn, would delay the Second Advent of Christ, as Falwell believed that Jesus would only return when all of Earth’s inhabitants had heard God’s word (Webber, 1991). Falwell felt the only way to stop the spread Communism was to support a strong national defense. In turn, his stance was that a strong military was supporting God’s will. Falwell expressed communism as godless; the Moral Majority viewed it as without liberty. Both saw it as a threat to America best answered with a strong national defense.

In addition to a strong military, both Falwell and the Moral Majority supported an independent state of Israel. The Moral Majority stated that “America [would] not remain a free nation unless [it] defend[ed] the freedom of Israel” (Dobson & Hindson, 1981, p. 215). They felt this was a position shared by the majority of Americans. Though they claimed not to be “against Arabs or Palestinians,” they did believe “the efforts of the P.L.O. (Palestine Liberation Organization) [were] to exterminate the Jews and drive Israel into the sea” (Dobson & Hindson, 1981, p. 216). The Moral Majority claimed that a pro-Israel stance gave us an ally in an unstable area of the world (Webber, 1991) Peace in the Middle East was of utmost importance to, among

other things, promoting America's ideas of liberty. Maintaining our presence there helped to secure our liberties at home and abroad.

Predictably, Falwell based his support for Israel on the Bible. On the issue of Israel, Falwell claimed that the Bible was "more up to date than our newspapers" (Falwell, 1980, p.107). This is in reference to the Old Testament theme of God promising the nation of Israel to Abraham, the patriarch of Judaism. Falwell quoted Genesis 12: 2-3 to support his point:

I will make you into a great nation, and I will bless you; I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse; and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you (Falwell, 1980, 109).

There are two parts to this passage that Falwell felt applied to the current state of Israel. The promise God made to Abraham was still binding in Falwell's eyes. He felt that "God [was] faithful [so that] Israel remain[ed] a free nation" (Falwell, 1980, 107). However, always aware of what might bring downfall to America, Falwell also wished to avoid the curse of God that came from opposing Israel. He stated that "Every nation that has ever persecuted the Jews has felt the hard hand of God on them. Every nation that has ever stood with the Jews has felt the hand of God's blessing on them" (Falwell, 1980, p. 113). Support for Israel could only mean divine support for America. Finally, Falwell thought that Israel needed support because of its role in the Second Advent, or Jesus's second coming to judge mankind. He writes that in "the Book of Revelation...Israel plays a significant role" (Falwell, 1980, p 112). As Falwell believed the Bible to be the literal word of God, the Book of Revelation's predictions were to come true in Falwell's mind. Undoubtedly he felt that opposition to Israel would be disastrous to the United States from several Biblical aspects.

The pattern that emerges from the collective claims of Jerry Falwell and the Moral Majority is clear. Jerry Falwell and other Fundamentalists believed very specific ideas according to their belief that the Bible was the inerrant word of God (Falwell, 1987). These ideas were then rebranded and used by the Moral Majority to promote specific political ideals. Essentially, there remained two entities that claimed independence of each other. Yet, Jerry Falwell, the preacher, was also the leader and founder of the Moral Majority, a group that happened to share the exact same stances as him. So, it can be safely assumed that Falwell was using his lobbyist group to make political claims based on his specific theological methodology. Whether or not this should have impinged upon his rights to tax exemption is another matter. What I will focus on next is the merits of the ways he went about making these claims.

Was Jerry Falwell consistent with this political use of theological methodology?

Falwell stated that, through the different authors of the Bible, God “dictated...exactly what he wanted to say” (Falwell, 1987, p.149). He felt it was a rigorously accurate book containing God’s word. Furthermore, Falwell claimed the Bible to be the only example of God’s word: “the only infallible revelation of God’s mind” (Falwell, 1987, p. 150). Falwell felt that reading the Bible allowed God “to speak through us ...and give us direction and guidance in our daily lives” (Falwell, 1987, p. 150). Clearly, he felt the book held great power, as his church doctrine stated that it was “authoritative in all matters” (Harding, 2000, p. 278). It told the story of Jesus Christ, his death, and bodily resurrection. Humans, Falwell’s church doctrine states, could “only be saved through...repentance of sin and by faith alone in Him as Savior” (Harding, 2000, p. 278). The sins that humans needed repentance for were clearly outlined in scripture, according to Falwell. As I have stated, he supported each of his political points with either specific Biblical references or general themes. His politics, as I have shown, were a reflection of his religion. His religion, meanwhile, was a reflection of his interpretation of the Bible. I feel it is important, then, to examine if Falwell was consistent with his use of the Bible for political claims. He claimed that, “as a Christian, the Bible was to stand at the center of [his] life” (Falwell, 1987, p. 147). Did his literal interpretation of the Bible stay at the center of his politics? Or, did he merely use the Bible to support his political beliefs?

