

FEELING RIGHT:
POLITICAL THEOLOGY, WHITE EVANGELICAL CHRISTIANITY,
AND THE IM/POSSIBLE PROJECT OF LISTENING

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Dedicated to my beloved children Amos and Arlo:

My desire is that you hear, smell, touch, see, and perform the truth.

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ABSTRACT

This dissertation examines the status of truth in contemporary political discourse. Truth seems to either have no grounding in fact, becoming reduced to a “feeling-only truth;” or truth is reduced to a “crypto-fundamentalist version of the facts”—facts that carry no awareness of the power structures that seek to be manifest as first principles, anchoring truths that fix white, straight, cisgendered, able-bodied men as the ideal citizen. I frame my project with case studies from fundamentalist Christianity at the Creation Museum in Boone County, KY and from charismatic-evangelical practice at the International House of Prayer in Kansas City, MO. These examples, read in comparison to popular works on knowledge and to “radical” or “theology after the death of God,” demonstrate that secular truth-making continues to rely on the modern liberal sovereign subject, who is presumed to be autonomous and free to make decisions about what is true.

I argue that effective truth is affective; it is conceptual but also exceptional, exciting the passions and breaking through the monotony of day-to-day life. Challenging the modern liberal subject, I argue that human beings come into subjectivity at the limits—at the limits of language and at the limits of power. I offer the revelation of an affected God: a God of the im/possible, simultaneously potential and limit. In turn, individual subjectivity is limited—affected by—the structures that reify white male supremacy in the U.S. At the same time, subjects are revealed as porous, as interdependent, and as open to change—albeit slow, incremental change. I propose a first principle of listening for political truth—listening for sense, listening with the senses, and for a sense of place. Critical listening therefore takes place. Listening is an event rooted in facts—but also a music-making that moves people, challenges systems, and performs truth. Performed truth, enacted truth, hopefully, is change

INTRODUCTION: THE (UN)TRUTHFUL STATUS OF POLITICAL DISCOURSE IN THE UNITED STATES

Don't be so overly dramatic about it, Chuck. You're saying it's a falsehood, and they're giving — our press secretary, Sean Spicer, gave alternative facts to that. -Presidential Advisor Kellyanne Conway on Sean Spicer's inflated report of Donald Trump's inauguration audience.

"Wait a minute. Alternative facts? Alternative facts? Four of the five facts he uttered . . . were just not true. Alternative facts are not facts; they're falsehoods." - Reporter Chuck Todd in response¹

Truths are decayed from among the children of men." Aquinas' gloss on Psalm 11:2²

Shortly after the 2016 Republican National Convention, which saw Donald Trump crowned as the GOP nominee, former House Speaker Newt Gingrich appeared in an interview on CNN. The interviewer challenged some of Trump's key campaign claims, which painted a dark picture of the U.S. as crime-ridden, dark, and decrepit, by asserting that "violent crime is down and the economy is ticking up." Gingrich responded, "The average American, I will tell you this morning, does not feel crime is down." The interviewer answered, "But it is down...it's the facts" "What I said is equally true," Gingrich maintained. "No," the interviewer asserted, "People *feel* it." Gingrich is clear in his response. "As a political candidate, I'll go with how people feel."³

During the first debate of the 2016 presidential election cycle, democratic nominee Hillary Clinton looked to the camera and said, "I hope the fact-checkers are

¹ Rebecca Sinderbrand, "How Kellyanne Conway ushered in the era of 'alternative facts,'" *The Washington Post*, January 22, 2017, Accessed April 22, 2021, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/the-fix/wp/2017/01/22/how-kellyanne-conway-ushered-in-the-era-of-alternative-facts/>.

² Thomas Aquinas, "First Part, Question 16, Article 7" in *Summa Theologica*, (United States: Benziger Bros., 1947), 93.

³ John Oliver "Republican National Convention," *Last Week Tonight*, HBO, July 25, 2016, Accessed April 22, 2021, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zNdkrtfZP8I>.

turning up the volume and really working hard.” During the debate Clinton’s campaign website was converted into a fact-checking repository of Donald Trump’s false statements called “Literally Trump.”⁴ According to a *Wired* report, nearly two million people visited the site after Clinton mentioned it during the live debate. The Clinton campaign’s fact-checking project pales in comparison to others that have thrived in recent years, like Politifact.com, Factcheck.org, or Snopes.com. Despite the clear evidence that Donald Trump frequently lies and the efforts to fight the slip of fact into fiction with redoubled fact-checking projects, Donald Trump was elected as the 45th President in November of 2016. Despite his defeat in the subsequent election, the question must be asked: does Donald Trump’s success in the previous election and continued mean that truth doesn’t matter anymore?

Indeed, the election of Donald Trump caused a renewed interest in the status of truth in the U.S. People rushed to announce that the U.S. is now “post-truth!”⁵ Named the Oxford dictionary word of the year in 2016, Oxford Online defines “post-truth” as “relating to or denoting circumstances in which objective facts are less influential in shaping public opinion than appeals to emotion and personal belief.”⁶ This project takes

⁴ Issie Lapowsky, “Millions of People Checked out Clinton’s Debate Fact-Check Site,” *Wired Magazine*, August 27th, 2016, Accessed April 2021, <https://www.wired.com/2016/09/millions-people-fact-checked-debate-clintons-website/>.

⁵ For example, see Ruth Marcus, “Welcome to the Post-Truth Presidency,” *Washington Post*, December 2, 2016, Accessed April 22, 2021, https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/welcome-to-the-post-truth-presidency/2016/12/02/baaf630a-b8cd-11e6-b994-f45a208f7a73_story.html. While the term “post-truth” was coined in 1992 by Serbian-American playwright Steve Tesich², it was named “word of the year” in 2016 by Oxford Dictionaries, citing a “2000% increase” in usage from 2015. Apparently there are earlier usages where post-truth means “after truth was given.” Richard Kreitner, *The Nation*, November 30, 2016, Accessed April 22, 2021, <https://www.thenation.com/article/post-truth-and-its-consequences-what-a-25-year-old-essay-tells-us-about-the-current-moment/>.

⁶ Alison Flood, *The Guardian*, November 16, 2016, Accessed April 22, 2021, <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2016/nov/15/post-truth-named-word-of-the-year-by-oxford->

up the question of truth in this moment. Apparently we Americans no longer agree on what it means to claim that something is true. Even worse, the argument seems to map onto political camps. People on the right claim truth can be measured by feelings; and people on the left constantly seek to fact-check the feelings of the other side. So political truth, at least in popular discourse, seems to be, on one hand, whatever a person *feels* is true, having no connection to facts (as modelled by Newt Gingrich's refusal of the facts in the opening scene). I will call this version of truth "feeling-only truth." Or on the other hand, truth is reduced to what I name a "crypto-fundamentalist" version of the facts, which we can see operating in Hillary Clinton's elaborate effort to fact-check Donald Trump.

Fact-checking, so far, has not been an effective strategy for combating the slip of fact into fiction and the rise of feeling-only truth. That is not to say, I must be clear, that facts don't matter. While the present project does make a turn to poststructuralism, and even to deconstruction, this turn is not to assert there are no facts. Facts have to matter to a project that is interested in facilitating a more just and flourishing world, because change depends on understanding the problems that actually face us. Without, for instance, the scientists in Wuhan, China who swiftly sequenced the DNA of the Covid-19 virus and released the sequence for free to the broader scientific community, the mRNA vaccines that proved effective at generating immunity to the novel virus would not have been so quickly possible.⁷ Without the data—the facts—the cure is not possible.

[dictionaries.](#)

⁷ Jon Gertner, "Unlocking the Covid Code," *The New York Times Magazine*, March 3, 2021, Accessed April 4, 2021, <https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2021/03/25/magazine/genome-sequencing-covid-variants.html>. It is worth noting that China also attempted to block scientists from warning the global

The example of the Covid-19 vaccine broadens truth from facts to include theoretical frameworks. Raw data requires interpretation to organize, structure, and make sense of it. For the researchers in Wuhan, the scientific method and the built-up knowledge of the field of genetics provides a scaffold for their work sequencing the virus. Facts require interpretation. A December 2020 episode of the radio show *This American Life* featured an interview with scientist Nianshuang Wang, one person whose work contributed to the vaccine.⁸ His work is “structural biology,” which tries to map the structure of molecules. Wang’s project was to replicate the spike protein using its DNA code—just the protein, not the deadly virus—that gives corona viruses their distinctive halo. At first inserting the protein into carrier cells resulted in unstable versions of the protein, which lost their shape or failed to replicate adequately. The radio story recounts the tedium of working day after day, preparing test after test: trying different carrier cells, and tweaking the genetic code. Wang mixed the test material in a small flask, set it on a small platform that swished the fluid, and waited. Most of the tests failed. Finally, Wang changed the genetic code to “swap in two proline amino acids” which helped to hold the protein in its spike form—and caused the receiving cells to make more spikes. Wang’s study is one of the many layers of research that made possible the vaccines for the novel

community about Covid. Kuang Biao, “China’s coronavirus cover-up: how censorship and propaganda obstructed the truth,” *The Conversation*, March 6, 2020, Accessed April 4, 2021, <https://theconversation.com/chinas-coronavirus-cover-up-how-censorship-and-propaganda-obstructed-the-truth-133095>. Finally, in early 2021, China blocked entry to a WHO team studying Covid’s origins. Sarah Boseley, “China blocks entry to WHO team studying Covid’s origins,” *The Guardian*, January 5, 2021, Accessed April 4, 2021, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2021/jan/05/china-blocks-entry-to-who-team-studying-covids-origins>.

⁸ David Kestenbaum, “Act Two: The Other Extinguishers,” *This American Life*, December 18, 2020, Accessed April 22, 2021, www.thisamericanlife.org/727/transcript.

coronavirus. The mRNA vaccine for the Covid-19 virus injects the spike protein into people, where it replicates, causing an immune reaction that results in human beings developing antibodies that can fight the virus without being infected with the virus itself. The work of science is the testing and refining of theories to make the best possible use of the data—the facts—we have.

After the refining of science come the ethical questions about how to use the findings of science in the world. Who should access a life-saving vaccine first? Should doctors and nurses who are treating patients get first access? Or should the people who are most likely to fall ill be vaccinated first? Which members of society are considered “essential” and therefore deserve to be vaccinated as quickly as possible? What side effects for a vaccine are worth enduring for the greater good represented by herd immunity? All of these questions—and many more—go into deciding how to deploy the vaccine that was made possible by scientific discovery. And when decisions are made about how to make a life-saving technology available, ethics enters into the equation. Ethics names the shared values that structure our decision making.

So any truth worth its salt must address these three factors: the raw data from our world, the theories that scaffold that data, and finally the questions about how to use the results of the combined data and theories the world.⁹ Importantly, my project does not intend to offer a definition of truth, writ large, capital-T.¹⁰ No, instead, I seek to offer a

⁹ Reading Simon Blackburn’s little book, *Truth: A Guide* assured me that I am not interested in wading into definitions of truth as they are received in philosophy. Though, Blackburn, like me, refuses to make a final determination of the truth. He seeks frameworks for truth that hold on to facts and questions of morality at the same time. Simon Blackburn, *Truth A Guide for the Perplexed*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007.

¹⁰ I avoid saying truth without politics in order to avoid becoming entangled in the long trajectory of philosophical debates about the nature of truth. Thomas Aquinas’s definition of truth depended on

partial explanation for how truth came to seem so improbable in contemporary U.S. political discourse. It is the third moving piece that is particularly sticky, like a burr, and is where the conceptual elements of truth catch onto the material. As human beings act out their truth, it emerges entangled within their concrete location, including power structures of the world like white supremacy and patriarchy. At the same time, truth is acted out through human bodies, with feelings and desires. Decisions to act out truths through bodies with feelings, in the world structured by systems of power, emerge as ethics. In other words, claims about what is true shape the way humans act in the world. Truth is enmeshed with ethics, because it is an anchor, a first principle, for the decisions human beings make about how to act in the world.

Ethics seems to be the most obvious site of disagreement about truth. One would expect people to agree about the facts, and even about the theories to scaffold and make meaning out of or from facts. Yet contemporary discourse cannot seem to agree even on the facts. And why does feeling appear to be in opposition to facts? Rather than remaining at the level of abstraction, my project draws out several knotty examples of contemporary truth-making in order to untangle the seeming bifurcation between feeling-only truth and a crypto-fundamentalist version of the facts.

