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God Made It Happen:
A Rhetorical Analysis of Jerry Falwell’s Response to 9/11

By

Terry Littleton

Capstone Thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Bachelor of Arts in Cultural Studies

Cultural Studies Program
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Abstract

Using rhetorical analysis, this project examines the two texts (Listen America! and 700 Club interview after 9/11) of a Religious Right preacher, Jerry Falwell to examine conceptual continuity over twenty years and uncover key ideological concepts. While the Religious Right employs many methods to influence the votes of the evangelical congregation, this paper will focus specifically on Falwell and the use of Biblical metaphors in his popular evangelical discourse. The project examines the fear-mongering used to create hate and paranoia in audience of these two texts.

Key Words

Religious Right / Bible / Jerry Falwell/ Propaganda

Ideology/ Religious Media
"Religion is the sigh of the oppressed creature, the heart of a heartless world, just as it is the spirit of a spiritless situation. It is the opium of the people."

Karl Marx (Marx)

Introduction

The Religious Right appears to be the moral fiber of America but is actually using God as a political tool. The Religious Right, a faction of mostly Evangelical Republicans, functions in a way that sets them apart from the traditional or mainstream Evangelicals. This faction represents the merging of a political party and a religion into a group that is focused on and promotes an extreme right-wing ideology. Social relations and practices present in the United States show that the Religious Right influence the followers to vote republican. It coerces them to use social activism to increase awareness of their ideas and permeate their views through various media outlets (T.V, Radio, Film, Internet, Books, etc.).

The concept of the Religious Right is documented in various forms of supporting texts. One explanation comes from Robert Boston’s book *Why The Religious Right Is Wrong About Separation Of Church And State*, as he describes in detail, three fundamentals that fall under the title of Religious Right “a movement that blends [1]theological conservatism with [2]far-right wing politics and [3]hostility toward church-state separation” (Boston, 17). Boston’s has interesting facts and purported explanations of Religious Right’s preachers telling half-truths or fabricated, convoluting stories to sway the opinions of the followers. Boston writes the

“Religious Right was created more for political reasons than religious ones. During the waning years of the presidency of Jimmy Carter, some Republican political strategists began to theorize about ways to get the Southern white Protestants out of the Democratic Party and into the GOP. They decided the way to do this was to emphasize what we now call “culture wars” issues—abortion, gay rights, school prayer and so on” (Boston, 19-20)
Another text, Randall Balmer’s *Thy Kingdom Come: An Evangelical’s Lament*, defines the movement as “a loose federation of politically conservative evangelicals” (Balmer, X). Balmer is currently a practicing member of the Evangelical church. He proposes that the Religious Right society aims to blur the lines between religion and politics by encouraging the followers to vote republican. Some of their moral conformities will construct an authoritarian government based on the principles of the leaders of the Religious Right, a judgment of Bible Scripture’s purpose, as explained by Balmer. He tells of a disassociation with certain facets of the system of belief of Christianity and the unclear views the Religious Right demands of its followers. Balmer says “the quest for power and political influence has led to both distortions and contortions” (34). The author uses evidence to support his argument. Balmer uses coherent dialogue that methodically dismantles the myth of the modern theocracy sought by so many Christian conservatives today. Balmer also refers to the Religious Right as the New Christian Right and the Christian Right. Their views on social conservative agenda amount to “military expansion, reckless exploitation of the environment, maintenance of racial segregation, and the abolition of the Department of Education.” (Balmer, XXVI) They have no consolidated headquarters and no members carry cards depicting them as Religious Right members. Balmer calls it “political shorthand, a term of convenience” (Balmer, XXVI).

According to *Kingdom Coming: The Rise of Christian Nationalism* by Michelle Goldberg, the Religious Right is a combination of nebulous organizations that include right-wing elite think tanks and conservative republican preachers using an ideological activism which commands political offices, lower level preachers and a veritable voting bloc of hard, right wing conservatives. All of the former attend, as Goldberg suggests, to form the agenda of the Christian nationalists, also known as Religious Right (Goldberg, 249), with the hope and intention to re-
structure the social parameters of the United States. Goldberg further explained “these organizations are intricately linked together, creating a movement that is both incredibly disciplined and amorphous. It is a hyrda-headed thing, sometimes contradictory but unified enough to be called by a single name” (Goldberg, 6).

The Religious Right: The Biggest Threat to Democracy, by A.F. Alexander defines Religious Right as “a radical Christian movement that strives for control over every aspect of life in America…This radical, even extremist, movement is comprised of followers from Catholics to Baptists, Mormons to Presbyterians, and others” (Alexander, 24). She maintains that the Religious Right’s take on the church and state separation as a misunderstanding of the Constitution. They implied that the 1st amendment meant Christian religion and the wall was one-sided, meaning government didn’t have power over religion but the church has power over the government through divine principles (Alexander, 24).

The Religious Right movement has many Dominionists and Fundamentalists. It is religious fanaticism, which has become conservative religion in today’s world, as Alexander explains, “The overall tactics the Religious Right use can be summed up with the terms propaganda and manipulation. But there are specific tried-and-true propaganda techniques that they employ to manipulate, and a few they have devised themselves” (Alexander, 96). This project examines some of these techniques in an analysis of Falwell’s speeches and texts.

History/Founding of the Religious Right Movement

The real impetus for this movement came from the 1971 Supreme Court ruling in the Green vs. Conally case which “produced a ruling that any institution that practiced segregation was not, by definition, a charitable institution and, therefore, no longer qualified for tax-exempt
standing” (Balmer, 14). Chip Berlet, investigative reporter and independent scholar, explained that the decision to form the Religious Right movement was based on racism, plain and simple. Of course, the leaders used transference and applied persuasion to believe the government was attacking the Evangelic Christian schools rather than the true reason of segregation (Berlet). Paul Weyrich was the key factor in provoking the movement. Weyrich was not of the evangelical faith but Catholic. He was employed by Barry Goldwater, the republican nominee, as a political strategist for the GOP in the 1964 presidential election and was a staunch conservative in his ideology. He saw the problem of a large body of American white evangelicals who removed themselves from politics and did not vote. Balmer asked Weyrich what started the movement, he said it was not abortion but that “the 1975 action by the IRS against Bob Jones University that was responsible for the genesis of the Religious Right” (Balmer, 16). Balmer calls Weyrich one of the “architects” of the Religious Right movement (13). Research shows Weyrich to be the coordinator of the Religious Right movement and right-wing think-tanks like the Heritage Foundation, which he founded with financial help from the Colorado brewer, Joseph Coors (Bellant, 1). His tenacity and foresight helped the Religious Right movement become a force of power in the American political landscape for almost forty years, even after his death in 2009.