I believe that Falwell was inconsistent with his use of the Bible for political claims. To begin with, Falwell was oversimplifying the Bible when he stated that it was “inspired by God so that all its words are the written true revelation of God” (Harding, 2000, p. 278). The Bible is a very complex anthology, “a collection of writings produced and assembled in stages over more than a thousand years” (Coogan, 2010, p. 3). Falwell acknowledged this, stating:

Written over a period of 1,500 years by forty different authors spread across the Middle East, North Africa, and southern Europe, the Bible...is a collection of sixty-six different books: thirty-nine in the Old Testament, twenty-seven in the New. There are a total of 1,189 chapters and 774,000 words in the King James Version of that ancient text (Falwell, 1987, p. 147).

It would seem, then, that Falwell had an accurate historical view of the Bible. However, Falwell also believed that all of these (at least) “forty different authors” were inspired by God and did not contradict each other. Modern Biblical scholars consider the claim that the Bible has no contradictions to be unsupportable (Ehrman, 2009). Yet, this opinion does not necessarily make Falwell’s interpretation wrong. In fact, it was largely against this humanistic interpretation of the Bible that Fundamentalists originally rebelled (Dobson & Hindson, 1981). The point is that many people, including most Biblical scholars, do support the idea that the Bible is itself inconsistent. As Dr. Bart D. Ehrman puts it, “the Bible makes *better* sense if you acknowledge its inconsistencies instead of staunchly insisting that there aren’t any” (Ehrman, 2009, p. 6). Falwell was free to believe that the Bible had no contradictions. Nevertheless, his view is incredibly hard to support when the Bible is viewed in context. It is the fact that the Bible is so inconsistent that makes Falwell’s claims about it inconsistent as well. This can be easily seen when considering the verses Falwell quoted to support his political ideas.

As I have already mentioned, Falwell thought “The Bible clearly states that life begins at conception” (Falwell, 1980, p. 1670. He gave specific verses from Genesis, Luke, John, and Psalm 139: 13-16, which I have included below, to defend this claim:

For you created my inmost being; you knit me together in my mother’s womb. I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made; your works are wonderful, I know that

full well. My frame was not hidden from you when I was made in the secret place, when I was woven together in the depths of the earth. Your eyes saw my unformed body; all the days ordained for me were written in your book before one of them came to be (Falwell, 1980, p. 167)

Interpreting this verse, Falwell wrote that “these particular verses refer to the embryo” (Falwell, 1980, p. 167). As the Bible never specifically mentions the morality of abortion, it is apparent that Falwell actively searched out verses to support his point. It would appear as though Falwell advocated trying to find truth by making interpretations not necessarily intended in the text. However, Falwell’s thoughts and actions elsewhere regarding Biblical interpretation deny this implication.

In his speech, “Ministers and Marches,” Falwell chastised other Christian preachers for claiming supporting the Civil Rights Movement (Harding, 2000). Specifically, he did not like the use of their “lifting out of the Bible such instances as Moses leading the Jews out of Egypt” to compare with the African-American struggle to gain civil freedoms in the United States (Harding, 2000, p. 113). Harding quotes an excerpt from Falwell’s sermon as follows:

The 400 years of Egyptian bondage is a type of the sinner’s experience before he is converted...The Promised Land is a parallel to the victorious Christian life on the earthly level, and our eventual Heaven on the eternal plain. To try and force any other meaning than this is simply making the Bible say what you want it to say (Harding, 2000, p. 113).

Falwell stated that he liked “to read the Bible exactly as [he] read a novel” (Falwell, 1987, p 151). It seems as though in some places he was willing to read symbolism and metaphors into the text such as in the example from Psalms. However, when others tried to do the same in a way that Falwell did not agree with, he claimed that they were misusing the Bible.

This seems to imply that Falwell alone, or at least those who agreed with him, had the sole authority to interpret the Bible. Falwell claimed that this authority came from “the illumination of the Holy Spirit” (Harding, 2000, p. 278). He was able to discern the truths of the Bible with the Holy Spirit’s guidance. As the Bible’s authors did “not make mistakes or tell lies,” this truth was everlasting for Falwell (Falwell, 1987, p 150).

Yet, again Falwell was not able to adhere to this rule either. After the Civil Rights Movement made great gains socially and politically, Falwell went back on his “Ministers and Marches” speech. In his autobiography, he blamed his speech on the fact that he was “just thirty-one years of age...born and raised in the deep South...and had been a Christian for less than a dozen years” (Falwell, 1987, p. 290). Later, in the same book, he writes that he “meant well, but...was wrong” (Falwell, 1987, p. 337).