Before I get to my extended case studies, let me to return to my opening examples of political truth-making in the descriptions of Newt Gingrich and Hillary Clinton. As I

Aristotle. He wrote, *Veritas est adæquatio intellectus et rei* or, “truth is the conformity of the intellect and things” (Q 16.2) My work on the modern liberal subject, who comprehends the world, therefore addresses questions of epistemology, while holding epistemology in conversation with actions, because subjectivity adds the capacity to act to discussions of knowledge. The truth I am reading is political because it emerges from the discourse of the American political system; and the truth I am reading is political because it emerges from and shapes the systems of power that place some lives over others in U.S. life.

observed these moments in 2016, the first seeds of this project were sown. Both vignettes come from the 2016 election, when Donald Trump and Hillary Clinton were locked in a battle for political *power*. I was struck by how differently the GOP and Democrats worked to make their case for election and I wondered how these opposing rhetorical, even epistemological, strategies were folded into the widening polarization of left and right. Seeing these differing approaches to truth in the heightened example of a presidential election, a competition for the highest office in the U.S., made it evident that power is, somehow, a component of truth-making.¹¹

For the Covid-19 vaccine, power enters the conversation with the ethical questions I list above, when decisions are made about how to manufacture and deploy the life-saving pharmaceutical; and likely power had many opportunities to enter before the vaccine was developed, as questions of funding, lab space, and so much more. Some of the ethical questions about the vaccine may be decided by the laws of our country, or state—but if there is no existing answer to these questions, it is people and institutions in positions of power that make these decisions. So the tedious work of testing and

¹¹ 46th President Joe Biden's rhetorical strategy has been different than Hillary Clinton's. Biden speaks more in narratives and values than Clinton tended to. Take for example his inauguration speech, where he said, "There is truth and there are lies. Lies told for power and for profit. And each of us has a duty and responsibility, as citizens, as Americans, and especially as leaders – leaders who have pledged to honor our Constitution and protect our nation — to defend the truth and to defeat the lies." Joe Biden, "Inauguration Address by President Joseph R. Biden, Jr." The White House, Press Briefing Room, January 20, 2021, Accessed April 4, 2021, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/speeches-remarks/2021/01/20/inauguration-address-by-president-joseph-r-biden-jr/>. Similarly Biden's March 31, 2021 speech introducing his infrastructure plan addresses big ideas and the need to save democracy itself. Biden said, "It's not a plan that tinkers around the edges, it's a once in a generation investment in America, unlike anything we've seen or done since we built the interstate highway system and the space race decades ago... I truly believe we're in a moment where history is going to look back on this time as a fundamental choice having been made between democracies and autocracies." Joe Biden, "Joe Biden Speech on \$2 Trillion Infrastructure Plan Transcript March 31," *Rev*, March 31, 2021, Accessed April 4, 2021, <https://www.rev.com/blog/transcripts/joe-biden-speech-on-2-trillion-infrastructure-plan-transcript-march-31>.

repeating tests that Nianshuang Wang undertook in the lab swiftly became entangled with political power, even with the presidential power that had been sought by Donald Trump and Hillary Clinton in 2016, because history tells us that Donald Trump, with an already widely established reputation as habitual liar, became president of the United States in January of 2016 and remained in office until January 2021. Therefore it was the administration of “alternative facts” that faced the global Covid-19 pandemic in February of 2020. Donald Trump and his chosen team were responsible for leveraging the money and logistical force of the federal government to respond to the pandemic, and that power included making decisions about how to finance and then distribute the vaccines.

People and institutions with political power therefore make decisions that have life and death consequences for the citizens of the U.S. It is here, where truth-making meets power, and then intersects with the material lives of people, that truth-making is imbricated with projects of subject formation. Claims about what is true, however truth is determined, anchor the decisions that people and institutions with power make about how others can or should live their lives. Donald Trump’s claims about what is true, often divorced from facts or science, shaped his response to the pandemic. For example, he frequently claimed the pandemic was almost over or would just go away: on Friday, February 7th, 2020, he said “we get into April, in the warmer weather—that has a very negative effect on that, and that kind of virus.”¹² Trump’s *hope* that the virus would disappear became a claim that it *would*, which in turn allowed him to limit the response

¹² Christian Paz, “All the President’s Lies About the Coronavirus,” *The Atlantic*, November 2, 2020, www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2020/11/trumps-lies-about-coronavirus/608647.

of the federal government to the pandemic.¹³ In addition, Trump claimed that the anti-malaria drug hydroxychloroquine was effective against Covid-19, even pushing the Federal Drug Administration to issue an emergency approval of the drug for treating the pandemic disease. At least one person died after taking a version of chloroquine used to clean fish tanks, while apparently trying to prevent Covid-19. And at the same time, people with lupus and rheumatoid arthritis struggled to get access to hydroxychloroquine, which *is* proven to treat their conditions. Finally, after the medicine was demonstrated to cause heart problems in otherwise healthy people, the FDA was forced to rescind their authorization. When asked why he was advocating for the drug, against the advice of his health advisors, Trump said “I feel good about it. That’s all it is, just a feeling, you know.”¹⁴ Trump’s claims and correspondingly his decisions in response to the pandemic were based on feelings—and false information—which resulted in direct harm to people under his power and ultimately countless unnecessary deaths.

Political power is therefore a key component of the truth-making I seek to analyze. So my project engages political theology, specifically the work of controversial political theorist Carl Schmitt, who famously wrote in his 1922 book, *Political Theology: Four Chapters on the Concept of Sovereignty*, “Sovereign is he who decides on the

¹³ Of course, it’s impossible to know precisely what was happening inside Trump’s mind (we are closed subjects, at least in that sense) but he did admit to journalist Bob Woodward, in the weeks before the pandemic was publicly known, that he understood the danger of Covid-19. It seems therefore that his claims the pandemic would end were made in hope rather than belief. Maggie Haberman, “Trump Admits Downplaying the Virus, Knowing it was ‘Deadly Stuff,’” *New York Times*, September 9, 2020, <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/09/09/us/politics/woodward-trump-book-virus.html>.

¹⁴ Libby Cathey, “Timeline: Tracking Trump Alongside Scientific Developments on Hydroxychloroquine,” *ABC News*, August 8, 2020, <https://abcnews.go.com/Health/timeline-tracking-trump-alongside-scientific-developments-hydroxychloroquine/story?id=72170553>.

exception.”¹⁵ Political theology, broadly defined, lives at the intersection of Christian theology and politics and in political philosophy. The field has a rich bibliography of texts, many of which are doctrinally committed to the Christian tradition. My project in contrast, takes up the line of political theology without doctrinal commitments, excited and provoked in recent years by a renewed reading of Carl Schmitt’s work. Specifically, this work aligns with “radical” or “death of God” theologians for whom, “God in the image of man, God sitting in heaven, is dead.”¹⁶ Radical theologians are therefore interested in how power is renegotiated when it no longer is anchored in a traditional doctrine of God. Schmitt’s political theology, which is not about God at all, but rather is about power in a state, a nation, without a sovereign human leader, has been extremely evocative for radical theology. Because of its materialist convictions, political theology challenges the traditional Christian doctrine of God. Even in its more recent new materialist form radical theology is still moved by Karl Marx’s claim that “religion is the opiate of the masses;” or the argument that religion serves to obscure the material abuses of people whose labor is key to the operation of the state.

Radical theology therefore finds itself in an uneasy relationship with Schmitt’s political theology, even as the latter provides crucial tools for exploring the current status of power in the U.S. Schmitt infamously wrote, “All significant concepts of the modern theory of the state are secularized theological concepts.”¹⁷ Given the increased

¹⁵ Carl Schmitt, *Political Theology: Four Chapters on the Concept of Sovereignty*, trans. George Schwab, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005), 5.

¹⁶ John T. Elson, “Toward a Hidden God,” *Time*, April 6, 1966, 82.

¹⁷ Carl Schmitt, *Political Theology*, 16.

acknowledgement in the U.S. that religion, most often Christianity, cannot be absolutely cordoned out of the supposedly secular realms of government and other public institutions, works exposing the theological underpinnings of U.S. politics have proliferated.¹⁸

The relationship between Schmitt and radical theological projects is fraught, because Schmitt's analysis of the state—he has the German Weimar Republic in mind—deploys theological language in order to challenge liberal democracy, which he sees as incapable of making adequate decisions. To state his concern a little too simply, if every person has a say in the decisions that govern a state, then no firm decisions will ever be made. At the same time he is critical of ability of the judiciary to make decisions, because they are governed by a set of laws or norms that cannot possibly account for every contingency. It is this concern about “legal indeterminacy” that pushed Schmitt to support the dictatorial Nazi regime in Germany. Radical theology joins uneasily with Schmittian political theology, taking from it the certain tools of analysis, while at the same time working against the authoritarian and anti-democratic impulses in Schmitt's thought.

It is at this juncture of theology and political power that I take up my analysis of the status of truth in contemporary political discourse. Sovereign power, according to Schmitt, resides in the person or institutions, who decide the exception to the law. When a crisis arises, the sovereign decider is the person or the institution who has the power to suspend the law. Schmittian sovereignty in its purest form is the absolute power of a dictator over people: under complete Schmittian sovereignty, individual subjects lose the

¹⁸ For example the work of Slavoj Žižek, Giorgio Agamben, Mark C. Taylor, Richard Kearny, and many others.

freedom to choose how to act. In a representative democracy, the people are free to elect representatives who set the laws that govern the people. If democracy seeks to make power diffuse, shared amongst the people, then Schmittian sovereignty seeks to concentrate power in a single person or institution.

I seek to unearth how Schmittian sovereignty is embedded in U.S. political discourse. In a fairly straightforward way, Trump was the “sovereign” who decided “the exception” that allowed hydroxychloroquine to briefly be used to treat Covid-19. Yet, the exception—or emergency FDA approval—did not last, because Trump was not a dictator and the other systems of accountability in our society eventually kicked in to check his power. So, as I write, sovereignty in the U.S. is not always the absolute power that mirrors “God sitting in heaven” as king of kings. Nonetheless, a Schmittian model of sovereignty persists in the U.S., woven into the mechanisms of power that make decisions with life and death consequences for people in the U.S.

At times attempts to claim Schmittian-style sovereignty are explicit, out in the open, like for example, in the January 2021 phone call where Trump attempted to strong-arm Georgia Secretary of State Brad Raffensperger into “finding” enough votes to overturn the results of the election in his state. Trump even went so far as to vaguely threaten the Secretary with criminal prosecution if he did not comply.¹⁹ This, I argue, was an open attempt to wrest power from the people, from the U.S. democratic will by overturning the results of an election, which was, by all accounts, as free and fair as any

¹⁹ Michael D. Shear and Stephanie Saul, “Trump, in Taped Call, Pressured Georgia Official to ‘Find’ Votes to Overturn Election,” *New York Times*, January 5, 2021, <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/01/03/us/politics/trump-raffensperger-call-georgia.html>.

election in recent U.S. history.

Yet, of course, even before Trump’s “aspirational fascism” took center stage, other less explicit forces worked to disempower people from exercising their freedom in U.S. elections.²⁰ White supremacy, for example, operates as implicit Schmittian sovereignty in the U.S. electoral system. Since 2013, when the Supreme Court overturned a key portion of the 1965 Voting Rights Act, which required states with a history of discrimination to clear changes to voting regulations with federal authorities, states have rushed to amend their voting systems. Polling place closures, voter identification laws, and voter roll purges are just a few of the strategies that have been used to make voting harder for minorities. Often these changes were made in the name of preventing “voter fraud,” the same fraud that Donald Trump claimed cost him the 2020 election. Despite the explicit reasons for these changes to voting regulations, time and time again, the laws seem to target access to voting for Black and other non-white voters. One voter ID law in North Carolina was struck down by a federal court, which wrote it was designed to target Black voters “with almost surgical precision.”²¹ This is Schmittian sovereign power, which seeks to concentrate power in white people by working to except people of color from participation in democracy. Schmittian sovereignty moves in explicit and implicit

²⁰ William Connolly, *Aspirational Fascism: The Struggle for Multifaceted Democracy Under Trump*, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2017).

²¹ Sam Levine and Ankita Rao, “In 2013 the Supreme Court Guttled the Voting Rights Act—How has it Changed the U.S.?” *The Guardian*, June 25, 2020, <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2020/jun/25/shelby-county-anniversary-voting-rights-act-consequences>. In late March 2021, Georgia Governor Brian Kemp signed a sweeping law to remake the state voting system by making it harder to vote by mail, limiting ballot drop boxes, making it a crime to deliver water and food to voters in line, etc. Nolan D. McCaskill and Zach Monellaro, “All Eyes are on Georgia. Again.” *Politico*, April 4, 2021, Accessed April 4, 2021, <https://www.politico.com/news/2021/04/04/georgia-voting-law-479002>.

forms; and Schmittian sovereignty works at different scales, sometimes working to concentrate power in a group, like white people, or at other times in a person, like Trump.

I propose that Newt Gingrich's strategic decision to accept "what people feel" in my opening vignette demonstrates that another layer, *feeling*, circulates in the production of political truth. For some people feeling serves as the verifier of truth, as "feeling-only truth;" in contrast, I believe Gingrich *knew* what the FBI data, cited by the interviewer, said about crime. He knew that crime was up in some major cities, but down by most other measures. Gingrich chose to strategically ignore the facts for his—and the Republican Party's—political gain. He made a choice to leverage certain people, certain subjects, as part of the coalition that consolidated power for Donald Trump as the 45th president. The people that Gingrich sought to address in that interview were attracted to Trump, at least in part, because of how he made them feel.

Trump's work to activate feelings was most obvious at his infamous campaign rallies in 2016. The cry "Make America Great Again," while not explicitly racist, at least not in a stereotypical way, activated white voters who felt as though they have been left behind in the economic recovery since 2008. But instead of pushing people towards a new world, one where the ninety-nine percent do not have to bear the weight of financial pain as the top one percent become incomprehensibly rich, Trump's cries calls for "Greatness" harkened back to a whiter past.²² Trump's blatantly racist calls to "Build a Wall" that keeps out Mexican migrants, or to send women of color in Congress "back

²² This is not a new strategy, of course. See Pem Buck's *Worked to the Bone*, which is an account of how poor white people were pitted against black slaves to keep them from resisting the economic system in Kentucky. Pem Buck, *Worked to the Bone: Race, Class, Power, and Privilege in Kentucky*, (New York: Monthly Review Press, 2001).

where they came from,” made evident the white supremacism embedded in his political decisions.²³ But Trump’s explicit white supremacism doesn’t explain why he kept holding intensely emotional rallies even *after* he was elected as president.

Trump’s effectiveness as a public speaker, though it might mystify observers on the left, is clear. Political theorist William Connolly’s brief book *Aspirational Fascism* (2017), offers an introductory comparison, albeit a careful one, between Donald Trump’s rise to power and the life trajectory of Adolf Hitler. Hitler’s ascension, of course, led to the breakdown of the Weimar Republic, the same representative democracy that Carl Schmitt critiques for its lack of sovereign power. Key to Connolly’s analysis is to explore the role of *affect* in Trump’s aspirational fascism. Connolly argues that pundits are too swift to mock Trump’s speaking style, which “draws into a collage dispersed anxieties and resentments about deindustrialization, race, border issues, immigration, working-class insecurities, trade policies, pluralizing drives, the new place of the United States in the global economy, and tacit uncertainty about the shaky place of a neoliberal culture on this planet.”²⁴ But the verbal claims work in concert with “Trump’s animated gestures, facial expressions, finger pointing, strutting, signature phrase clusters, and recurrent twirls around the stage to call out the roaring acclaim of the audience.”²⁵ As Connolly argues, “[e]ach element in a Trump performance flows and folds into others until an

²³ Katie Rogers and Nicholas Fandos, “Trump Tells Congresswomen to ‘Go Back’ to the Countries They Came From,” *The New York Times*, July 14, 2019, <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/07/14/us/politics/trump-twitter-squad-congress.html>.