In 1975 the Internal Revenue Service (IRS) wanted to revoke Bob Jones University’s tax-exempt standing due to a school regulation that prohibited inter-racial dating. This school was a Christian university and African Americans were denied admission until 1971 and unmarried African Americans until 1975, the IRS decided that the policies of the university disobeyed the tax law for tax exemption due to racial discrimination. The university filed a lawsuit to protect their tax-exemption. The case went up the ladder to the Supreme Court in 1983 ruled in favor of the IRS. In this instance the Supreme Court’s ruling outraged the Evangelical Christians.
William Martin’s book *With God on Our Side: The Rise of the Religious Right in America* explains, “[S]everal key figures on the Religious Right credit the 1978 IRS/Christian school battle with playing a pivotal role in bringing together conservative Christians and creating a genuine politically effective movement” (Martin, 173). Martin speaks of Paul Weyrich arguing the following:

[What galvanized the Christian community was not abortion, school prayer, or the ERA [Equal Rights Amendment]. I am living witness to that because I was trying to get those people interested in those issues and I utterly failed. What changed their minds was Jimmy Carter’s intervention against the Christian schools, trying to deny them tax-exempt status on the basis of so-called de facto segregation…enraged the Christian community and they looked upon it as interference from government… opposition to government interference and the interests of the evangelical movement, which now saw itself on the defensive and under attack by the government” (Martin, 173)

Martin’s text goes on to explain the views of Bill Billings, a son of a leader of the Religious Right, Robert Billings (executive director of Moral Majority). He details a 1978 protest where over 120,000 letters to the government demanded the IRS stop removing the tax exempt status to Christian schools. Billings said it was

...not entirely ideological...[i]f the Christian school were to lose their tax exempt status their tuition could conceivably double. When it becomes not just a moral or conservative/liberal issue, but a pocketbook issue, you definitely take an interest. And they did. I don’t know if I was really surprised. I knew that somewhere there was going to be something that would jolt some people into action. We’d been trying to encourage that (Martin, 173).

Here we see a distinct correlation between white evangelical Christians being moved by their leaders to believe that there was a government conspiracy to attack the fabric of their lives, and persuading them to vote to change the government. Weyrich had the plan and needed others to help him put his thoughts into fruition.
Weyrich had a meeting with Robert Billings, and Ed McAteer, Howard Phillips met with Jerry Falwell to discuss using his power as a preacher to spread the conservative agenda further at a Holiday Inn in Lynchburg, Virginia. Paul Weyrich is the one of the organizers of the Moral Majority and both Martin, (200) and Boston (20) claimed that Weyrich coined the name. Weyrich saw a way to increase the voting bloc for Republicans by changing the parameters of the Republican Party to address religious wedge issues using the evangelical preacher Jerry Falwell as the front man to spread the message. Falwell said “Believing in the Bible as I do… I would find it impossible to stop preaching the pure saving gospel of Jesus Christ, and begin doing anything else-including fighting Communism, or participating in civil-rights reforms” (Balmer, 17). Chinks in the armor of the Christian faith disagreeing with how this movement was founded show a distinct relationship to the racial disparity of the white evangelic Christians and everyone who did not think in the same light; they were considered the enemy of the movement and subject to ridicule and derision. Balmer explains how the Religious Right leaders work, “by seeking to commandeer and dominate the conversation, however, the leaders of the Religious Right have failed to observe even the most basic etiquette of democracy” (Balmer 186). In other words, as Randall Balmer has succinctly put it: “the Religious Right of the late twentieth century organized to perpetuate racial discrimination” (Dudley).

The Equal Rights Amendment (ERA) was another milestone for the movement. The ERA amendment was a decision of equal opportunities and the thought of man and woman being equal was a deciding factor in the Religious Right’s rejection of the amendment. The thought was that a woman was subservient to the man in the family dynamic as it is written in biblical scripture. Martin explains the Biblical Scriptures that are in question

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1 The Equal Rights Amendment: Equality of rights under the law shall not be denied or abridged by the United States or by any state on account of sex.
“As the church is subject to Christ, so let wives also be subject in everything to their husbands.” (Ephesians 5:24)

“As in all the churches of the saints, the women should keep silence in the churches. For they are not permitted to speak, but should subordinate, as even the law says. If there is anything they desire to know, let them ask their husbands at home. For it is shameful for a woman to speak in church.” (I Corinthians 14:33-35)

“Let a woman learn in silence, with all submissiveness. I permit no woman to teach or to have authority over men: she is to keep silent...[w]oman will be saved through bearing children, if she continues in faith and love and holiness, with modesty.” (I Timothy 2:11-12, 2:15) (Martin, 161)

These Bible scriptures are the reason that this loosely organized faction of the Religious Right was in turmoil. Immediately the leaders were perplexed and needed to come together and form a plan on how this amendment could and should be squashed. They thought this amendment was an immoral act of feminism that would break the backs of the American family and cause apocalyptic mayhem. The conservative Christians consider women as “proper role for a woman is to be quiet, have babies, and do what the husband tells her (Martin, 161-162).

Political quotes from the past can show the understanding of a possible potential becoming a reality in the present. For instance:

Barry Goldwater 1964: “I’m frankly sick and tired of the political preachers across this country telling me as a citizen that if I want to be a moral person, I must believe in “A,” “B,” “C,” and “D.” Just who do they think they are? And from where do they presume to claim the right to dictate their moral beliefs to me?” (Balmer IX)

John F. Kennedy: “It was Virginia’s harassment of Baptist preachers, for example, that led to Jefferson’s statue of religious freedom. Today I may be the victim, but tomorrow it may be you...until the whole fabric of our harmonious society is ripped apart at a time of great peril” (Alexander 14-15).
Two Jerry Falwell texts

The project analyzes two specific texts and critically ascertains the methodology and approach used. The first textual event is a portion of a Jerry Falwell’s *Listen America!* The second is analysis of Pat Robertson interviewing Falwell after 9/11 tragedy on September 13, 2001. Across all these texts and decades later we see that Falwell presents a direct connection of the same motifs and beliefs. Studying the correlation of these two textual objects will enhance the reader’s knowledge of this important leader of the Religious Right and his views. Falwell’s rhetoric and views are examined.