Never does Falwell state that the Bible was inconsistent on the topic of Civil Rights, but that seems to be the case. For instance, in Paul’s letter to Philemon, Paul sends a slave, Onesimus, back to his master, Philemon, and also asks Philemon to treat Onesimus as a brother (Philemon 1: 8-16). In Ephesians 6:5, slaves are told to obey their masters. In 1 Timothy 1:10, slave traders are likened to perjurers and liars. It seems that the Bible is unclear on the ethics of slavery, much less the civil rights for a previously enslaved group of people. Falwell did go back on his word with regards to this political issue, and it is easy to see why. The Bible says many things that could be used to support or argue against the Civil Rights Movement. Falwell simply chose the verses that supported his view and decried any views stating otherwise as contrary to God.

Falwell, then, created a system of rules for interpretation that is impossible to follow. On one hand, he stated that the Bible was “unfailingly beautiful, inspiring, and captivating to anyone

who [came] to it with an open heart and lively mind” (Falwell, 1987, p. 150). On the other, he argued against those that tried to use a lively mind to derive messages from the text. In all cases, the common link is not how Falwell interprets the Bible but instead how he relates the Bible to politics. It matters little what the text actually says for Falwell’s arguments. Conversely, it is what Falwell wished to use the Bible for that was important. That way, if his position changed, he could admit personal fault without discrediting the Bible itself. This also allowed him to continue in his ways, using the same system to make political claims.

Was Falwell's use of theological methodology valid?

The fact that Falwell was using an inconsistent theological methodology cast doubt on its validity for political use. However, the fact that it was inconsistent does not necessarily make it invalid. This question serves to weigh the merits of Falwell's use of the relationship between politics and religion. It also addresses the question, is the historical basis for Falwell's claims accurate?

I believe that Falwell's use of theological methodology was invalid and that his interpretation of American history was inaccurate. I make both of these claims because Falwell's use of American history was biased and self-serving for his political agenda.

Falwell claimed to have a great respect for history. He wrote that "History provides us with valuable lessons that Americans must carefully examine and heed" (Falwell, 1980, p.24). For this reason, Falwell put great emphasis on the origin of our country. He did this for several reasons. The first is that he viewed the foundation of our country as the reason for America's rise to power. He stated, "I believe America has reached the pinnacle of greatness unlike any nation in human history because the Founding Fathers established America's laws on precepts on the principles recorded in the laws of God, including the Ten Commandments" (Falwell, 1980, p. 29). This quote implies the second reason Falwell emphasized the United States' foundation in history: he portrayed it as an act of God. For support, he cited the fact that our coins, postage stamps, and Declaration of Independence all reference God (Falwell, 1980). This view of history was the foundation for Falwell's interpretation of the separation of Church and State.

Owing to his Separatist background, Falwell did not originally think that the Church and State should mix. As I have already mentioned, he used scripture to support this argument including the story of Jesus and the Pharisees from Matthew 22. However, upon rereading the

passage, Falwell claimed that he changed his mind (Falwell, 1987). A more accurate interpretation can be found when this story is put in the context of Falwell's inconsistent theological methodology. Falwell supported the separation of Church and State to mean that government should not interfere with religion and vice-versa. He supported this interpretation when the issue concerned the Civil Rights Movement (Falwell, 1987). However, it was not until abortion was legalized in the *Roe v. Wade* decision that Falwell decided to interpret the separation of Church and State differently (Strober and Tomczack, 1979). Following his inconsistent pattern, Falwell changed his mind, while still citing the Bible for support. He emphasized the second truth he found in Matthew 22: "if the law of man actually comes into conflict with the law of God, we disobey man's law and pay the penalty" (Falwell, 1987, p.344). Unsurprisingly, Falwell still claimed to support the separation of Church and State, even after pursuing political action. Herein is the problem with the validity of Falwell's actions. He employed a biased and self-serving use of history to support his political opinions. His newfound interpretation of the separation of Church and State is a telling example of this trend.