²⁴ Connolly, *Aspirational Fascism*, 26.

²⁵ Connolly, *Aspirational Fascism*, 26.

aggressive resonance machine is formed that is more intense than its parts.”²⁶ Trump’s power comes from his racist, nationalist, etc. claims, but also emerges from the way he performs, from his bodily movements, his quirks of speaking, or from the forces of feeling that cannot be reduced to merely the conceptual. During a performance, Trump’s power is caught up, amplified, and returned to him by the audience who shouts, chants, in response to his performance, further fueling the resonance machine.

This dissertation uses the recent interdisciplinary or discourse of affect theory to develop a theoretical framework for analyzing political truth as it moves across different registers of meaning—meanings that co-assemble with, vibrate against—the conceptual. As Melissa Gregg and Gregory J. Seigworth write in the introduction to *The Affect Theory Reader*, “[a]ffect arises in the midst of *in-between-ness*: in the capacities to act and be acted upon.”²⁷ Affect therefore names the material power that one subject has upon another. Subjects stretch out into space, as sound that lands on ears, light that touches eyes. These kinds of material, but para-conceptual interactions are what Connolly describes in Trump’s “finger pointing...and recurrent twirls.” These intensities facilitate the “aggressive resonance machine” that becomes more than its parts.

In in a sense, the capacity to act and be acted upon is the most basic measurement of the political, as the relationship between bodies, “human, nonhuman, part-body, or otherwise,” however brief or enduring.²⁸ But affect does not move linearly, it is not

²⁶ Connolly, *Aspirational Fascism*, 26.

²⁷ Melissa Gregg and Gregory J. Seigworth, “An Inventory of Shimmers” in *The Affect Theory Reader*, (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2010), Loc 50.

²⁸ Gregg and Seigworth, “An Inventory,” Loc 53.

beholden to tidy cause and effect, or to manifesting as consistent one-to-one relating, rather it is “those resonances that circulate about, between, and sometimes stick to bodies and world”²⁹ Affect can therefore describe the political as it exceeds the capacity of individuals to act, and becomes the powers that circulate to structure a society. Affects can impinge on groups of bodies, evoking different responses from each person, while still contributing to a project of collective subject formation.

We have names, for specific forms of affect—or feeling—like the anger Trump so frequently performs and provokes in U.S political discourse. Feelings are in this perspective read as the named emotions taught to children in picture books, like “happy,” “sad,” or “angry.” In affect theory feelings are often pitted against “potential,” which is a name for affect that is pre-discursive, prior to named feelings. Donovan Schaefer refers to two “types” of affect theory: first the phenomenological, building on the work of Silvan Tompkins, which sees affects as biological drives that are fluid in their ability to attach to objects in time and space; and second, a type that defines affect as pre-discursive potential by developing the philosophies of Spinoza, Whitehead, and Deleuze.³⁰ Scholars who see affect as potential tend to completely divorce affect from specific feelings, viewing feelings—like love or anger—as cultural constructs. In her political theology Karen Bray adds a third type of affect theory to Schaefer’s list by including the work of cultural studies, which describes the collective feelings of particular political moments, like Ann Cvetkovich’s depiction of depression as a “public feeling” in the fallout of the

²⁹ Gregg and Seigworth, “An Inventory,” Loc 53

³⁰ Donovan Schaefer, *Religious Affects*, (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2015), 36.

2008 Great Recession.³¹

Chapter three develops my position amongst these three strands of affect theory in detail, with particular attention to the relationship between the “pre-discursive” and feelings. I follow Donovan Schaefer who describes affect as a series of biological drives that have developed through deep evolutionary time: including “anger-rage, surprise-startlement, enjoyment-joy, interest-excitement.”³² Affects are therefore durable, or intransigent, resistant to change. They are not, however, totally unchangeable. Affects are not a “pristine set of interlocking gears” but rather “a system in tension,” which is the “living multiplicity of diverging emotional drivers rather than a unified economy.”³³

So truth-claims circulate in political power—and power is simultaneously conceptual and affective. Given these observations, I argue that Hillary Clinton, the democratic party, and other groups further to the left, do not tend to acknowledge the role that feelings, with their ability to activate power, play in political truth. Why is this? Why has fact-checking become the go-to approach of liberal politicians, when it does not seem to make a difference in the increasingly polarized U.S. political landscape? I argue that the intense focus on fact-checking modelled by Hillary Clinton presumes—unquestioningly accepts as natural—a form of human subjectivity where human beings, via their minds, are in control of their feelings, desires, and drives.

This model of subjectivity, which may be called “the modern liberal subject,” “the

³¹ Karen Bray, *Grave Attending: A Political Theology for the Unredeemed*, (New York: Fordham University Press, 2020), 5. Ann Cvetkovich, *Depression: A Public Feeling*, (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2012).

³² Schaefer, *Religious Affects*, 46.

³³ Schaefer, *Religious Affects*, 47.

sovereign subject,” or “the buffered self,” is the form of human subjectivity that is presumed to be “natural” and “normal” in the contemporary U.S.³⁴ The modern liberal subject emerged from post-Enlightenment modern re-negotiations of epistemology, when truth was brought down to earth, no longer anchored in a transcendent source, but rather carried in the autonomous ability of human beings to reason. I propose that this renegotiation of truth parallels the renegotiation of power within states, when the power was brought down from a literal sovereign leader into the hands of the people as a democracy.

Then, following the arguments of Mayra Rivera and J. Kameron Carter, I demonstrate that the sovereign subject almost invariably is represented by a white male, cisgendered, heterosexual person. I see implicit Schmittian sovereignty in the presumption that the modern liberal subject is the normal, even ideal form of U.S. citizen, because it seeks to exclude people who are not white men from full participation in U.S. life, whether openly through voting restrictions, police violence, or through more subtle practices, embedded, for example, in the student loan system promising access to education by then disproportionality burdening students of color with debt.³⁵

If politicians, activists, and at times, scholars on the left tend to *believe*

³⁴ Mayra Rivera writes, “Modernity imagined the *ego cogito* of self-identity as transparent, unaffected, autonomous. The self was assumed to be the master of his agency; he knew himself and was in control of his emotions and desires.” Mayra Rivera, *The Touch of Transcendence: A Postcolonial Theology of God* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2007), Loc 1496. In chapter one, I make the case via Charles Taylor’s *A Secular Age*. Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age*, (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 2007).

³⁵ “An average black graduate has \$7,400 more in student debt than his or her white peer.” Alina Akhtar and Hillary Hoffower, “9 startling facts that show just how hard the student-debt crisis is hurting Black Americans,” *Business Insider*, June 10, 2020, <https://www.businessinsider.com/how-americas-student-debt-crisis-impacts-black-students-2019-7>.

unquestioningly in the modern liberal subject then it is not surprising that they often do not recognize the role of feeling and affect in generating and circulating truth. It also follows that people who assume human beings are led by their autonomous ability to reason attempt to fight feeling-only truth with increasingly elaborate fact-checking programs. As a partial corrective to this tendency on the left, I analyze the current status of political truth and demonstrate that the positions that dominate public discussions—“feeling-only truth” and “crypto-fundamentalist facts”—fuel arguments about epistemology that work to obscure projects of subject formation. The fact-checking undertaken by Hillary Clinton, and by others in similar projects, obscures their belief in the modern liberal project of subject formation. Because their belief in the modern liberal subject is assumed, accepted as natural, and largely unconscious, it cannot adequately be held to account for its roots in racism, patriarchy, and other forms of oppression.

Again, political power acts to set the first principles, norms, laws—explicit and implicit—that govern action in the world. Therefore the people or institutions that set the first principles for a society have power over subjects; and the principles, norms, or values that govern society are tools of subject formation, setting guidelines and limitations on how free people are to act. Political truth and political subjectivity are therefore imbricated and co-emerge across a variety of magnitudes, from individual to institutions. If the modern liberal subject, unconsciously presumed as natural by much of the U.S., cannot fully account for subjectivity in the U.S., which emerges entrained in white supremacy, patriarchy, heteronormativity, and many other structures of oppression, then is another model of subjectivity is necessary, one that accounts for the role of feelings—of affect—in forming subjects?

I argue that the bifurcation of feeling-only truth and crypto-fundamentalist facts named in the opening paragraphs is artificial: facts and feelings are *together* implicated in the production of truth. Furthermore, if political truth is inseparable from projects of subject formation, then political truth is also enmeshed in power. Political truths resonate across facts, feelings, and power; and political truths shape and are shaped by subjects, both as individuals and as collective. Truth therefore must always be thought in relation to affect and power. At the close of this project, I propose an economy of truth as a political theology of revelation, which accounts for the circulation of facts, feelings, and power.

Chapter Outline:

My project (thankfully) does not stay with Donald Trump's rhetorical and affective prowess, which aids in the circulation of his authoritarian desires. Instead I turn to a series of knotty truth-making sites that intersect with Trump's rise to power. Specifically, I explore political truth through case studies of contemporary evangelical Christian communities. According to Pew Forum data from 2014, the United States is 70.6 percent Christian. Of that 70.6 percent, 25.4 percent are evangelical Christians.³⁶ And then, according to the same data, evangelical Christianity is 76 percent white.³⁷ Most white evangelical Christians, 80 percent, voted for Donald Trump in 2016 and then in 2020, despite his almost-total break from the expected conservative social morality of

³⁶ "Religions," Religious Landscape Survey, Pew Research Forum, Accessed March 5, 2020, <https://www.pewforum.org/religious-landscape-study/#religions>.

³⁷ "Racial and Ethnic Data," Religious Landscape Survey, Pew Research Forum, Accessed March 5, 2020, <https://www.pewforum.org/religious-landscape-study/racial-and-ethnic-composition/>.

evangelical Christianity.³⁸

One moment when critics of Trump in 2016 expected a breakdown of evangelical support for the then-candidate was when the Access Hollywood tape was released, featuring Trump's claim that he grabs women "by the pussy."³⁹ Yet this assertion did not hinder Trump from achieving his unexpected victory in 2016. So what is it about Donald Trump that is so compelling for white evangelical Christians? While I cannot give a total or final answer to this question, I propose that white evangelical Christians trusted Donald Trump, at least in part, because they have been trained to recognize intense feeling as a verifier of truth.

In 1989 D.W. Bebbington defined "evangelical" according to four quadrants of a quadrilateral: "conversionism" which is the impulse to convince people to become Christians; "activism," or the impulse to be involved in the world, in shaping and changing societies; "biblicism" or the central role of the scriptural text; and "crucicentrism" which refers to the central role of Christ's death in salvation.⁴⁰ While these basic doctrines still loosely bind together a group called evangelical, the category, "evangelical Christian" has stretched to encompass more and more expressions of Christianity such that some claim the term no longer has a single coherent definition.⁴¹

³⁸ Tom Gjelten, "2020 Faith Vote Reflects 2016 Patterns," *NPR*, November 8, 2020, <https://www.npr.org/2020/11/08/932263516/2020-faith-vote-reflects-2016-patterns>.

³⁹ Mark Makela, "Transcript: Donald Trump's Taped Comments About Women," *The New York Times*, October 8, 2016, <https://www.nytimes.com/2016/10/08/us/donald-trump-tape-transcript.html>.

⁴⁰ D.W. Bebbington, *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain: A History from the 1730s to the 1980*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), 2-3.

⁴¹ Craig Martin, for example, suggests evangelicals might be identified by a shared "habitus" or disposition to the world rather than a shared set of doctrinal categories. Craig Martin, *A Critical*

For the purposes of this dissertation, I make use of “evangelical” first because the Christian communities I engage in this project self-identify as evangelical.⁴² Second, evangelical signifies here a reflection of the broader influence of evangelicalism on contemporary U.S. politics, as demonstrated above by the largely unified vote in support of Trump.

My interest in evangelical Christianity is explored through ethnographies, which are deep, close readings of particular communities, designed to function as a bridge between outsider and insider by offering a rich experience of the community that would not otherwise be accessible to outsiders. Ethnographies are crucial for my project, because I seek to explore more than the doctrines or beliefs of evangelical Christians, which tend to dominate conversations about these communities, particularly in progressive theological communities.⁴³ Ethnographies include thick descriptions of the places where religion is embedded, of the communities who embody a religion, and most important for my project, of the practices which allow a community to act out their beliefs and doctrines.

I open Chapter One at the Creation Museum in Boone County, Kentucky. The museum, my first case study, is run by Answers in Genesis (AIG), a ministry dedicated to

Introduction to the Study of Religion, 2nd Ed., (New York: Routledge, 2017).

⁴² While their evangelical identity is not on the front of their homepages, you can see it here, for example: <https://www.ihopkc.org/press-center/faq/can-evangelical-believers-fellowship-christian-traditions-catholic-orthodox-eastern-coptic/>, <https://creationmuseum.org/events/presentations/the-genetics-of-adam-and-eve-georgia-purdom/>

⁴³ Join me on the first day of an introductory “Religion and Society” class when I ask students to define religion and most respond “belief in God.” I spend the rest of the semester attempting to dismantle the dominance of that definition of religion. I make the case in Chapter Two that radical theologians tend to miss some of what is happening in evangelical Christian communities because they do not address the layer of practice and of community formation.

apologetics or to the defense of Christian beliefs. Despite the museum's commitment to the defense of conceptual knowledge about Christianity, the museum is more than a series of conceptual claims: the Creation Museum is an experience, a tourist attraction designed to draw visitors from around the country. The museum acts on all the senses by immersing visitors in an array of dinosaur skeletons, fossils, animatronic displays, and multimedia presentations. The primary difference between the Creation Museum and another natural history museum is that it exists in an alternate scientific reality, where the universe is no more than 6000 years old, instead of the 14 billion years agreed upon by secular scientific consensus. What is at stake for the Creation Museum in making claims about the youthfulness of the universe? First and foremost, they seek to maintain a literalist interpretation of the first chapters of the book of Genesis, which, in their reading, asserts that the universe was created in six literal days and uses the text of the Hebrew Bible to date the age of the earth.