*Listen America!* Text

In 1980 Jerry Falwell published a book entitled *Listen America!: The conservative blueprint for America’s moral rebirth*. Here we examine excerpts from the first chapter of his book titled “I Must Listen”:

> We must reverse the trend America finds herself in today. Young people between the ages of twenty-five and forty have been born and reared in a different world than Americans of years past. The television set has been their primary babysitter. From the television set they have learned situation ethics and immorality—they have learned a loss of respect for human life. They have learned to disrespect the family as God has established it. They have been educated in a public-school system that is permeated with secular humanism. They have been taught that the Bible is just another book of literature. They have been taught that there are no absolutes in our world today. They have been introduced to the drug culture. They have been reared by the family and the public school in a society that is greatly void of discipline and character-building. These same young people have been reared under the influence of a government that has taught them socialism and welfarism. They have been taught to believe that the world owes them a living whether they work or not (15-16).

Falwell writes from a moral standpoint, implying to the readers that there is a problem with America, and he clarifies the problematic decisions that made it so. He pinpoints adults from the age of twenty-five to forty years old as different from the earlier generations of the past.
He emphasizes his stance of why things are this way. He suggests that television is the primary baby-sitter of the American population, teaching them traits of immorality, situational ethics (love conquers all mentality) and a loss of respect for human life. He surmises that God established the family dynamics that they disrespect, and the Bible is another book of literature as taught in the public schools. He emphasizes that Americans are infused with human secularism, drug culture, loss of family values, and have no ‘moral absolutes. He sees a void in discipline and character building. He speaks of the government teaching the American population that socialism and welfarism are proper and Americans are taught to believe the world owes them a living whether working or not.

This entire paragraph shows a distinct dislike for a large portion of the population in America. He degrades the public school system as a malignancy spreading humanism to the unwitting children. There is something in Falwell’s temperament that wants to discredit the social dynamics he sees as an immoral action in the extreme, and it’s disrespectful to America as a whole, both in human dignity and production of America’s achievements as a nation. His arguments are very general without any support or evidence to his claims. He goes on to condemn America in his next paragraph.

I believe that America was built on integrity, on faith in God, and on hard work. I do not believe that anyone has ever been successful in life without being willing to add that last ingredient—diligence or hard work. We now have second-and third-generation welfare recipients. Welfare is not always wrong. There are those who do need welfare, but we have reared a generation that understands neither the dignity nor the importance of work (16).

At this point in Falwell’s life he was forty seven, the evangelical pastor and televangelist, merely 7 years older than the people on whom he is basing his argument. He claims that this age bracket (25-40) was cultivated without understanding dignity or hard work which roughly
speaking would be the ‘baby boomers’. Look closely at how his opinions are being addressed to his audience for his admonishment of America. He describes his observations as being deplorable and unacceptable and hurting the fabric of American society. In the next paragraph he seems to explain the reason.

Every American who looks at the facts must share a deep concern and burden for our country. We are not unduly concerned when we say that there are some very dark clouds on America's horizon. I am not a pessimist, but it is indeed a time for truth. If Americans will face the truth, our nation can be turned around and can be saved from the evils and the destruction that have fallen upon every other nation that has turned its back on God (16).

Falwell wants the reader to believe that he is giving his audience the facts, “Every American who looks at the facts... is indeed a time for truth” (16). Falwell wants to alter the trend he sees America going down. He is telling the readers his ‘facts’ have ‘truth’ to them. He sees that it is his moral obligation to inform the American people of how he sees the country and the immoral acts/policy incorporating the American society as a whole. Later on this paragraph he shifts to a wearying concern of American not facing the legitimacy of the “evils and destruction that have fallen upon every other nation that has turned its back on God” (16). His belief that a lack of God is what is destroying the nation as it has done in the past to other nations. He doesn’t explain what other nations he speaks of so the reader must look to supposition as assuming the worst. The evil he speaks of expounds on generalities and sweeping statements without using cold hard facts to back up his claim. He is asking his readers for something in the next paragraph.

There is no excuse for what is happening in our country. We must, from the highest office in the land right down to the shoe shine boy in the airport, have a return to biblical basics. If the Congress of our United States will take its stand on that which is right and wrong, and if our President, our judiciary system, and our state and local leaders will take their stand on holy living, we can turn this country around (16).
He admonishes the government officials for using their power to divert attention away from his interpretation of God's will as he reads in biblical scriptures. He clarifies that government officials, including the president, congress members, and the judiciary system (judges) plus state and local political leaders must follow, and stand on "holy living" (16). This will help the country recover from what Falwell thinks America has lost. Again his opinion of 'holy-living' is based purely on his interpretation of the Bible in a literal way without any straying from the biblical texts as true and without fault. He is making a claim that America should abide by the bible, a document written roughly between 6,000 to 2,000 years ago. Lack of critical reason and belief in a higher power's will are his true values.

I personally feel that the home and the family are still held in reverence by the vast majority of the American public. I believe there is still a vast number of Americans who love their country, are patriotic, and are willing to sacrifice for her. I remember the time when it was positive to be patriotic, and as far as I am concerned, it still is. I remember as a boy, when the flag was raised, everyone stood proudly and put his hand upon his heart and pledged allegiance with gratitude. I remember when the band struck up "The Stars and Stripes Forever," we stood and goose pimples would run all over me. I remember when I was in elementary school during World War II, when every report from the other shores meant something to us. We were not out demonstrating against our boys who were dying in Europe and Asia. We were praying for them and thanking God for them and buying war bonds to help pay for the materials and artillery they needed to fight and win and come back (16-17).