Instead of a Separatist view, Falwell now claimed that "The doctrine of the separation of Church and State simply mean[t] that the state shall not control religion and religion shall not control the state. It [did] not mean that the two may never work together" (Dobson & Hindson, 1981, p. 193). This interpretation seems balanced. However, it becomes much more biased when paired with Falwell's explanation of this separation. Falwell explained that "to our nation's forefathers, especially Thomas Jefferson and his colleagues from [Falwell's] state of Virginia, the separation of Church and State had been designed to keep the government from interfering with the church" (Falwell, 1987, p. 337). Nowhere in this explanation is the clause that religion should stay out of politics. This was because Falwell needed to blur the line

between the Church and State so that he may use religious arguments to support his political points. He cited specific historical examples to support this effort including that “Benjamin Franklin...proposed that the Congress adjourn for two days to seek divine guidance...a marked turning point in the writing of the Constitution, complete with a Bill of Rights” (Falwell, 1980, p. 44). He also remarked that “George Washington is reported to have said, ‘It is impossible to rightly govern the world without God and the Bible’” (Falwell, 1980, p. 44). In Falwell’s version of the country’s history, it was “God who established her and blessed her” (Falwell, 1980, p. 50).

However, many of the forefather’s went to great lengths to secure religious freedom for all religions, not just Christian sects (Boston, 2003). In fact, Thomas Jefferson, a man that Falwell claimed was vehemently pro-Christian, was one of the premier instigators for religious freedom in American law, passing a bill that stated a national religion would be “sinful and tyrannical” (Boston, 2003, p. 66). It passed 60-27. Though this implies that religious freedom was supported by a majority of the Founding Fathers, it does not necessarily support the idea of the separation of Church and State. Jefferson expressed his thoughts on this subject quite plainly: “I do not believe it is for the interest of religion to invite the civil magistrate to direct its exercises” (Boston, 2003, p. 78).

Furthermore, the support that the Founding Fathers gave toward religious freedom was never meant to make it a “Christian nation” as Falwell claimed (Falwell, 1980, p. 29). Even if some Founding Fathers wished for this, it was not the opinion of all. Jefferson notes that when there was an “effort to amend [his] bill so that it would apply to Christians only [it was] rejected by a great majority,” a fact Jefferson took to mean that the bill’s “protection [was for] the Jew and the Gentile, the Christian and Mahometan, the Hindoo, [and] the infidel of every

denomination” (Boston, 2003, p. 67). Other Founding Fathers shared this sentiment and continued to support it. In fact “the Treaty of Tripoli, an agreement signed between the United States and the Muslim region of north Africa in 1797...approved by the Senate under John Adams”, states flatly ‘The Government of the United States is not, in any sense, founded on the Christian religion’” (Boston, 2003, p. 253).

It is safe to assume that Falwell’s use of theological methodology was invalid based on the evidence presented. The reasoning behind this is quite simple. Falwell speaks of the origins of our nation as a time dominated by Christian sentiment (Falwell, 1980). He stated that “the goal of the framers of our Constitution was to govern the United States of America under God’s laws...based on the Ten Commandments” (Falwell, 1980, p. 53). However, there are certain assumptions that Falwell connects with this statement. The first is that our Founding Fathers not only believed in God, but that they were trying to form a Christian nation (Falwell, 1980, p. 29). Paired with this is Falwell’s definition of a true Christian, one who follows the “fundamentals” of Christianity, as outlined in the first portion of this paper. We are then left with a biased interpretation of our country’s origin based on a specific definition of true Christianity. Falwell would undoubtedly have no problem with such a country. However, as we will see in the next section, the inconsistency of Falwell’s use of the Bible combined with his invalid interpretation of history resulted in a political strategy that lacked the principles found in our Constitution.

Was this use of theological methodology congruent with the principles of our Constitution?

Falwell's use of theological methodology for the making of political claims was a clear violation of the civil rights many groups of people, including homosexuals, women, and the non-religious. Though it is not necessarily the harmfulness of what Falwell believed that matters, it is important to recognize that using theological methodologies for political claims can cause harm. Falwell's use of theological methodology was especially harmful because it stood in direct opposition to the ideals on which this country was founded. I will make no argument that our Founding Fathers were unified in all aspects of creating a new nation. I will say, however, that we do have a record of what they were able to decide upon as a group, the US Constitution.

Concerning religion, the Constitution reads in full:

Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press; or the right of the people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the Government for a redress of grievances (U.S. Const. amend. I).

Regardless of what Falwell, his critics, or anyone else believes that amendment to mean, the Founding Fathers also provided us a governing body that would hold the power to decide the meaning and implementation of the country's laws. This body is known as the United States Supreme Court, and both its formation and its powers are listed in the US Constitution:

Section 1. The judicial Power of the United States, shall be vested in one Supreme Court, and in such inferior Courts as the Congress may from time to time ordain and establish...