The history of AIG is therefore linked to renegotiations of epistemology in early U.S. modernity and the movement called "fundamentalism." *The Fundamentals*, written between 1910 and 1915, are a series of books that attempt to pin down a set of fundamental, non-negotiable beliefs for Christianity in modernity, including "biblical inerrancy" and "premillennial" dispensationalism.⁴⁴ The books were drafted, in part, as a response to growing public awareness of Charles Darwin's theory of evolution by natural selection. Some Christians responded to shifting knowledge accepting the Bible as an

⁴⁴ Susan Trollinger and William Trollinger, *Righting America at the Creation Museum*, (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press), 4.

errant document.⁴⁵ But others pushed back. *The Fundamentals* attempted to position the Christian scripture as a source of truth equal to or better than the new science that was emerging at the end of the 19th century.⁴⁶

With the help of William and Susan Trollinger's book *Righting America at the Creation Museum*, I perform a close reading of truth production at the Creation Museum, where "Man's Word" and "God's Word" are set in stark contrast in the narrative signage of the building. Despite the Creation Museum's avowed starting place for claims about the universe, which alone ought to support their argument about the universe's age, the Creation Museum goes to great lengths to make their creation story *feel* scientific. The affective movement of truth at the Creation Museum is further demonstrated by the work of other first principles, like racism, which are not articulated, but rather suggested by the museum's attempts to generate fear with racialized images and words. Projects of subject formation at the Creation Museum—both implicit and explicit—work to, as Trollinger and Trollinger write, prepare "fearless warriors for what it understands to be the ongoing

⁴⁵ For a more in-depth telling of the relationship between the Creation Museum and fundamentalism, see the introduction to Trollinger and Trollinger's *Righting America at the Creation Museum*.

⁴⁶ The Fundamentals are a collection of essays which aren't beholden to a single thesis about science, religion, and the authority of scripture. One essay on science and religion presumes that science will "catch up" to what is presented in the Bible allowing conflicts to be resolved. The essay goes so far as to offer Augustine's suggestion that the length of the 6 days of creation was not settled until the end of creation, allowing earlier "days" to be much longer. James Orr, "Science and the Christian Faith," in *The Fundamentals Vol 4*, (Chicago: Testimony Publishing Company, 1910), 101. Another essay claims the bible is not at all in conflict with science. "The writer has been such a diligent student of the physical sciences and of the philosophies based on them, for upwards of twenty-five years, and a practicing lawyer for a still longer period, and having now acquired a fair knowledge of the text of the Scripture, he caused say that he is aware of no demonstrated face of science which is in conflict with a single statement of the Bible" Philip Mauro, "Life in the Word," in *The Fundamentals Vol 5*, (Chicago: Testimony Publishing Company, 1910), 17. The Creation Museum has responded to these discrepancies here: Terry Mortenson, "Exposing a Fundamental Compromise," *Answers in Genesis*, last modified May 4, 2018, <https://answersingenesis.org/theistic-evolution/exposing-a-fundamental-compromise/>.

culture war in America.”⁴⁷

Indeed, the entanglement of evangelical Christianity in conservative politics is a site this dissertation must further explore. The rise of what is variously called the “New Christian Right” or “New Religious Right” since the election of President Richard Nixon, who explicitly partnered with evangelical Christians in his campaign, has been well-documented.⁴⁸ The early-modern fundamentalist Christians failed to stave off the encroachment of science and reason into public discourse and failed to convert mainstream Christianity to fundamentalism. In the 1920s these fundamentalist Christians reemerged, many taking the name “evangelical,” meaning Protestant in German, in order to differentiate themselves from the perceived failures of fundamentalism.⁴⁹ Despite their name change, these groups “maintain their commitments to biblical inerrancy, premillennialism, patriarchy, political conservatism, and creationism.”⁵⁰ Through the 1950s-1990s and into the present, evangelical Christianity has exerted its influence on U.S. social values and politics.⁵¹ Often these efforts are in direct conflict with social

⁴⁷ Trollinger and Trollinger, *Righting America*, 4.

⁴⁸ See for example Axel Schäfer, *Counterculture Conservatives: American Evangelicalism From the Postwar Revival to the New Christian Right*, (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 2011) or Darren Dochuck, *From Bible Belt to Sun Belt: Plain-Folk Religion, Grassroots Politics, and the Rise of Evangelical Conservatism*, (New York: Norton, 2012).

⁴⁹ Trollinger and Trollinger, *Righting America*, 5. Some groups kept the name fundamentalist: “But in good part this was a squabble over labels: notwithstanding the name change, many ‘evangelicals’ continued (and continue) to maintain their commitments to biblical inerrancy, premillennialism, patriarchy, political conservatism, and creationism”

⁵⁰ Trollinger and Trollinger, *Righting America*, 5

⁵¹ Examples include work to overturn *Roe vs. Wade* or onslaught of state bills in 2021 that attempt to undermine the rights of transgender people. Associated Press, “White evangelicals distinct on LGBTQ Rights, abortion,” *NBC News*, January 2, 2020, <https://www.nbcnews.com/feature/nbc-out/white-evangelicals-distinct-lgbtq-rights-abortion-n1109446>.

change movements like the Civil Rights movement, the Women's Movement, or the Gay Rights movement. Evangelical Christianity therefore works across an intersection of political influence and conservative social values in an attempt to shape the U.S. in its image. I argue that the ability, the power to set the first principles for truth, co-emerges with projects of subject formation, like the Creation Museum's effort to arm people for its culture war.

I find a project of subject formation that is oddly parallel to the work at the Creation Museum—albeit to a diametrically opposed end—in Steven Pinker's book, *Enlightenment Now: The Case for Reason, Science, Humanism, and Progress*.⁵² The narrative at the Creation Museum is that Man's turn to reason has caused the world to deteriorate, facilitating the breakdown of morals they see in the contemporary world. I read Pinker as refuting this view by offering “a different understanding of the world, grounded in fact and inspired by the ideals of the Enlightenment.”⁵³ I argue that Pinker believes in the modern liberal subject—the sovereign subject—but does not state his belief as starting place, because he assumes the “buffered” self is that natural, neutral, form of the human subject. What results is a crypto-fundamentalism that parallels the fundamentalism of the Creation Museum, but emerges as yet another elaborate project of fact-checking. The resulting crypto-fundamentalist version of the facts cannot adequately account for the systems of power, like white supremacy, or patriarchy, which seek to assert themselves as first principles of political truth.

⁵² Steven Pinker, *Enlightenment Now: The Case for Reason, Science, Humanism, and Progress*, (New York: Penguin Books, 2016).

⁵³ Pinker, *Enlightenment Now*, xvii.

Chapter Two supplements my reading of fundamentalist-evangelical Christianities by turning to charismatic-evangelical Christianities, whose charismatic practices are charged with affective intensity. Put another way, in Chapter Two, I seek the “feeling” in feeling-only truth. For the purpose of this project, charismas refer to the supernatural gifts of the Holy Spirit, like prophecy, speaking in tongues, gifts of knowledge, and more. The practice of the supernatural gifts of the Holy Spirit has a varied and contested history in the U.S. So it is important to note that Christians identifying as “charismatic” are a subset within the larger evangelical Christian community, as are those who might self-identity as fundamentalist. However, I suggest that threads of charismatic-evangelical practice are woven through the larger evangelical Christian imagination via the global media apparatus, particularly via the Christian media ecosphere, and as a result these practices shape truth-making in popular political discourse.⁵⁴

The twentieth century catalyst point for contemporary charismatic practice can be traced to the Azusa Street Revival in Los Angeles, California in 1906, from which emerged the Pentecostal movement. The charismatic-evangelical Christian community introduced in Chapter Two, The International House of Prayer in Kansas City, MO (IHOPKC), traces their roots to at least two more recent movements. First, IHOPKC

⁵⁴ Donovan Schaefer highlights the role of the global media ecosphere in spreading charismatic affect to a broader audience in his reading of the film *Jesus Camp*. He highlights the diametrically opposed reception of the film by Christians, on one hand, who see the film as a celebration of their word; and by liberals, on the other, who are horrified by the spiritual training undertaken by young Christians. Donovan Schaefer, “Teaching Religion, Affect, and Global Media,” in *Religious Affects*, (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2015). In discussing “intensifications” of the charismatic diagram (I argue IHOPKC falls into this category), Jon Bialecki suggests that “an increasingly postdenominational media landscape, especially one with forms of distribution like cable or the internet” it is easy for people to hear about emerging charismatic practices. Jon Bialecki, *A Diagram for Fire: Miracles and Variation in an American Charismatic Movement*, (Oakland, CA: University of California Press, 2017), 128.

traces its history to the post World War II healing revivals led by figures like Oral Roberts and William Marion Branham. The second charismatic movement shaping IHOPKC is the Vineyard Network of Churches, which started in California in the late 1970s. The community that is now IHOPKC was, for a time, part of the Association of Vineyard Churches and as a result, I propose they share DNA, which allows me to read across their practices.

Chapter Two advances two arguments. First I contend that one source of feeling-only truth in U.S. popular discourse is the affective prayer training that is received in charismatic-evangelical communities. Working with, and at times challenging, T.M. Luhrmann's description of Vineyard communities in *When God Talks Back*, I argue that because God's presence cannot be verified scientifically in contemporary society, evangelical Christians have learned to trust intense feeling as a marker of God's presence.⁵⁵ Second, reading Jon Bialecki's *A Diagram for Fire* and primary documents from IHOPKC, I argue charismatic-evangelical truth-making, with its affectively-charged "apocalyptic" folding of time, where the kingdom of God is present, but not yet fully realized, demonstrates how nodes of power—like white supremacy or theocratic control—are drawn through time by affective intensity and reasserted, albeit as shifting theological, biblical, or prophetic claims.

This second argument intersects with Schmittian political theology. Schmitt argues that the "sovereign" makes the exception and then claims the exception moves with excitement or *affective intensity*. He compares the exception in jurisprudence to the

⁵⁵ T.M. Luhrmann, *When God Talks Back: Understanding the American Evangelical Relationship with God*. (New York: Alfred Knopf, 2012).

miraculous in theology and finds a point of comparison between the kind of supernatural power moved by God and the action of the exception that works to consolidate power in a sovereign leader or institution. I find a heightened version of this comparison in my analysis of IHOPKC's writing and re-writing of their "prophetic history," where claims that seek to consolidate power in white people or an authoritarian leader, are made and re-made with which to maintain white evangelical Christian respectability. As a result, familiar nodes of political power are asserted with freshness and a façade of novelty.

In order to more fully explore the affective intensity of exceptional truth claims—and to challenge the repetition of Schmittian sovereignty in U.S. political discourse, Chapter Three turns to a broader discussion of radical political theology and affect theory. Remember this project is located in radical theology. Karen Bray includes the "death-of-God and poststructuralist theories of event, plasticity, open relationality, and potentiality" as tools that radical theologians use to argue for a "theology of immanence."⁵⁶ A theology of immanence might challenge the dominating power of sovereignty that is repeated by IHOPKC. Before making such a theological move, I demonstrate that the existing radical political theology has tended to miss the affective dimension of the practices that drive nodes of power in evangelical Christianity, which points in turn to a deeper lacuna in radical theology as it engages in politics.

Chapter Three looks at the narrative of the "Rise of the Religious Right" or "return of the religious" in the secular sphere as it presented by radical theologian Clayton Crockett. I argue that radical theology tends theorize evangelical Christianity as

⁵⁶ Bray, *Grave Attending*, 15.

an instrument of the Republican Party or late-stage liberal capitalism, but not to analyze the agency of religious practices in themselves.⁵⁷ The chapter then offers some brief historical corrective. Next, I turn to the work of Donovan Schaefer in *Religious Affects* to broadly introduce the role of affect in creating evangelical Christian community.

I propose that what occurs in the Vineyard Communities and at IHOPKC is a partial explanation for how feeling-only truth works in the broader context of political truth. Evangelical Christians are trained in their communities to accept intense feelings as a verifier of truth. The same white evangelical Christians who support Trump as a block, trust their intense feelings to prove that Trump's claims are truthful, despite the fact-checking of liberal politicians and the media. Even more insidious is the conflation of excitement with novelty within these communities, which facilitates the perpetuation of intransigent forms of Schmittian sovereignty in U.S. political truth—sovereignty feels new, but is the same white supremacy that has fueled U.S. politics since the creation of the nation. Because power feels like a new revelation, white evangelical Christians are not forced to attend to the long relationship between some forms of Christianity and white supremacy in the U.S. A feedback loop emerges in which the new lends excitement to old first principles. Indeed, white supremacy and authoritarianism are first principles of U.S. political truth, durable powers that seek to maintain the shape of political discourse, of political power.

At the same time, I propose that example of charismatic-evangelical Christianity demonstrates that human beings are partially porous—not closed and buffered from the

⁵⁷ Clayton Crockett, *Radical Political Theology: Religion and Politics after Liberalism*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 2013).

world, as is the modern liberal subject. I build on this in Chapter Three by turning to again to Clayton Crockett read here in tandem with the lineage of thinkers who are proposing models of subjectivity other than the modern liberal subject. Crockett proposes that subjects are “plastic” and changeable as they encounter the world. I hold that plasticity which Crockett argues in dialogue with neuroscientific understandings of the brain, must be held in tension with the durability, the intransigence, of affects as held by Donovan Schaefer. Individuals *do* change; but change is not absolute or instantaneous, rather it is slow, iterative work through time. The porosity of the subject demonstrates the interrelation, interdependence, and vulnerability of people. Subject formation is therefore an individual and a collective process. The possibility of different powers—anti-Schmittian powers, the powers of the people—do not and cannot emerge as part of a total break in the present powers, because subjectivity with its individual will to act emerges entrained in the current systems of power.