He reprimands America as an immoral, decaying society and looks back to the nostalgic past of his own childhood remembrances. He speaks of the World War II as high point in his life and he compares it to the Vietnam War where anti-war slogans and upheaval at the war itself were common knowledge. He urges his readers to return to the ways of the past through re-assimilation to get back what was lost in American society.

I believe that Americans want to see this country come back to basics, back to values, back to biblical morality, back to sensibility, and back to patriotism. Americans are looking for leadership and guidance. It is fair to ask the question,
"If 84 per cent of the American people still believe in morality, why is America having such internal problems?" We must look for the answer to the highest places in every level of government. We have a lack of leadership in America. But Americans have been lax in voting in and out of office the right and the wrong people (17).

After demeaning the America people he implies that America seeks a better way of life. It seems as if he is conflicted. He uses a “come back to basics” and continues the sentence preaching: values, biblical morality, sensibility and patriotism. All of these are buzz words used to rile up the emotional response of a good, proper, Christian American citizen. He uses a quotation “If 84 per cent of the American people still believe in morality, why is America having such internal problems?” without any citations to back this claim up. He merely asks this quotation as question, a fair question, and he knows the answer to his made up question. There is absolutely no logic to this question. Falwell warns of a “lack of leadership” in the highest places of government, i.e. the President and Supreme Court. He denigrates the political offices and blames the America people for voting them in. He tries to use his pull as a man of god to persuade others in his next paragraph.

My responsibility as a preacher of the Gospel is one of influence, not of control, and that is the responsibility of each individual citizen. Through the ballot box Americans must provide for strong moral leadership at every level. If our country will get back on the track in sensibility and moral sanity, the crises that I have herein mentioned will work out in the course of time and with God’s blessings (17).

Looking further into the text, he informs the audience of his “responsibility as preacher of the Gospel is one of influence…” (17). Falwell believes that he speaks with God’s advice. Who is the audience that Falwell was trying to influence with this book? He gives further details about the plan he has to change the social dynamics of an America gone wrong. He implores and
demands that the end result is in the hands of the people. He is challenging the citizens to rise up and follow his advice so America can be restored to its former glory. Again he knows the will of God for he uses his God as his backup plan with his “blessing”. He uses ‘moral’ two times in this paragraph and goes on to establish his understanding as he identifies his resentments in the next paragraph.

It is now time to take a stand on certain moral issues, and we can only stand if we have leaders. We must stand against the Equal Rights Amendment, the feminist revolution, and the homosexual revolution. We must have a revival in this country. It can come if we realize the danger and heed the admonition of God found in 2 Chronicles 7:14, “If My people who are called by My name will humble themselves, and pray and seek My face, and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven and will forgive their sin and heal their land” (17).

He specifically accuses the Equal Rights Amendment, the feminist revolution, and the homosexual revolution as having a negative effect on the population. These three issues, in Jerry Falwell’s eyes, are immoral and hurt the fabric of the American people. His discourse promotes a ‘revival’ which is a code word to imply the loss of something and the reawakening of the morality, as per his judgment. He wants Americans to believe the admonition of God, and his stance goes back to the older America that was religiously involved in normal, appropriate actions, none of which can be affirmed through factual history. What makes him decide that the people who are destroying America are the homosexuals, the feminists and the Equal Right Amendment? These three issues are untenable to the moral compass of Falwell and the Moral Majority, yet are based on what biblical terms? Falwell cites the Bible as his administrative wakeup call to American people and disregards the oppression of these people (homosexuals, feminists, etc.) as unfounded nonsense and demonizes these things as unpatriotic and un-American. He implores Americans to stop lingering in ignorance and apathy and address the sins
that he thinks are destroying the nation. He speaks of American’s liberties being taken away, yet points to the very issues that are trying to improve the country for all Americans. He presents the dynamics of social reality to claim there is as ‘us versus them’ mentality and he must use political power to change the laws under the Bible’s supervision.

As a preacher of the Gospel, I not only believe in prayer and preaching, I also believe in good citizenship. If a labor union in America has the right to organize and improve its working conditions, then I believe that the churches and the pastors, the priests, and the rabbis of America have a responsibility, not just the right, to see to it that the moral climate and conscience of Americans is such that this nation can be healed inwardly. If it is healed inwardly, then it will heal itself outwardly (17)

He implores America to wake up and see the systematic destruction present in the society and return to the “biblical basics” to correct, in his determination, what is wrong in America. There is no reasonable decision making ability present in his thought process but only simple, narrow minded contemplations without considering other versions of a functioning society based on good will and kindness to others.

Americans have been silent much too long. We have stood by and watched as American power and influence have been systematically weakened in every sphere of the world (18).

This implication of American power being weakened is again a generalization based on a fear of other countries one upping the United States. It is assumed that Falwell’s thoughts come from military, economic, and political standpoints, yet he is employing a fear constructed mentality of alarm and unwilling trepidation to win support for his argument.

We are not a perfect nation, but we are still a free nation because we have the blessing of God upon us. We must continue to follow in a path that will ensure that blessing...Let us never forget that as our Constitution declares, we are endowed by our Creator with certain inalienable rights. It is only as we abide by those laws established by our Creator that He will continue to bless us with these
rights. We are endowed our rights to freedom and liberty and the pursuit of happiness by the God who created man to be free and equal (18).

Here we see an affinity to Thomas Jefferson and The Declaration of Independence as an example of going back to the founding fathers using their political pull to break away from the British Empire. Falwell is confusing two documents, (the Constitution and Declaration of Independence) as a single text, a boldly groundless claim that would upset anybody that knows a little bit about how this country was truly founded. Once again, looking closely at the text we find distinct discrepancies with Falwell telling his audience his views without fact checking his own research to effectively corroborate his claims; unless he truly knows he is perpetuating a belief based in mistruths. He depicts America as having a right to freedom and liberty and the pursuit of happiness yet Falwell’s temperament supports belittling homosexuals, feminists or any other lifestyles that Falwell himself abhors. Is it possible that Falwell’s moral superiority is more important than the others he loathes, thus reducing them to less than the ‘Moral Americans’ he wants to lead? Falwell uses the denigration of others to define an ‘us versus them’ mentality that shows hatred and disillusionment in his attitude.