(art. III)

Section 2. The Judicial Power shall extend to all Cases, in Law and Equity, arising under this Constitution, the Laws of the United States, and Treaties made, or which shall be

made, under their Authority;--to all Cases affecting Ambassadors, other public Ministers and Consuls;--to all Cases of admiralty and maritime Jurisdiction; to Controversies to which the United States shall be a Party;--to Controversies between two or more States; between a State and Citizens of another State; between Citizens of different States,-- between Citizens of the same State claiming Land under Grants or different States, and between a State, or the Citizens thereof, and foreign States, Citizens or Subjects (art. III).

Falwell continually claimed that the Founding Fathers were influenced by Christianity. Yet, he does not support their creation of or trust in a Supreme Court, stating: “no nine men have the power to undermine and rock that which God has built up” (Williams, 2010, p. 85). There is no need to make the claims, as Falwell did, that our Founding Fathers were a majority of Christians or focused on making our country a Christian nation. More so, there is no need to point to items such as postage stamps or currency to imply what bearing God should have on our country. These statements should have no bearing on the political processes of our nation. The United States was founded by a very complex and diverse group of individuals (Boston, 2003). However, they were able to create a document that expresses their combined intent, regardless of how anyone interprets their actions. The Constitution grants the power of interpreting law to the Supreme Court.

When the Supreme Court ruled on the case of *Everson v. Board of Education*, their ruling included this statement: “The ‘establishment of religion’ clause of the First Amendment means at least this: Neither a state nor the Federal Government...can pass laws which aid one religion, aid all religions, or prefer one religion over another” (Hamburger, 2002, p. 461). Falwell may well have believed that the Founding Fathers wished for our nation to be Christian, a claim I have shown to be invalid. In any case, those same Founding Fathers provided for a Supreme

Court that ruled definitively that the separation of Church and State shall keep the government from favoring any religion.

Falwell's political motivation was predicated entirely upon his Fundamentalist Christian beliefs. It led him to oppose homosexual rights, abortion, pornography, and drugs while supporting a strong national defense and an Independent Israel. Whether he was right or wrong on any of these issues is beyond the scope of this paper. What matters is that Falwell was using an exclusivistic rhetoric upon which to found his political beliefs, the very exclusivity from which the Constitution protects its citizens. Falwell's own church doctrine stated that the Bible was "authoritative in all matters" (Harding, 2000, p. 278). For Falwell, it was more important than the Constitution itself. This is a fact that is most likely true for a large portion of Christians. Many religions have sacred texts that they follow. This is another reason the separation of Church and State is so important. However, Falwell took his beliefs and tried to transcribe them onto the founding of our country and the way it runs. By skewing the relationship between Fundamentalist Christianity and the United States political system, Falwell advocated for a government that would best serve the needs of Fundamentalists. If given credence, this would be in direct violation of the Everson ruling and the Constitution at large (Hamburger, 2002).

Establishing a government that served Fundamentalist needs would probably not be a cause for concern for Falwell. After all, he considered that the goal of the Founding Fathers and God. Nevertheless, there is a great danger in letting one religion decide the voice of God for a country, just as there is a great danger in advocating any specific God for one country. An individual's definition of God often presents absolutist views on right and wrong. When such religious absolutist views translate into absolutist political opinions, dialogue in a democracy is stalled.

Thomas Jefferson understood this and wisely advocated for religious freedom (Boston, 2003). Falwell's political and religious ideas are not based on fact. They are circular and self-serving. His basic argument is as follows: Fundamentalist Christians know the true voice of God. He reveals himself in a Fundamentalist reading of the Bible. This reading is inspired by the Holy Spirit. Our nation was founded on Christianity, the same Christianity that Fundamentalists follow. Therefore, following the beliefs of Fundamentalist Christians is not only staying loyal to the Founding Father's wishes, it is also staying loyal to God. To simplify the argument, Falwell believes that he knows what is best politically for the country because he knows what God's political views are.

This argument creates a claim that is simply impossible to make, especially in a democracy. A democratic society is based upon the idea that every citizen receives equal rights, regardless of religion, race, sexual orientation, etc. Falwell attempted to take that system and insert his own, one in which a citizen's rights were dependent upon Falwell's religious beliefs.

It would be foolish to assume that any religious person would not let their religion influence their politics. In fact, most individuals that describe themselves as religious most likely consider it the most important thing in their lives. Our government's separation of Church and State guarantees that its citizens retain the right to practice religion as they see fit. Falwell's combination of religion and politics not only gives undue preference to his religious beliefs, it also infringes the rights of all citizens that do not practice his religion. Regardless of the religion of our Founding Fathers, the true meaning of the Bible, or America's current status in relation to God's wrath, it should never be up to one faith tradition to decide the fate of our country. This nation was built on liberty, and Falwell's use of theological methodology denies the very essence of that.

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