I open Chapter Four with a reading of *Hamilton: An American Musical*, considering how the show has affectively worked to re-make the founding narrative of the U.S. into a story that puts people of color in positions of power by allowing them to play the Founding Fathers. There is power in representation: it is moving to see Lin-Manuel Miranda, a Puerto Rican man, play Alexander Hamilton, as a “young, scrappy, and hungry” immigrant.⁵⁸ Yet in the summer of 2020, when the show was widely released online in the midst of the global Covid-19 pandemic and the renewed surge in the movement for Black Lives, *Hamilton* provoked different feelings: feelings of

⁵⁸ “My Shot” track 3 on Lin-Manuel Miranda, *Hamilton: An American Musical*, Atlantic Records, 2015.

hopelessness, despair, and tragedy. Representation alone no longer felt adequate. What about the slaves, indigenous people, and other minorities not included in the story? It felt as though American exceptionalism of the founding U.S. myth was revealed afresh.

Revelation is popularly imagined as a sudden moment of insight—a lightning bolt of understanding. In charismatic-evangelical Christian communities moments of exceptional affect, read through the traditional lens of revelation, serve as total breaks, a novel word from God (albeit always one that is somehow in dialogue with Biblical revelation). I propose that radical political theology should seek a different model of “revelation.” As I articulate it, revelation in dialogue with theologian Jean Luc Marion and philosopher Jacques Derrida does the difficult work of engaging reason at its limits where reason is *affected*: where reason encounters embodiment, knowledge, desire, feeling and *other people*.

At the limits of subjectivity human beings encounter *possibility* and possibility is power—albeit power that is limited and therefore im/possible—the power to make decisions, to make claims of truth. At the limit of the human subject, people encounter power, and power is affective: power is the ability to act and be acted on. However, as Chapter Three argues in its reading of Donovan Schaefer and William Connolly, I do not claim that concept proceeds affect or that affect proceeds concept. Rather meaning, both affective and conceptual, co-emerge from a network of impossibilities that constrain and shape human subjectivity. Therefore the possibilities at the limits of human reason present as the impossible; they are constrained by the material social/cultural/political realities of each subject entering into discourse. This radical political theology seeks to expose and challenge the oppression of subjects who do not conform to the white,

heterosexual, cisgendered, able-bodied model of the male subject through the repetition of unconstrained Schmittian sovereign power, as it seeks to consolidate power in particular people or institutions.

It is in the im/possibility at the limits of human subjectivity, this project finds that God persists—albeit a God who emerges from the heritage of negative theology and in dialogue with radical, rather than the strong God of traditional doctrine. God at the limits is affected, and constrained. The constrained power of an im/possible God is what this project seeks to draw out—what this project seeks to reveal. The dependent power of this God emerges with the hard work of listening, learning, and organizing with people who resist the Schmittian style of sovereignty. The repetition of Schmittian-style sovereign power, the assertion of intransient nodes of political power, cannot be challenged with more Schmittian sovereignty. Instead, human beings who encounter their limits must meet other people. At the limits of individual human subjects are other subjects, human, animal, and otherwise.

I propose that political truth must be honest about its power. It must be truthful about the first principles that govern decisions. Truth is made with reference to first principles, whether they are acknowledged or not. Unearthing these principles *reveals* the power that animates decision-making. I therefore propose an economy of political truth that takes *listening* as its first principle. Following Jean Luc Nancy, it is a first principle that listens for sense, across all the senses, and for a sense of place. Critical listening and affective openness therefore *takes place*, because that is the only way to hear the resistance that is always challenging the prophetic novelty of white supremacy/authoritarianism. A radical theology that breaks with Schmittian sovereign

power in political discourse must listen and learn to work with—to amplify—the voices of the people who Schmittian sovereign power seeks to except from citizenship.

Listening that moves across the conceptual and affective—listening for sense, with the senses, and with a sense of direction—can facilitate the flourishing of what political thinkers Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri call the power of “the multitude” and I call the powers of the people. Together the constrained power of individuals is amplified, presenting an im/possible resistance to Schmittian sovereignty.

In *Hamilton*, Angelica Schuyler sings, lamenting the role of women in the American Revolution, “You want a revolution? I want a revelation!” I propose that the project of listening for the im/possible enacts an iterative revelation, not a wholesale revolution.⁵⁹ A political economy of truth that is constantly aware of its folding back on itself, checking its facts, applying reason, while also being moved by the powers of the people is one that might perform positive change.

⁵⁹ “The Schuyler Sisters” track 5 featuring Renée Elise Goldsberry on Lin-Manuel Miranda, *Hamilton: An American Musical*, Atlantic Records, 2015.

CHAPTER 1

CREATING MODERN SUBJECTS OF TRUTH; OR TRUTH DOES(N'T) BELONG
TO GOD?

*“What you’re seeing and what you’re reading is not what is happening”
-President Trump, address to VFW July 24th, 2018⁶⁰*

“PREPARE TO BELIEVE” - The Creation Museum’s advertising slogan.⁶¹

At the Creation Museum in Boone County, Kentucky two narratives of the universe’s origin are presented side by side. As part of a museum display, like you might find in any natural history museum in the U.S., slick graphics present “Man’s Word,” which claims that the universe originated 14 billion years ago; the second narrative is labeled “God’s Word” and it states that the universe was created 6000 years ago.⁶² This conflict—“Man’s Word” versus “God’s Word”—is the topic of this chapter. I interrogate the modern conflict between “religion” and “science” because it offers crucial insight into the current bifurcation of truth I outlined in the introduction: political discourse in the U.S. seems to pit “feeling-only truth” that is completely divorced from facts against a “crypto-fundamentalist” version of the facts—facts which cannot adequately account for the structures of power that seek to assert first principles with which to anchor the straight, white, cisgender, able-bodied man as the ideal citizen.

Despite the recent and marked rise of feelings as a source of truth, the impasse of

⁶⁰ “Donald Trump: ‘What you’re seeing and what you’re reading is not what’s happening,’” *BBC News*, July 25, 2018, Accessed April 22, 2021, <https://www.bbc.com/news/av/world-us-canada-44959340>.

⁶¹ “Prepare to Believe,” Creation Museum, Accessed April, 22, 2021, <https://creationmuseum.org/>.

⁶² My observation of the signage at the Creation Museum took place in the summer of 2018. See Image 1 in Appendix 1.

“feeling-only truth” versus a “crypto-fundamentalist” version of facts does not supersede the conflict between science and religion. Rather I argue both impasses express conceptual battles that serve to obfuscate another set of processes in U.S. life—the production of subjects, especially the production of subjects free to act with the full privileges of citizenship in the U.S. While no narrative of subject production is final or singular, this chapter traces two narratives of subject formation that map onto the conflict between religion and science: ethnographic and primary source accounts of the Creation Museum and Steven Pinker’s book *Enlightenment Now: The Case for Reason, Science, Humanism, and Progress*. My first goal in this chapter is to demonstrate how public debates about science and religion serve to obscure the ways that knowledge production is entangled with subject formation. Subject formation encompasses at once the capacity of individuals both to perceive and act in the world, and the collective subject formation that is imposed or embraced through participation in society and the state. The laws, norms, doctrines, or other first principles set by institutions simultaneously serve to anchor claims to truth and to assist in the creation of subjects. This project proposes that political truth and political subjects co-emerge within U.S. life.⁶³

I argue that the Creation Museum and Pinker’s book are engaged in oddly parallel projects of subject formation even as they aim at diametrically opposed ends. The primary differences between the creation of subjects at the Creation Museum and those imagined by Steven Pinker is in their first principles. The Creation Museum presents its claims with the aura of scientific truth; and its performance of science demonstrates the

⁶³ This is perhaps true of all political life, but my project is focused on the American context. Another project might make this argument with a broader scope.

hold science has on knowledge in the U.S. imagination. At the same time the claims at the Creation Museum have an explicit set of first principles, rooted in a fundamentalist reading of scripture and a conservative social worldview. Following the argument of William Trollinger and Susan Trollinger in *Righting America at the Creation Museum*, I argue that what matters at the Creation Museum is not presenting science that is better substantiated with facts than that of the secular science (this is not possible), but rather the experience of visiting the museum. Visits to the Creation Museum are designed to form subjects: Trollinger and Trollinger write, “the Creation Museum seeks to shape, prepare, and arm millions of American Christians as uncompromising and fearless warriors for what it understands to be the ongoing culture war in America.”⁶⁴ At the Creation Museum individuals are prepared to act as part of a collective Christian subject warring on behalf of social conservatism.

Steven Pinker’s 2016 book *Enlightenment Now* boldly contrasts “bleak” assessments of the world, “growing pessimism about the way the world is heading, cynicism about the institutions of modernity, and an inability to conceive of a higher purpose in anything but religion” with “a different understanding of the world, grounded in fact and inspired by the ideals of the Enlightenment: reason, science, humanism, and progress.”⁶⁵ Pinker advances a version of secularization where religiosity must die as human knowledge about the world grows. Pinker argues that one does not “believe” in

⁶⁴ Susan Trollinger and William Trollinger, *Righting America at the Creation Museum* (Baltimore, MD: John Hopkins University Press, 2016), 2.

⁶⁵ Steven Pinker, *Enlightenment Now: The Case for Reason, Science, Humanism, and Progress*, (New York: Penguin Books, 2016), xvii.

reason, which “prior to everything else and needn’t (cannot) be justified on first principles.”⁶⁶ I argue that Pinker’s confidence in reason serves to obscure his *belief* in the modern liberal subject.

In contrast to Pinker’s measure of the current age according to a reduction in the amount of religion, philosopher Charles Taylor argues that it is more fruitful to view secularity as a change in the “conditions of belief” in God.⁶⁷ Key to the changes that Taylor maps is a shift from the “porous subject” where human beings are affected by forces outside of the self to the “buffered subject” which has “closed the porous boundary between the inside (thought) and the outside (nature, the physical).”⁶⁸ The buffered subject is unaffected by the outside world. Even more, the buffered self is under the control of reason and the will and therefore is able to step back from the passions and control them. The buffered subject is another name for the modern liberal subject or the “sovereign subject” who, I will argue, serves the model for citizenship in the U.S.

Again, I hold that Pinker’s project in *Enlightenment Now* rests on belief in that very buffered subject. As a result, presumptions about ability of the subject to think and act freely serve as first principles for his claims about the world’s progress. Because Pinker fails to recognize or perhaps to analyze the role the sovereign subject plays in identifying and authorizing truth, he clings to what I call a “crypto-fundamentalist version of the facts.” As a result he is not adequately able to account for the structures of

⁶⁶ Pinker, *Enlightenment Now*, loc 933-934.

⁶⁷ Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age*, (Cambridge MA: Belknap Press, 2007), 3.

⁶⁸ Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 300.

power that seek to anchor truth in powers like racism, sexism, homophobia, transphobia, and ableism. At the same time, Pinker's hyper-focus on facts misses the role that affects, feelings, play in making effective truth claims and in making subjects.

The second goal of this chapter is to demonstrate how problematic it is that secular truth—and the supposedly secular state—depend on the modern liberal subject. The modern liberal subject or "the buffered self" is an autonomous, apparently neutral "every person." The closed-off sovereign subject possesses the mental ability to perceive and comprehend the world and is endowed with the *freedom to act*. To challenge the surface neutrality of the modern liberal subject, I read theologians Mayra Rivera's and J. Kameron Carter's works on the racist, colonial assumptions that underpin its structure. According to Carter, the sovereign subject is made in the image of the white colonizer. The sovereign (read ruling) subject is a white, cisgendered heterosexual, able-bodied man and people who do not fit into that identity are therefore not granted subjectivity and therefore are not free to act as full citizens in the U.S.

Rivera and Carter's claims that the sovereign subject serves as a white savior, mediating citizenship, demonstrate a key insight of controversial political theorist Carl Schmitt. Schmitt wrote, "All significant concepts of the modern theory of the state are secularized theological concepts."⁶⁹ This project, with Rivera and Carter, concurs that theological concepts continue to operate in the secular state.⁷⁰ As the introduction explains, Schmitt's once obscure German political thought has ignited a cascade of

⁶⁹ Carl Schmitt, *Political Theology: Four Chapters on the Concept of Sovereignty*, trans by George Schwab, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005), 36.

⁷⁰ I don't think every single concept of the state is theology, which Schmitt seems to imply.

political theology, particularly amongst “radical” or “death of God” theologians critical of the supposed secularity of the modern liberal state.⁷¹

The final goal of this chapter is to define Schmittian sovereignty—sovereign power—as I seek to interrogate and challenge it in the contemporary U.S. An early book by Schmitt, *The Concept of the Political*, is critical of the liberal democratic republic—he has the Weimar Republic in mind—*because* it depends on the sovereign subject. According to Schmitt, it is difficult to make decisions if everyone is allowed to have a say; even more, Schmitt argues that the systems of laws and norms set up to govern the state result in a toothless judiciary, or what Schmitt scholar William Scheuerman calls a “crisis of legal indeterminacy.”⁷² In response, Schmitt asserts the need for another kind of sovereignty. Hence his dramatic assertion in *Political Theology*: “[s]overeign is he who decides on the exception.”⁷³ Sovereign power is wielded by—is concentrated in—the person who decides cases at the limit of the law. Schmitt calls the decisions that exceed the law “the exception.” Schmitt’s affinity for concentrated sovereignty is manifest in his support of dictatorial Nazi Regime.

Building on the work of Rivera and Carter, I argue that subject formation in the modern U.S. context is imbued with Schmittian exceptional sovereignty, albeit sovereignty that is often implicit rather than explicit. I propose that subject formation works to make white cisgendered, heterosexual, able-bodied men into exceptional

⁷¹ I mean the non-fundamentalist branch of political theology.