The hope of reversing the trends of decay in our republic now lies with the Christian public in America. We cannot expect help from the liberals. They certainly are not going to call our nation back to righteousness and neither are the pornographers, the smut peddlers, and those who are corrupting our youth. Moral Americans must be willing to put their reputations, their fortunes, and their very lives on the line for this great nation of ours. Would that we had the courage of our forefathers who knew the great responsibility that freedom carries with it (18).

Falwell surmises that only Christian people (he also implies here that all Christians are conservative and all liberals are not Christian) can stem the tide of destruction America is facing by using their power to vote and elect a god fearing man. Falwell again uses generality in the third sentence to heap liberals in the same instance as ‘others’ that corrupt the youth. He calls
upon ‘Moral Americans’ to use all they have to disrupt the people that are destroying the framework of America. Basically he is telling the Christian Americans to use everything in their power to stop these immoral Americans forthright. Later on in this chapter he another contradiction occurs.

Our Founding Fathers separated church and state in function, but never intended to establish a government void of God. As is evidenced by our Constitution, good people in America must exert an influence and provide a conscience and climate of morality in which it is difficult to go wrong, not difficult for people to go right in America (19).

Here again we have a First Amendment misinterpretation purported by Falwell which disrespects the founding fathers understanding of the Constitution. (He must have spoken to them personally to know their intentions.) Earlier in this essay we discussed the same implication that the Religious Right twists the Constitution to support their assertion. Falwell goes one step further regarding the writing of this political document.

I am positive in my belief regarding the Constitution that God led in the development of that document, and as a result, we here in America have enjoyed 204 years of unparalleled freedom. The most positive people in the world are people who believe the Bible to be the Word of God. The Bible contains a positive message. It is a message written by 40 men over a period of approximately 1,500 years under divine inspiration. It is God's message of love, redemption, and deliverance for a fallen race. What could be more positive than the message of redemption in the Bible? But God will force Himself upon no man. Each individual American must make His choice (19).

Once again we see Falwell using generalizations to describe his belief that his God was the writer of the Constitution in the same way the Bible was written through his disciples. He compounds his belief as ‘positive’ with no regard of ever changing his thought and without any support except his own ‘belief’. Here again he compared this political document in the same relevance as the Bible. His understanding of when the
Bible was written is unfortunately limited in scope. Basically the Old Testament, written before the birth of Jesus Christ was between 6th century B.C. and before his birth and its pages are three times as numerous as the pages of the New Testament. His explanation of 1,500 years ago taints his credibility as research shows the New Testament was written after Jesus, but before 150 years after his death. Falwell writes with so much conviction and seemingly authoritative knowledge that fact checking his claims might seem belittling to a man of his preacherly influence. Needless to say his understanding is skewed by a lack of research.

Americans must no longer linger in ignorance and apathy. We cannot be silent about the sins that are destroying this nation. The choice is ours. We must turn America around or prepare for inevitable destruction. I am listening to the sounds that threaten to take away our liberties in America. And I have listened to God's admonitions and His direction—the only hopes of saving America. Are you listening too? (20).

He is basing his position on a falsehood as he speaks of American sins crippling the nation. His real reason is trying to corral the votes to effectively remove the decisions from those who oppose his point of view. His motives are fear based without true evidence, based only on his religious belief. Falwell is using propaganda to attract more followers to his congregation in the hopes of changing political policies. The next text will help understand the qualities of repetition Falwell uses to hammer his opinion down as unchanging with one purpose.

Post 9/11 interview with Jerry Falwell and Pat Robertson

On September 11th, 2001 America was attacked by an Islamist terrorist group. There were a series of four terrorist attacks in New York City and Washington D.C. as the terrorists hijacked four passenger jets, with the intention of flying them into four buildings. Two of those planes crashed into the North and South towers (Twin Towers), respectively, of the World Trade Center complex in in the Manhattan district of New York City. A third plane crashed into the
Pentagon (Headquarters for the US Department of Defense) in Washington D.C. area. The fourth plane which had been targeted at the US Capitol in Washington D.C. ended up crashing into a field near Shanksville, PA – thanks to the passengers overcoming the terrorists.

Two days later on the 700 club, a quasi-news organization founded and hosted by Pat Robertson, there was an interview between Jerry Falwell and Robertson on the subject of 9/11 and the possible reasons for the terrible occurrence. The following is a rhetorical analysis of the text, namely the televised speech, by Falwell and Robertson for their main audience, the 700 club viewers. The transcript describes the entire interview while the video only shows some of the interview. The interview is presented as a newscast, with both Falwell and Robertson appearing as if they are reporting ‘factual’ news. The viewers are mostly Christian evangelicals who seek guidance, counseling and news from the Christian Broadcasting Network (CBN). While this text doesn’t encompass the views of the Religious Right, analyzing this text will give a deeper understanding of the two important leaders and how propaganda is used to sway the audience to a fearful intensity. The syntagmatic structure is a narrative argument describing all those who oppose the views of Falwell and Robertson as having a direct connection to the 9/11 attack on America. It is based on persuasion and influence. Stuart Hall described the mass communication of television such as this interview as having “complex structure in dominance” (Hall, 163).

The media video shows the face of Falwell, and behind him is a newsroom with many TV monitors and on the right side of Falwell’s head on the screen, (all the rest were blank screens) the words “Terrorism in America” in bold face white letters over a black backdrop. As the interview continues the viewer sees Robertson agreeing with him on the left side of the

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2 The name 700 club comes from the term used to describe the first telethon in 1963 of Christian Broadcasting Network (CBN). Robertson asked 700 donors to give a monthly $10 to support the function network or he would close his faltering network. Robertson coined the term after the telethon was a success.

3 Cited from CBN Webpage. “CBN is a global, nonprofit ministry preparing the nations of the world for the second coming of Jesus Christ through media, prayer partnering, and humanitarian aid” (cbn.com).
screen with Falwell occupying the right side. Underneath the men are captions of where they are located, which is the Christian Broadcasting Network (CBN) studios and Lynchburg, VA respectively. These preachers have a grandfather-like demeanor with graying hair, possibly signifying wisdom through maturity. Both are dressed in business suits and ties, hair combed, face and makeup professionally done to add to the reputable presentation of their message. Falwell and Robertson have taken this tragic event and turned it into a platform to further their political agenda. Both Falwell and Robertson are key figures in the Religious Right with a large following. The opening discussion begins,

PAT ROBERTSON: Listen. What are you telling the church? You called your church together. What was your response at Thomas Road to this tragedy?

JERRY FALWELL: Well, as the world knows, the tragedy hit on Tuesday morning, and at 2:00 in the afternoon, we gathered 7,000 Liberty University students, faculty, local people together, and we used the verse that I heard you use a moment ago, Chronicles II, 7:14, that God wanted us to humble ourselves and seek his face. And there's not much we can do in the Church but what we're supposed to do, and that is pray. Pray for the President that God will give him wisdom, keep bad advisors from him, bring good ones to him, praying for the families of the victims, praying for America. And, you know this thing is not a great deal different than what I remember and you Pat. We're about the same age. December 7, 1941, when we entered the war against Japan, Germany, Italy. Hitler's goal was to destroy the Jews among other things, and conquer the world. And, these Islamic fundamentalists, these radical terrorists, these Middle Eastern monsters are committed to destroying the Jewish nation, driving her into the Mediterranean, conquering the world. And, we are the great Satan. We are the ultimate goal. I talked this morning with Tom Rose publisher of the Jerusalem Post, and orthodox Jew, and he said, "Now America knows in a horrible way what Israel's been facing for 53 years at the hand of Arafat and other terrorists and radicals and barbarians.

He describes the Islamic fundamentalists as Middle Eastern monsters linking them to Adolph Hitler and the Nazi regime. He expounds that these fundamentalists are hell-bent on conquering the world as Hitler was and that they think of America as the great Satan. Falwell uses a Biblical scripture as his source of power to spread the message of why this happened. The
actual biblical text reads as such, “If My people who are called by My name will humble themselves, and pray and seek My face, and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven and will forgive their sin and heal their land” (The Holy Bible: New King James Version Chronicles II 7:14). We can see Falwell using the same biblical scripture in the Listen America! text. Falwell claims that the terrorist attack should have been foreseen due to the wicked ways of America and that the act of the tragedy forced many people to pray. Falwell surmised that the way to forgiveness is turning away from sins of the wicked ways and devoting your life to God so the land (America) can be restored.

PAT ROBERTSON: Jerry, I know that you shared several 40 day fasts for revival in America. We here at CBN had a couple of 40 day fasts during the Lenten season, and Bill Bright, I don't know, eight or nine. Do you think that this is going to be the trigger of revival, a real revival in the Church where we truly turn back to God with all our heart?

JERRY FALWELL: It could be. I've never sensed a togetherness, a burden, a broken heart as I do in the Church today, and just 48 hours, I gave away a booklet I wrote 10 years ago. I gave it away last night on the Biblical position on fasting and prayer because I do believe that that is what we've got to do now-- fast and pray. And I agree totally with you that the Lord has protected us so wonderfully these 225 years. And since 1812, this is the first time that we've been attacked on our soil, first time, and by far the worst results. And I fear, as Donald Rumsfeld, the Secretary of Defense said yesterday, that this is only the beginning. And with biological warfare available to these monsters; the Husseins, the Bin Ladens, the Arafats, what we saw on Tuesday, as terrible as it is, could be miniscule if, in fact, if in fact God continues to lift the curtain and allow the enemies of America to give us probably what we deserve.

PAT ROBERTSON: Jerry, that's my feeling. I think we've just seen the antechamber to terror. We haven't even begun to see what they can do to the major population.

After Falwell's justification, Robertson asked a question “Do you think that this is going to be the trigger of revival, a real revival in the Church where we truly turn back to God with all
our heart?” (Transcript). Falwell agrees with Robertson and he implores people to fast and pray. Falwell describes this attack as the first on American soil since the 1812 war against Great Britain, and compares this act as “by far, the worst results” (Transcript). Assuming the results of these words are true it would be a travesty. In the 1812 war, the British occupied portions of United States for three years and the death toll was 17,000+ while the death toll from the 9/11 attack was 3,018 people, and less than one day long. We see an incongruity in Jerry Falwell’s illogical deduction of which was “worse”. The influence Falwell is trying to perceive as worse might be believable by people who don’t have the necessary resources to fact check his claim. Falwell has no historical reference to back him up, and yet, as a man of supposed integrity and a member of the clergy defines the base of power that helps him establish his claims whether they are true or false.

Falwell speaks of monsters as having biological weapons (nerve gas, mustard gas) and this act of 9/11 would be “miniscule…if fact God continues to lift the curtain and allow the enemies of America to give us probably what we deserve” (Transcript). Falwell and Robertson are setting the stage to scare the audience that these circumstances are some form of a biblical crux, and that only faith and prayer can remove the dark clouds in America. They speak of doom and gloom for the entire population of America. Robertson warns America has “just seen the antechamber to terror” (Transcript). Again they are setting the background for rest of the interview using the semi-analogous connection of Hitler to the terrorists and illustrate God’s removal of protection and the fear based thought process in the audience they want to propagate to the unassuming viewers. Falwell continues to explain the possible destruction by the “enemies of America” because “God’s” lifting of the curtain allowed more death to occur and America deserving it, as proper penance. It is as if the divine order has helped the United States become a
great nation. Robertson reacts to the problematic discussion of the “major population” and Falwell cuts him off with a harsh comment.

JERRY FALWELL: The ACLU’s got to take a lot of blame for this.

PAT ROBERTSON: Well, yes.

Falwell goes on to change the dynamics of the conversation by saying “The ACLU’s got to take the blame for this” (Transcript). The ACLU ⁴ (American Civil Liberties Union) works to defend individual rights and liberties as defined by the constitution. How can this organization have any accountability for 9/11? It’s as if suddenly the ACLU is blamed for this horrific occurrence. Looking at the ACLU and the Islamic Fundamentalists in complicity doesn’t seem to compute under critical analysis. The Islamic terrorists damaged the country and Falwell implicitly compares this damage as closely related to the ACLU damaging America too. This organization helps America by keeping and improving the civil liberties of all individuals. The fact that Falwell blames them for this tragedy tends to discredit his belief when compared to factual discourse; certainly a disconnection is easily considered as unfounded fallacy. Of course, Robertson agrees with Falwell, acknowledging him with a simple “well, yes” (Transcript). The fact is the Muslim terrorists did this atrocious deed, not the ACLU and their lawyers. This is an absurd statement based on fear and it is an attempt to hold this organization accountable.