⁷² William E. Scheuerman, *Carl Schmitt: The End of Law*, 2nd ed., (New York: Rowman and Littlefield, 2020), 19. I owe a debt gratitude to Stephen Keating who let me read his unpublished chapter on Carl Schmitt and pointed me to this reference.

⁷³ Schmitt, *Political Theology*, 5.

subjects; and at the same time seeks to except everyone else from full freedom and therefore from full citizenship. The Schmittian sovereignty of white men in political truth-making manifests as the ability to decide the norms, the standards, or the first principles for truth in the U.S. Decisions about who matters in society have life and death consequences. I argue that political truth must work to make legible its first principles in order for them to be held accountable. The problem is that the first principles of the secular state work to hide themselves; this phenomenon is evident in my reading of Steven Pinker, whose *Enlightenment Now* obfuscates its dependence on the modern liberal subject as a first principle.

Finally, I return to Schmitt's work to argue that *effective* truth-making is *affective*. Any analysis of political power requires an account of affect as the forces that circulate amongst people, creatures, and other things. Importantly, the exception that enacts sovereignty is felt as *exciting*—"In the exception the power of real life breaks through the crust of a mechanism that has become torpid by repetition."⁷⁴ This sets up the project of Chapter Two, which is to look at the role of affect in making and remaking claims of white supremacy and authoritarianism. And at the same time, Schmitt's observation that affect can *cause people to change* is a crucial insight for the left, which as I describe in the introduction, has tended to lean more and more on the fact-checking apparatus to combat Trump's lies and the rise of feeling-only truth. Scholars and activists on the left must challenge the crypto-fundamentalist hold that fact-checking has on the resistance to fascism and instead must recognize the important role that feelings play in persuasive

⁷⁴ Schmitt, *Political Theology*, 15.

truth. Key to an alternative economy of political truth—an economy that challenges the exceptionality of white men and the exception of all other people—is its ability to encompass facts, feelings, and power.

The most basic definition of affect I use is “the capacities to act and be acted upon”—as light touching eyes, as sound landing on ears.⁷⁵ Affect therefore is part of the production of knowledge, and correspondingly, of political truth. Simultaneously affect is a measure of power, which means it plays a role in subject formation, as it plays out across individual actors and in the hierarchizing of groups. Feelings are name for specific affects that play out in the world. Following Donovan Schaefer, I argue that human beings are affected in both pre- and post-discursive moments, but that the effect the pre-discursive has on human beings cannot be meaningfully separated from the effect of the post-discursive on people. Nonetheless, affect theory’s ability to attend to knowledge, feelings, and power as part of a project of empowering and limiting subjects makes it an ideal theoretical framework for my analysis.

The work of this chapter is to unravel two specific projects of subject formation, at the Creation Museum and in *Enlightenment Now*, in order to speak to the supposed crisis of truth in U.S. politics. The seeming bifurcation of feeling only-truth and a crypto-fundamentalist version of the facts works to hide projects of subject formation. I see such a project in the explicit move of Newt Gingrich to traffic in what people *feel* is true, despite knowing it is factually inaccurate, in order to gain political power, and a partial failure of subject formation in Hillary Clinton’s elaborate projects of fact-checking

⁷⁵ Melissa Gregg and Gregory J. Seigworth, “An Inventory of Shimmers” in *The Affect Theory Reader*, (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2010), Loc 50.

Donald Trump, which did not have the effect she anticipated.⁷⁶ I suggest that Clinton's determined assertion of facts depends on a particular mode of subjectivity—the modern liberal subject. I therefore develop a framework to explain the failure of Clinton's factchecking project in my analysis of Pinker's *Enlightenment Now*.

The atmosphere at the Creation Museum is not one of dry facts and scientific boredom. Instead the Creation Museum is a thriving tourist destination: Christians around the country save their money to take a vacation to the Creation Museum, planning their visit to see the life-sized recreation of Noah's Ark. The Museum is immersive, acting on all of the senses, demonstrating in sounds, images, and more that the world is fallen in need of God. The Creation Museum claims that human beings have strayed from "God's Word," following "Man's Word" into a breakdown of society. At the Creation Museum facts and their interpretation are woven into the fabric of how human beings choose to act in the world—and therefore entangled with the kind of people, the kind of citizen-subjects they become.

Subjects of God's Word; Making Christian Truth at the Creation Museum

Driving up to the Creation Museum is like arriving at an amusement park. You enter a gated parking lot where an attendant hands you a stub for an expensive spot. Immaculately groomed paths wind toward the main building. A row of doors are flanked outside by large, "life-sized" dinosaurs. Inside the atrium queues snake towards the ticket

⁷⁶ It is important to note that Hillary Clinton won the popular vote by nearly 2.9 million. Her strategy was not effect for winning Trump voters, who swung the election because of the electoral college, despite being the minority. Alana Abramson, "Hillary Clinton Won the Popular Vote by Nearly 2.9 Million," *ABC NEWS*, December 22, 2016, <https://abcnews.go.com/Politics/hillary-clinton-officially-wins-popular-vote-29-million/story?id=44354341>.

counter and signs point visitors towards the gift shop. The 75,000 foot facility opened in 2007 and cost 27 million dollars to build with most of the funds for the Museum coming from private donations. The museum's press page boasts that more than 3.5 million visitors have been in the center since it opened.⁷⁷ The museum is run by Answers In Genesis (AIG), a non-profit organization dedicated to Christian apologetics that was founded by Australian former high school teacher Ken Ham. Ham explains that the Museum is located in Kentucky so that it is within driving distance of as much of the U.S. as possible. The purpose of the museum is to "point today's culture back to the authority of Scripture and to proclaim the gospel message."⁷⁸ To that end the primary goal of the Museum is to argue that "the account of origins presented in Genesis is a simple, but factual account of actual events."⁷⁹ In other words, the God of the Christian Bible created the universe "in six consecutive twenty-four-hour days less than ten thousand years ago."⁸⁰

In order to argue the earth is less than ten thousand years old, the museum immerses visitors into its vision—its truth—of natural history. It is a full-body experience that activates all the senses. The museum is high-tech, known for its use of animatronic human and animal displays. Once visitors have purchased (expensive) tickets, they are directed to ticket takers armed with scanners at the main entrance of the museum's

⁷⁷ "Press Room," The Creation Museum, Answers in Genesis, Accessed March 20, 2021, <https://creationmuseum.org/press/>.

⁷⁸ Trollinger and Trollinger, *Righting America*, 1.

⁷⁹ Trollinger and Trollinger, *Righting America*, 1.

⁸⁰ Trollinger and Trollinger, *Righting America*, 1.

exhibits. Upon entering guests are immediately confronted with an animatronic display containing a “prehistoric” human who searches for food next to a moving, swaying dinosaur.⁸¹ The lights are dim. The animals and humans are all set into a lush backdrop of tropical foliage, replete with dirt on the ground and painted backdrops. A soundtrack of soft, vaguely jungle-like sounds, plays in the background. Lifelike trees hem the visitor onto the path that is designed to lure them through the museum—and there is only one way through. The path presses visitors deeper and deeper into museum’s argument that the universe is less than ten thousand years old.

Of course, the Creation Museum’s claim that the universe is less than ten thousand years old contradicts the secular scientific consensus. Scientific consensus, substantiated by the geological and fossils, is that dinosaurs and human beings did not coexist. Most dinosaurs became extinct 65 million years ago and the earliest ancestors of human beings appeared 6 million years ago.⁸² Rather than simply ignoring the claims of the scientific community, the Creation Museum attempts to challenge the evidence that universe is 14 billion years old. Because the Genesis narrative is read as spanning six literal days, they argue that human beings were present at the very beginning of the world. The museum therefore depicts with swaying animatronic machines, dinosaurs and humans co-existing.

The Creation Museum’s fight with secular scientific consensus is not new. I write this chapter in Nashville, Tennessee not far from Dayton, Tennessee where the infamous

⁸¹ See Image 2 in Appendix 1.

⁸² Pickrell, John. “Top 10: Dinosaur Myths.” *New Scientist*. September 4, 2006. <https://www.newscientist.com/article/dn9936-top-10-dinosaur-myths/>.

Scopes Monkey Trial took place. The trial pitted the Christian Bible's account of creation against Charles Darwin's newly popularized account of evolution by natural selection. At stake was whether evolution should be part of high school science curriculum—whether children poised to become adult citizens in the U.S. should learn a religious account of the origins of the universe or the account provided by the scientific community. In other words, the conflict between science and fundamentalist Christianity has long been key to the formation of U.S. citizens as actors in society, as subjects. John Scope's conviction for teaching evolution was overturned on a technicality; and evolution by natural selection eventually emerged from the conflict as the theory taught to students in high schools.⁸³

Again, it is conflict between secular epistemology, which is intimately linked to the scientific method, and the knowledge-production of fundamentalist evangelical Christianity that is the subject of this chapter. Both groups, in their own ways, respond to the renegotiations of epistemology and truth since the Enlightenment. And both secular modernity and fundamentalist Christianity claim to possess the capital-T Truth. As the introduction to this project explained, truth since the Enlightenment has been broadly understood to be linked to science. Truth is facts, facts that are ordered and interpreted by the scientific method. Indeed, I propose the truth-making at the Creation Museum *performs* the rigor of science by presenting facts tied to material evidence like fossils and skeletons—and using theories to organize and interpret data like their “flood geology,”

⁸³ Albeit, not without ongoing challenges from creationists. As my introduction explains, fundamentalist Christians fell out of public life in the 1920s only to swiftly reemerge and challenges to the teaching of evolution in public schools persisted even during fundamentalism's so-called “quiet period.” Trollinger and Trollinger, *Righting America*, 5.

which I parse later in the chapter. The museum's (unverifiable) scientific theories allow their claim of a young universe to feel scientific. Notice that AIG and the Creation Museum do not deny science; instead they challenge human reason as the first principle of science. The Creation Museum's attempt to *perform claims* about a young universe with the language and form of secular science demonstrates the hold the science has on truth in the contemporary U.S.

Once visitors move through the initial display of ancient people and dinosaurs at the Creation Museum they enter the "Walk Through History" and follow the path through rooms that demonstrate the creation, fall into sin, and redemption of humankind, according to the fundamentalist Christian salvation narrative. Throughout the museum, the two "Words," "God's Word" and "Man's Word," are presented next to each other: on signs, in imagery, in film. God's word, drawn from the Bible, is depicted as "Truth," while humankind's word, called human "reason" is depicted as fickle. A sign announces that according to human reason: "everyone decides what is right in his own eyes." Or more precisely "'man's word' refers to 'autonomous reasoning'—the idea that the human mind can determine truth independently from God's revealed truth, the Bible."⁸⁴ The museum subordinates reason to God's word, calling it a "gift to humankind" that must be subjected to "the bible as the ultimate starting point." Therefore human reason, "autonomous reason," is not a valid first principle for truth. Only the Bible can serve as a starting point for truth claims, whether those claims are religious or scientific.

The first room of the "Walk Through History" sets up the argument that will be

⁸⁴ See Image 3 in Appendix 1.

made throughout the rest of the exhibit. In this room, there is a sign depicting a timeline with two distinct arcs stretching from the Christian reformation to the present. On the top arc, the relationship between humanity and the Bible is depicted: moving from “scripture alone” in 1500 to “scripture questioned” with Galileo in the 1700s and finally to “scripture abandoned” in the 1900s, when Hugh Miller popularized the “day-age” theory of Genesis One. The day-age theory, famously suggests that each “day” named in Genesis actually stands for a full age of the universe’s history. Embedded in this concern is the Museum’s desire to read the Genesis story as literally true. For AIG, parallel to the story of creation, sin, and redemption that is depicted in the Christian scripture is another more recent fall: the breakdown of humankind’s trust in scripture, because of the rise of scientific knowledge. The answer—the redemption—of this second fall is the Creation Museum itself.

Beneath the arc depicting humankind’s lack of trust in scripture is another timeline, that of human reason, which moves from Rene Descartes’s infamous “I think therefore I am” in the 1700s through to Charles Darwin’s theory of evolution in the 1900s. According to this sign, as the relationship between humankind and scripture disintegrates, the control of human reason increases and finally results in the emergence of the theory of evolution, which demolishes a literal reading of the first chapter of Genesis. The Museum claims when humankind depends on its own reason—then there is no basis “for morality and justice.” For the Creation Museum, certainty about first principles equates to certainty in ethics and morality.

Indeed, the supposed loss of a moral starting place is depicted in racist imagery in a section of called “Graffiti Alley,” set up to represent the “modern world” as it exists

without trust in the Bible. This section of the Creation Museum is meant to be very affective in its communication: visitors literally enter through a graveyard gate, with a headstone that reads “God is Dead.”⁸⁵ The lights are red in “Graffiti Alley,” suggestive of the lights on a police car. There is a large brick wall with a sign, “Today Man Decides Truth,” that is defaced with graffiti which crosses out “truth” and tags the wall with “whatever”—“Man Decides Whatever.”⁸⁶ At the Creation Museum the death of God is equated with the death of truth. The “whatever” marring truth is in the style of a gang tag, the marker used by gangs to claim territory in a city. Next to this sign is a wall pasted over with a variety of peeling news articles, which depict “The Next Jihadist” as a small brown child with a gun and a large picture of the Asian Virginia Tech shooter. “Balance” is provided by a depiction of the white shooter whose massacre took place in Aurora, Colorado—though the photo of the shooter is much smaller than the ones of people of color. The “urban” setting and the imagery is coded to present a racialized version of what is wrong with society. Graffiti Alley acts on the senses to activate the deeply rooted racism that shapes U.S. political truth. The Creation Museum explicitly names “God’s Word” as its starting place for truth; yet, clearly contemporary political biases—contemporary political nodes of power—are wrapped into the process of subject formation at the Creation Museum.

Though Creation Museum and AIG subordinate human reason to God’s Word, they have not abandoned facts and scientific theories. The Creation Museum seeks to

⁸⁵ “Museum Tour—Graffiti Alley [sic]” Creation Museum Blog, Answers in Genesis, August 21 <https://creationmuseum.org/blog/2007/08/21/museum-tour-graffiti-alley/>.