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⁴ The ACLU is a non-profit corporation working to defend the individual rights and liberties defined by the US Constitution. They are lawyers, lobbyists and community organizers fighting for First Amendment rights, and a person’s right to equal protection under the law, due process, and privacy. The also help factors of the population that are denied the rights, such as people of color, women, lesbians, gay men, bisexuals, transgender, prisoners and disabled people.
Falwell goes on to blame more American citizens that he vehemently abhors, namely the federal court system, the abortionists, the pagans, the feminists, the gays, the lesbians and other upstanding non-profit corporation called the People for the American Way.\footnote{PFAW Web-site: Description- “In times of hardship, in times of crises, societies throughout history have experienced wrenching dislocations in their fundamental values and beliefs. We are alarmed that some of the current voices of stridency and division may replace those of reason and unity. If these voices continue unchallenged, the results will be predictable: a rise in "demonology" and hostility, a breakdown in community and social spirit, a deterioration of free and open dialogue, and the temptation to grasp at simplistic solutions for complex problems" Norman Lear-Founder (pjaw.org)}.

JERRY FALWELL: And, I know that I'll hear from them for this. But, throwing God out successfully with the help of the federal court system, throwing God out of the public square, out of the schools. The abortionists have got to bear some burden for this because God will not be mocked. And when we destroy 40 million little innocent babies, we make God mad. I really believe that the pagans, and the abortionists, and the feminists, and the gays and the lesbians who are actively trying to make that an alternative lifestyle, the ACLU, People For the American Way, all of them who have tried to secularize America. I point the finger in their face and say 'you helped this happen'.

PAT ROBERTSON: Well, I totally concur, and the problem is we have adopted that agenda at the highest levels of our government. And so we're responsible as a free society for what the top people do. And, the top people, of course, is the court system.

Unpacking this paragraph further we see a direct attack by Falwell on the federal court system. Falwell uses this tragedy as a way to blame the ACLU and the federal court system for “throwing God out successfully with the help of the federal court system, throwing God out of the public square, out of the schools” (Transcript). Looking closer into the words of Falwell, he speaks with unambiguous/evident disdain describing the potential connection between his understanding of removing God from specific places, i.e. schools and public square, he believes that this unseen God can remove a physical “curtain” from the U.S. and let these enemies of American attack unobstructed, and kill Americans and damage property in a most vicious way.

In no uncertain terms does this connect to a logical reality. Of course we have to understand that the God he talks about is only a Christian God written about in the Bible. He does not talk about
other Gods in the pantheon of deities in the world today. He demonstrates an air of moral superiority as administering the truth to the viewing public. Falwell and Robertson have a zealous indignation contiguous with a narrow-minded intellect, for they claim to speak with God’s authority and claim that it should not be questioned.

Falwell’s next line shows the inconsistent parameters of his conversation, “The abortionists have got to bear some burden for this because God will not be mocked” (Transcript). One wonders how well Falwell knows the thoughts and emotions of this God he speaks of so reverently as the divine order of things. Falwell continues saying “And when we destroy 40 million little innocent babies, we make God mad” (Transcript). Again we assume Falwell must have a direct connection to his God for him to know what makes him mad (remember his Christian God is a male). The killing of babies he speaks of, in his opinion, is the abortionists that remove unwanted pregnancies from the womb of the female. Alas, the audience that views this show might be inclined to think that the these grandfatherly wise-men are speaking from a position of authority and influence that holds weight with moral obligations the viewer’s consent to believe. Falwell speaks with so much persuasive conviction that watchers are convinced and fact checking and pondering his message as hypothetically defective aren’t involved in the thinking process.

Falwell again is still on the offensive and his hate is palpable in his next sentence as he demonizes more American citizens, “I really believe that the pagans, and the abortionists, and the feminists, and the gays and the lesbians who are actively trying to make that an alternative lifestyle, the ACLU, People For the American Way, all of them who have tried to secularize America” (Transcript). Falwell packs in the specific American citizens that do not think the way he does. Falwell chooses to flip the script and lie to the American people implying that
secularization is as bad as the terrorist attack on the country. Again we have a disconnection between Falwell’s belief system and the real world. This country was founded on secular ideology because of the way Europe treated different religions, for instance Puritan (Fundamentalism) Christianity being one. There are others Christian faiths that were frowned upon in Europe also as they were not the state religion.

The next sentence Falwell uses is very important in formulating his views. He accuses certain individuals, stating, “I point the finger in their face and say ‘you helped this happen’” (Transcript). His derogatory remark juxtaposes the fact that this horrible occurrence happened and that part of America that does not fall under the sway of the Religious Right has in some mysterious way made this despicable action transpire. These televangelists use rhetorical devices such as fear and repugnance to entice individuals to become a part of their congregation of believers. They use their interpretation of biblical scriptures to explain why things are the way they are. The rhetorical tropes affectively discourage any other way of thinking as immoral and without God’s will. It’s a distinctive, my way or the highway mentality, and you are either for them or against them, with no thoughts of logic or clear reasonable decision making ability present in the society they want to make.

Pat Robertson’s statement speaks volumes, “Well, I totally concur, and the problem is we have adopted that agenda at the highest levels of our government” (Transcript). Here again Robertson uses his pull as a televangelist to describe the government’s culpability in the terrorists attacks. He emphasizes “the agenda” as a buzz word to coax the audience into submission that the government must be changed.

Remember, Falwell is blaming the government i.e. the federal court system, one aspect of a three point, executive, legislative and judiciary government. Is this, in Falwell’s thinking, a
suicide mission to kill themselves by disrespecting a Christian God and having a separate Muslim religion do God’s dirty work, or are these Religious Right leaders trying to sway the public opinion to think along their certain, specific ‘moral’ ways? Using Hall’s theory in this text, the “message form’ is a determinate moment” (Hall, 165) that is broadcasted to the audience using both connotative and denotative qualities. As Hall explains the associative meanings at the connotative level are not fully naturalized from the perspective of the audience. The text is trying to influence the ideology as natural through the encoding aspect of truthfulness.

Examining the text of the interview and the interpretations of the suggestions, we see Falwell trying to influence the watching audience with his brand of fear based persuasion.

JERRY FALWELL: Amen. Pat, did you notice yesterday? The ACLU, and all the Christ-haters, the People For the American Way, NOW, etc. were totally disregarded by the Democrats and the Republicans in both houses of Congress as they went out on the steps and called out on to God in prayer and sang ‘God Bless America’ and said 'let the ACLU be hanged'. In other words, when the nation is on its knees, the only normal and natural and spiritual thing to do is what we ought to be doing all the time- calling upon God.

PAT ROBERTSON: Amen. I wanted to ask you the reaction. I know that you had a major prayer meeting last night, and I know your people assembled, just a large gathering at your church. What was the mood of the people? What did they say and what did you sense with your congregation?

Another aspect at the end of the transcript was the word ‘amen’ which is generally used after a Christian prayer, from supposedly newsworthy interview to prayer like texts before Robertson’s ‘amen’. Both men use the term ‘amen’ after the other person speaks. This particular word is means that what was said before affirms the content as true and just. Again we must examine these two individuals, as leaders of many, agree, affirm and confirm which in turn is encoded to the viewing audience. By connotation, this demonization of what can be inferred to
as ‘marginal others’, the audience can be persuaded to believe that these words are indubitably true.

Falwell describes Congress speaking to God with a song and in a fictitious way puts Congress as disregarding anyone that Falwell dislikes and wanting the entire organization of the ACLU to ‘be hanged’. Looking again and again at the research compiled the only person saying ‘be hanged’ came from Falwell mouth and no other person. That specific notion of Falwell’s hatred for the ACLU is easily indicated and his thoughts are encoding the audiences into his hope for brainwashing.

While this particular text is trying to incorporate their views as the dominant cultural view with the audience as like-minded individuals, there are others watching who are questioning or outright enraged by the action of the textual discourse. Hall’s theory explains the three possible readers decoding’s necessary to interpret the message. These are dominant-hegemonic position in which the reader (viewer/watcher) is operating inside the dominant code(reference code); negotiated code where the reader understands the hegemonic encodings but is in conflict with believing them as ‘natural’; and the oppositional code which is contrary to the intended message the textual discourse conveys to mean. Hall has a fascinating notion on the description of massive media television and he explains this cultural enigma very appropriately.

There is a rhetorical fallacy connecting the terror act and the rest of the group they perceive as responsible to the discerning eye. The syntagmatic structure of the production of the entire text seems to fall apart after critical analysis. There are too many holes in the logic of these men to appear truthful.

Conclusion
Studying these two Jerry Falwell texts we see a distinct message that does not change over time. Jerry Falwell has become a leading manipulator using biblical axioms to encourage fear and hate, which deviates from the moral aspect of Bible verses. His rhetorical propaganda forms an ideological box of sorts and anyone outside the box is considered an enemy of the ‘moral values’ he preaches. The parameters of this box are off limits, not only to the Democratic Party, but also to homosexuals, feminists, abortionists, the ACLU, and other entities that do not consent to Falwell’s train of thought.

One week before he died he was interviewed by Christiane Amanpour on the Cable News Network (CNN) program called “God’s Warriors.” He was called the Religious Right by the press as a pejorative term but he actually enjoyed the designation. In this interview he still believes in his stance on the 9/11 tragedy, which blamed on the wicked ways of America including abortion, a homosexual lifestyle, and feminism.

AMANPOUR: You know, you caused a huge amount of controversy after 9/11 when you basically said that the Lord was removing his protection from America.
FALWELL: I still believe that. I believe that a country that is --
AMANPOUR: And that America probably deserved it.
FALWELL: Here's what I said, what -- no. I said that the people who are responsible must take the blame for it.
AMANPOUR: You did.
FALWELL: We were killing --
AMANPOUR: -- but you went on to say what I've just said.
FALWELL: We're killing a million babies a year in this country by abortion. But I was saying then and I'm saying now, that if we, in fact, change all the rules on which this Judeo-Christian nation was built, we cannot expect the Lord to put his shield of protection around us as he has in the past.
AMANPOUR: So you still stand by that?
FALWELL: I stand right by it.

Falwell goes on to contradict his own statement in the interview above. His opinion of the way this country was formulated, and his belief of what it meant, does not compute with the
historical facts. There is a disconnection with reality in his belief system, as his interpretations of biblical and constitutional texts are askew.

The logical conclusion of Falwell's argument is the destruction of American democracy through a Christian fundamentalist theocracy. This merging of religious ideology and politics suggests that America's citizens do not need to think rationally or logically, but that they must unquestioningly follow Falwell's interpretation of biblical scripture.

The end result of this type of thinking effectively diminishes the critical thought processes necessary to truly improve America. His methods ridicule and debase any and all who disagree with him, yet his intolerance of them is in itself hypocritical. His interpretations of biblical scriptures do not seem to include human compassion and kindness to the downtrodden. He uses a very selective reading method of the United States Constitution as well as the Bible to arrive at his conclusion of political and moral values. The opinions of Jerry Falwell and his followers detract from the rationality and tolerance shown by America's founders. The reality is that the Constitution was written by white American men, not by God, and that certain aspects have been amended in this document as time has passed; it is not 'inscribed in stone'.

FALWELL: Our politicians need to be men and women who take their faith into the halls of Congress, into the voting booth.

Falwell demands that Americans vote for a president who shares his moral values (falsely stating that they are what the nation was built on), which would effectively roll back many progressive changes that have been made in this country, especially involving civil and women's rights. We must remember what Falwell is saying when he imagined the 'moral values' this America had when it was founded. A return to the oppressions of that time is inconceivable, and yet he blatantly abuses his authority as a Man of God to persuade his followers that his way is the only way...the right way.
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