⁸⁶ See Image 4 in Appendix 1.

present evidence that supports their description of the universe as less than ten thousand years old in a way that is recognizable to the wider U.S. public. In order to appear truthful to a broad audience, the museum attempts to conform to the scientific standards that govern truth in secular discourse. AIG's website explains that "facts" don't speak for themselves, but must be interpreted. Dr. Terry Mortenson, who holds a PhD in the history of geology from Coventry University in England, serves as a lecturer and researcher for AIG. He explains "The first two rooms of our museum talk about the issues of starting places and assumptions. We strongly contest an evolutionist position that they are letting the facts speak for themselves"⁸⁷ Mortenson explains, "there aren't separate sets of 'evidences' for evolution and creation—we all deal with the same evidence (we all live on the same earth, have the same fossils, observe the same animals, etc.). The difference lies in how we interpret what we study."⁸⁸ White House counsellor Kellyanne Conway turned this claim on its head with her assertion of "alternative facts." Nonetheless in the wider U.S. discourse of truth, as I will demonstrate in my reading of Steven Pinker's *Enlightenment Now*, there is almost no space, no distinction between facts and truth. I propose that Pinker's conflation of truth and facts is a partial explanation of how truth-making on the left obfuscates its first principles, specifically its dependence on the modern liberal subject; and, as the Creation Museum rightly claims, secular truth-making does not work without the autonomous reasoning human subject.

So, the Creation Museum claims to have the same facts as the broader scientific

⁸⁷ Jill Stevenson, *Sensational Devotion: Evangelical Performance in Twenty-First-Century America*, (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 2013), 138.

⁸⁸ "About," Answers in Genesis, Accessed March 20, 2021, <https://answersingenesis.org/about/>.

community, but comes to wildly different conclusions. In order to do this, AIG's founder, Ken Ham, scaffolds scientific data onto a different set of scientific theories. In *Righting America at the Creation Museum*, Trollinger and Trollinger recount a 2014 public debate held between Ken Hamm and Bill Nye (the Science Guy). During the event, streamed live by CNN, the two figures debated the question "Is creation a viable model of origins in today's modern scientific era."⁸⁹ Given this platform, Ham discussed the data, the facts, of creation science, but he also made arguments *about* science. Ham makes a distinction between "observational science" and "historical science"—a claim that according to Trollinger and Trollinger, is not new to young-earth science, but is deployed in a particular formulation by Ham. For Ham, observational science is the kind that follows the scientific method, it is "objective, repeatable, and verifiable."⁹⁰ Historical science is "speculative," seeking to answer the question, "what happened in the past."⁹¹ In Ham's system, scientists in the present are on an equal playing field, all observing the same data and as a result the results can be agreed to be true. Data from the past, in Ham's thinking, cannot be used as scientific data, because scholars cannot access it in its original context and cannot perform the repeated tests that are necessary to establish fact. Historical science cannot "prove" what happened in the past.

During his debate with Nye, Ham explained, "I've been emphasizing all night, you cannot ever prove, using the scientific method in the present, you can't prove the age

⁸⁹ Trollinger and Trollinger, *Righting America*, 64.

⁹⁰ Trollinger and Trollinger, *Righting America*, 66.

⁹¹ Trollinger and Trollinger, *Righting America*, 68.

of the earth. So you can never prove its old.”⁹² As a result, what happened in the past is always expressed as a “model” instead of as truth. Forget for a moment the urge to dismiss Ham’s take on science; the point here is to try and understand how the moving pieces—data, reason, and belief in the bible—are deployed by the Creation Museum. Ham makes clear that human beings make decisions about how data is used, about how data is put together as scientific truth. In Ham’s skepticism, I hear traces of a postmodern critique of absolute truth, which wants to account for human fallibility in truth-making. Ham identifies limits to what human beings can know. As my project will go on to suggest, recognizing limits to human beings is valuable because it provides an opportunity to listen, and to act. Of course Ham’s skepticism does not lead him toward “better” truth than that of the broader scientific community; instead, it leads him to assert an alternative reality.

The alternative reality at the Creation Museum is exemplified by “The Flood Geology Room.” The room is designed around the argument that a worldwide flood—The Biblical Flood—can explain the current geological record, the same record used by secular science to argue that the earth is four billion years old. Trollinger and Trollinger explain that “flood geology” has always been central to young-earth creation science. These claims come from the popular 1961 book *The Genesis Flood*, which repeated the arguments made in the early twentieth century book *The New Geology*, and serves as the basis for claims at the Creation Museum. Trollinger and Trollinger performed a close analysis of the placards presented in the Flood Geology room, finding, surprisingly, given

⁹² Trollinger and Trollinger, *Righting America*, 72.

that Ham claims observational science is the only real science, that many of the cards are marked as “models.” Again for Ham, historical science makes use of models, to try and explain what happened in the past and is not “real” observational science. Trollinger and Trollinger analyzed the claims made on the placards of the Flood Geology Room, in order to see what observational science is actually presented. Sixty-eight percent of the descriptive placards in the room contain observational science, at least according to a basic definition that makes use of tests, observation, or measurement. In other words, one third of the information presented is not “real” science according to Ham.

There are a variety of historical “models” presented, for example the “residual catastrophism model” which argues that the earth’s “crust settles down after the flood” as “super volcanoes” and “superquakes ” gradually subside.⁹³ Citing five catastrophic volcano eruptions, the model seeks to explain how landmass can be changed rapidly, rather than as a result of years of buildup. If this was happening in large amounts at the time of the flood, the theory proposes, it might explain how what seems like years of accumulated land mass could have appeared quickly. Trollinger and Trollinger cite this example, because the data provided does not meet the standards of observational science that are espoused by Ken Ham. The most recent eruption listed is that of Mount Saint Helen which occurred in 1980, generating .25 cubic miles of ash. There are scientists alive who witnessed this event and therefore were able to observe and measure its effects; but this is not something that can be repeated, because it is in the past. Of the other eruptions listed, the most recent took place seventy-seven hundred years ago according to

⁹³ Trollinger and Trollinger, *Righting America*, 82.

the United States Geological Survey. Of course the placards at the Creation Museum do not date the eruptions, because as residual effects of the flood, the eruptions could not have taken place more than forty-three hundred years ago.

If the “science” presented in the Flood Geology room does not stand up to the scientific standards set by Ken Ham himself, then why not simply present the biblical Genesis story? Why go to this effort? Trollinger and Trollinger argue “in a culture that largely understands science to be the discourse of truth— that is, the methods and practices that yield real facts and reliable conclusions— an argument for a young Earth that can claim scientific support is likely to be much more persuasive to believers and unbelievers alike.”⁹⁴ In other words, there is an accepted form for truth in society and fundamentalist Christianity seeks to make its claims feel true according to a broadly accepted standard of truth.

The debate between Ham and Nye was called “Scopes II” by the media. The event was seen by some as an opportunity to recover from the shame of the first Scopes trial, when Creationism “lost” its support in the public consciousness and therefore lost its role in shaping students, in making subjects. Ken Ham, arguably, understands his work as reasserting a possibility that was shut down in the early 1900s when the scientific method, governed by autonomous human reason, became the measure of truth in Western imagination. At the same time, the fact that CNN was willing to air the event suggests that there is broader pushback against the standard of truth that emerged from the scientific revolution. While AIG pushes back with a very specific answer, I suggest that

⁹⁴ Trollinger and Trollinger, *Righting America*, 66-67.

there is a pushback against reason and science more broadly, and one way this manifests is as a turn to feeling as first principle for truth.

In order to open up in the scientific consensus that the universe is fourteen billion year old, Ken Ham presses against the limits of what human beings can know, by asking what human beings can know about the past with absolute certainty. Ham challenges what human beings can assume about their own mind's ability to know. Ham's approach, with its distinction between observational science and historical science is, of course, an oversimplification and blatant manipulation of the careful work done by scientists to test complex theories of the origins of the universe. And careful evaluation of the data presented at the Creation Museum demonstrates that the claims made by AIG depend on "models" that are less substantiated versions of the theories accepted by scientific consensus. In other words, scientific explanations of the past are, as the museum asserts, the best possible explanation of the available data. Human reason is what puts together data into a cohesive narrative. Ham and AIG are not wrong in their assertion that there is a limit to human reason; a limit that I argue in the next section is not observed by Steven Pinker to problematic ends. Nonetheless, Ham and AIG are demonstrably hypocritical in supplementing their strong claim that observational science in the present is the only "true" science with "models" of the past. The specific models chosen at the Creation Museum start with the parallel claims of "God's Word" and "Man's Word" that are traced throughout the "Walk Through History."

At the Creation Museum, human reason is subordinate to the claims of the Bible. In addition to the "Flood Geology Room" Trollinger and Trollinger describe the "Wonders of Creation Room" where fifteen videos play on a constant loop. The videos

combine photographic images, computer generated images, voiceovers, video clips, and scriptural text. Take the example of a video about the solar system: again, there is plenty of “observational science” in the form of basic data about each of the planets, its location, the temperature on the surface, etc. However, the argument stretches to suggest that the exact placement of earth indicates the existence of a designer—this is a move to argue there is a “model” that makes sense of the data. The video closes with a piece of scripture, “The heavens declare the glory of the Lord” (Ps. 19:1). While the video does not explicitly argue that God is the designer of the universe, the underlying tie to faith in a Christian narrative is obvious.

Righting America at the Creation Museum addresses the Creation Museum’s use of the Bible. AIG claims, “The Bible is divinely inspired and inerrant throughout. Its assertions are factually true in all the original autographs. It is the supreme authority in everything it teaches. Its authority is not limited to spiritual, religious, or redemptive themes but includes its assertions in such fields as history and science.”⁹⁵ Trollinger and Trollinger explain, “the Bible does not just contain truth; it *is* the truth.”⁹⁶ It is an insistence upon a literal reading of the Bible that anchors all of the claims made at the Creation Museum—and which resolves the limitations of human reason. The hermeneutic used by their community is “historical-grammatical,” paying attention to both the historical context and the language framework of the text. However, instead of requiring specialized training in the original language and culture of the text, the text is so

⁹⁵ Trollinger and Trollinger, *Righting America*, 112.

⁹⁶ Trollinger and Trollinger, *Righting America*, 112.

plain in its meaning that “everyone everywhere and at all times can understand what it means.”⁹⁷ Underlying this method of interpretation is the assumption that the original intention of the author (the Holy Spirit) remains accessible, which arguably is in tension with the precision of the historical-grammatical method. However, what matters for now is that the moving pieces of truth at the Creation Museum are anchored by a supposedly unchanging source, which must be accepted, believed in, according to faith. Truth finds a variety of places to anchor itself. Some anchors are obvious, like the fundamentalist Christian perspective at the Creation Museum, and others are less obvious. Yet other starting places are self-obfuscating, openly denounced, but nonetheless alive and working. Self-obfuscating starting anchors, like white supremacy and misogyny, hide themselves from their holders in order to protect that individual from recognizing their hatred. In the next section, I argue that Steven Pinker is guilty of a similar thing by obfuscating his dependence on the modern liberal subject. Then, I move with Mayra Rivera and J. Kameron Carter, into an analysis of the modern liberal subject’s role in maintaining white colonial power.

The televised debate between Bill Nye and Ken Ham—“Scopes II”—ended with no clear winner. Evolutionists claimed Nye ate “Ham for breakfast.”⁹⁸ Creationists contended that Ham won. Of course, Ken Ham did not refute the scientific consensus about the age of the universe. However, as Michael Schulson, wrote in the *Daily Beast*, “debate is a format of impressions, not facts. Ham *sounded* like a reasonable human

⁹⁷ Trollinger and Trollinger, *Righting America*, 112.

⁹⁸ Trollinger and Trollinger, *Righting America*, 64.

being, loosely speaking, and that's what mattered.”⁹⁹ Truthfulness, in the public imagination, is not only measured by facts—some claims *feel* true. In Chapter Two, I propose that charismatic-evangelical Christians learn that intense emotion verifies the presence of God; and therefore verifies the truth. Feelings are part of the assemblage, the resonance machine that makes up truth in contemporary U.S. life.

For now, the next section examines the status of truth in secular discourse. I read carefully Steven Pinker's book *Enlightenment Now*, which in its own way is a response to *feelings*. Pinker is dismayed by the intense pessimism he sees around him and seeks to assert via data that the world is in fact getting better. Pinker wants humankind to recognize progress and to rejoice. He wants people to be happy and optimistic about the world instead of worried and depressed. Pinker blames post-modern depression on the humanities (theology and philosophy are at the top of the list), which according to Pinker have eroded public confidence in knowledge—and therefore confidence in progress. While I am as dismayed by the rise of “feeling-only” truth as Pinker, I challenge his assertion that the answer is a return to the “*Enlightenment Now*.” I argue Pinker's book sublimates its dependance on the modern liberal subject, called by philosopher Charles Taylor “the buffered self,” and what results is a “crypto-fundamentalist” version of the facts, which are unable to fully account for the structures of power like racism, misogyny, and homophobia, that seek to assert themselves as first principle for truth.

In Chapter Four of this project, I argue political truth must name and evaluate its first principles. I propose an alternative economy of political truth that can encompass

⁹⁹ Trollinger and Trollinger, *Righting America*, 65.

facts, feelings, and power—even more, I propose a political truth that is revealed at the limits of the human subject. For now, I turn to Steven Pinker’s book in order to begin challenging secular political truth’s dependence on the modern liberal subject. This part of the project opens up space to think differently about political truth—to make space for revelation—at the conclusion of the project.

“Prepare to Believe” in the Modern Liberal Subject: *Enlightenment Now*

The second case study in this chapter is psychologist Steven Pinker’s 2016 book *Enlightenment Now: The Case for Reason, Science, Humanism, and Progress*. In what appears to be a sharp contrast to the explicit fundamentalist-Christian truth at the Creation Museum, *Enlightenment Now* is an example of popular secular cultural/political truth-making. For the purposes of my project, Pinker’s book exemplifies the on-going conflict between science and religion in U.S. popular discourse. Pinker’s book demonstrates how continued arguments at the conceptual level serve to obscure projects of subject formation. The production of selves at the Creation Museum and in Pinker’s work are more similar than they appear at first glance, because both examples have, what I propose we read as, fundamentalist commitments. I argue *Enlightenment Now* clings with a fundamentalist fervor to *the facts*. As I explain in the introduction to this project, fact-checking has been elevated to the status of cure-all for the ideological divide in the U.S. Progressive scholars and activists lament the break-down of truth and create increasingly elaborate fact-checking apparatuses but do not pause to consider what makes the truth at the Creation Museum—or Trump’s truth—effective. I argue that effective truth is affective. Truth-making works across the mind and the senses. Pinker, as I will demonstrate, dismisses feeling by arguing that people can control their passions with the

cool power of reason.

Demonstrating the importance of facts to Pinker's project, two-thirds of the book is dedicated to data. Pinker presents reams of evidence that the world has progressed and is now is better than ever. Yet, in order to make sense out of the data, Pinker must assert a framework: for Pinker, human reason and science provide the ideal theoretical scaffolds. Then, in addition to reason, Pinker requires some shared values to guide ethics in the world. Shared values allow human beings and institutions, like the government, to make decisions about how to act, or how to allow people to act, in the world. Decisions, especially those made by institutions, like the government, have power over the ability of people to live or die. For Pinker, the values that should guide action in the world add up to "Humanism." It is the last piece, the shared values—or, I propose, first principles—that bedevil Pinker's argument. Pinker claims that the values that make up humanism are first principles for ethical actions, these values do not include reason, though they are proven to be reasonable by their correspondence with "evolution" and "entropy." At the same time Pinker argues that there is nothing "prior" to reason, presenting a tension between his first principles and reason that does not resolve. Ultimately, I argue that Pinker's "humanism" is belief in the sovereign modern liberal subject, who is endowed with the ability to perceive, comprehend, and act freely in the world. But because the modern liberal subject is not acknowledged in Pinker's argument, what emerges is a "crypto-fundamentalist" version of facts, that is not able to adequately address the structures of power, like race, gender, sex, class, that seek to assert themselves as first principles, as white supremacy, as patriarchy, as heteronormativity, etc., in political truth.

It is evident from the very outset of his book that Pinker seeks to offer values for

human life and specifically that he seeks values other than religion to orient people in the world. In the introduction Pinker boldly answers the question “why should I live?”.¹⁰⁰ He confidently tells a student who wonders why one should live if religion is not the answer, “as a sentient being you have the potential to *flourish*.”¹⁰¹ And even more, you are able to “refine your faculty of reason itself by learning and debating.”¹⁰² You, student, are “endowed with a sense of *sympathy*” and are therefore “the ability to like, love, respect, help, and show kindness.”¹⁰³ All of these traits—and more—exemplify what Pinker calls “the ideals of the Enlightenment.”¹⁰⁴ Pinker admits, “The Enlightenment principle that we can apply reason and sympathy to enhance human flourishing may seem obvious, trite, old-fashioned”—but nonetheless he wrote the book because he has “come to realize that it is not.”¹⁰⁵ The book therefore sets out to defend the Enlightenment ideals of “reason, science, humanism, and progress.”¹⁰⁶ Note that in stating the aims of the book, the values like “sympathy,” “love,” or “respect,” traditionally rooted in religion, have dropped out of sight.

In my reading, Pinker proposes the “ideals” contained in the Creation Museum’s “Man’s Word” as the path forward for humankind. At the Creation Museum, visitors are

¹⁰⁰ Pinker, *Enlightenment Now*, loc 40-41.

¹⁰¹ Pinker, *Enlightenment Now*, loc 40-41.

¹⁰² Pinker, *Enlightenment Now*, loc 40-41.

¹⁰³ Pinker, *Enlightenment Now*, loc 40-41.

¹⁰⁴ Pinker, *Enlightenment Now*, loc 40-41.

¹⁰⁵ Pinker, *Enlightenment Now*, loc 40-41.

¹⁰⁶ Pinker, *Enlightenment Now*, loc 40-41.

led through a series of rooms that demonstrate the deterioration of world that was caused by “Man” giving up his dependence on “God’s word.” For the Creation Museum and AIG the death of God in modernity corresponds with the death of truth at the hands of man—or put another way, God is killed by man’s autonomous reason. I read Pinker’s *Enlightenment Now* as set up in opposition to the argument that is made at the Creation Museum, critical of their dark assessment of the world. Pinker sees this worldview in Trump’s dark inauguration speech that blamed “a global power system” for eroding “the underlying spiritual and moral foundations of Christianity.”¹⁰⁷ In contrast, Pinker argues that the world is now the best it has ever been—and Pinker has *the data* to back up this claim. It should come as no surprise that Pinker’s book is primarily comprised of data, which is presented as the evidence to support his claim that the world is steadily improving. While Pinker’s argument is more sophisticated than a mere factualism, I nonetheless, draw a connection between his overwhelming presentation of data and the reliance on fact-checking to correct for lies in contemporary political discourse. Again two-thirds of Pinker’s book, the middle section titled “Progress” runs through a series of challenges faced by the world, like famine, poverty, climate change, and war and systematically demonstrates the progress that has been made in combatting these issues. I propose that Pinker’s focus on data serves to obscure his underlying assumptions about what it means to be human—and similarly that political fact-checking on the left depends on a particular model of what it means to be human and therefore misses the role of feelings—of affect—in political truth.

¹⁰⁷ Pinker, *Enlightenment Now*, loc 31-32.

For example, Pinker statistically demonstrates that undernourishment (read hunger) has been on the decline since 1970. He says “the developing world is feeding itself,” which is “most obvious in China, whose 1.3 billion people now have access to an average of 3,100 calories per person per day.”¹⁰⁸ This amount of food, he explains, “according to US government guideline is the number needed by a highly active young man.”¹⁰⁹ Pinker presents these figures as progress: in the 19th century there was widespread hunger everywhere, then in the 20th century hunger improved in the West and now food shortages are decreasing in the rest of the world. Another large example cited by Pinker is the growth of wealth in the world. Pinker explains that in 1800 “at the dawn of the Industrial Revolution, most people everywhere were poor”—“almost 95 percent of the world lived in what counts today as ‘extreme poverty’ (less than \$1.90 a day).”¹¹⁰ Now Pinker explains “In two hundred years the rate of extreme poverty in the world has tanked from 90 percent to 10, with almost half that decline occurring in the last thirty-five years.”¹¹¹ Pinker’s claims are not without basis; according to these measures the world is better. My question as I read the data is who is this world best for? What people benefit most from this world? While he is correct that by these general measures the world has improved, it is not an equal improvement for all people.

The Creation Museum claims that the world is worse than ever; Pinker claims it is better than ever. At stake for the Creation Museum is shaping, preparing, and arming

¹⁰⁸ Pinker, *Enlightenment Now*, loc 179-180.

¹⁰⁹ Pinker, *Enlightenment Now*, loc 179-180.

¹¹⁰ Pinker, *Enlightenment Now*, loc 217-218.

¹¹¹ Pinker, *Enlightenment Now*, loc 217-218.

“millions of American Christians as uncompromising and fearless warriors for what it understands to be the ongoing culture war in America.”¹¹² In other words, the Creation Museum seeks to create subjects—a collective subjectivity that will go to war in the U.S. What is at stake for Pinker in *Enlightenment Now*? I propose that a particular form of subject is at stake for Pinker too. How could it not be, since Pinker is attempting to address the whole human condition? Important for my argument is the fact that Pinker does not name the kind of subjects he seeks to form, at least not directly. Perhaps, hidden behind Pinker’s data is a desire to make subjects that look like him—white, cisgendered, heterosexual, able-bodied men.

According to Pinker, progress requires the triumph of reason, which is “foremost” and “nonnegotiable” in his account of the Enlightenment ideals. Reason, Pinker argues, can explain and correct human beings’ tendency to not acknowledge progress. For example, one reason human beings do not acknowledge progress is “availability bias.”¹¹³ Humankind is prone to lean into the information that is most readily available to them. The news, for example, plays an important role in dictating what information is available to a wide audience. So, Pinker continues, more people are afraid of plane crashes than are afraid of car crashes, because plane crashes make the news, while car crashes do not. However, looking at the numbers—checking the facts—demonstrates that car crashes are far more common than plane crashes. The answer to availability bias, Pinker writes,

¹¹² Trollinger and Trollinger, *Righting America*, 2.

¹¹³ Pinker, *Enlightenment Now*, loc 151-152.

“The answer is to *count*. ”¹¹⁴

Yet, my reading of the current world suggests that the increasing availability of facts, data, numbers is not sufficient to move U.S. political discourse. For example, *PolitiFact* exists purely to fact-check U.S. politics. The website was even awarded a Pulitzer prize for their fact-checking efforts during the 2008 presidential election.¹¹⁵ Similarly, during Hillary Clinton’s first debate with Donald Trump, the democratic candidate for president turned her campaign website into a real-time fact-checker.¹¹⁶ As Trump spoke, his claims were immediately checked both by Clinton in the debate and more extensively by her campaign on the website. None of these efforts stopped Donald Trump from lying. During his time in office Trump made more than thirty thousand false or misleading statements and yet his approval rate held steady, indicating that his base of supporters are not moved by or do not encounter any information challenges Trump’s claims in their sources of media.¹¹⁷

Pinker knows that there must be some organizing scheme for the data he presents: both a theoretical framework and some shared values that guide decisions about how to

¹¹⁴ Pinker, *Enlightenment Now*, loc 1008.

¹¹⁵ Bill Adair “PolitiFact wins Pulitzer,” *Politifact*, April 20, 2009. <https://www.politifact.com/article/2009/apr/20/politifact-wins-pulitzer/>.

¹¹⁶ Issie Lapowsky, “Millions of People Checked out Clinton’s Debate Fact-Check Site,” *Wired Magazine*, August 27th, 2016, <https://www.wired.com/2016/09/millions-people-fact-checked-debate-clintons-website/>.

¹¹⁷ Despite low approval ratings for his response to the 2020 Covid-19 pandemic, Trump still received 10 million more votes in 2020 than in 2016. Harry Enton, “There are signs Trump’s base is leaving him on the coronavirus,” *CNN*, July 16, 2020, <https://www.cnn.com/2020/07/16/politics/trump-polling-coronavirus/index.html>. Britni De La Cretaz, “Trump Got 10 Million More Votes this Election. Where Did They Come From?” *Refinery 29*, November 18, 2020, <https://www.refinery29.com/en-us/2020/11/10176029/who-voted-for-trump-2020-vs-2016>.

act in the world. The final section of Pinker's book *Enlightenment Now* expounds on the tools that Pinker believes are necessary for progress in the U.S—reason, science, and humanism. Pinker explains, if you “insist that your answers, whatever they are, are reasonable, or justified or true and that therefore other people ought to believe them too, then you have committed yourself to reason, and to holding your beliefs accountable to objective standards.”¹¹⁸ Complementary to reason is science or “the refining of reason to understand the world.”¹¹⁹ In other words, reason presents a level playing field for human beings, standards that can be used to evaluate claims. Reason, according to Pinker, is “prior to everything else,” but cannot be justified with “first principles”—because we don’t “believe in reason.”¹²⁰ Reason, according to Pinker, is self-demonstrating. Pinker argues, once humans start using reason, “we can stroke our confidence that the particular kinds of reasoning we are engaging in are sound by noting their internal coherence and their fit with reality.”¹²¹ Notice that Pinker identifies the correspondence theory of truth as the basis for evaluating truth. I suggest that Pinker’s approach verges on tautological, on wish fulfillment, where truth that coheres with an individual’s perceived reality is what justifies a claim. Of course, one way to evaluate the coherence of reason with reality is through the application of the scientific method.

Science, according to Pinker, has done more good than harm. He rightfully

¹¹⁸ Pinker, *Enlightenment Now*, loc 49-50.

¹¹⁹ Pinker, *Enlightenment Now*, loc 51-52.

¹²⁰ Pinker, *Enlightenment Now*, loc 7056.

¹²¹ Pinker, *Enlightenment Now*, loc 7059.

identifies, for example, the powerful scientific “gift” of the eradication of smallpox.¹²²

Pinker goes so far as to call the elimination of smallpox a “feat of moral greatness,” which seems to imply that science, itself, is an ethical good, or at least that it is often good.¹²³ Pinker’s claims make apparent the ethical power entangled with knowledge production in much the same way that the Creation Museum does. Knowledge production—truth—works in tandem with the process of deciding what is ethical.

Scientific exploration is always mediated through human social and linguistic structures, a reality that Pinker works hard to downplay. Pinker argues, “Science cannot be blamed for genocide and war, and does not threaten the moral and spiritual health of our nation.”¹²⁴ Indeed, science, if science is defined as a method of testing and verifying a hypothesis, cannot be blamed for the morally bankrupt events of human history.

However, people, some of them practitioners of science, can take (at least some of) the blame for human actions. Pinker does not defend the doctors who cruelly experimented on people of color; however he dismisses these practices as a result of “racist beliefs,” which stem not from science, but from the “humanities: history, philology, classics and mythology.”¹²⁵ He is right that the scientific method cannot be blamed for these actions; however, science also cannot be fully separated from racist actions.

Pinker’s description of science assumes that it is possible to separate reason,

¹²² This example is so potent given the role vaccine for Covid-19 is playing in allowing the world to move on from the pandemic.

¹²³ Pinker, *Enlightenment Now*, loc 1101-1102.

¹²⁴ Pinker, *Enlightenment Now*, loc 7835.

¹²⁵ Pinker, *Enlightenment Now*, loc 8019.

which is refined as science, from the parts of the human being that are prone to racism, sexism, or other oppressive impulses. Yet, science practiced by people who are racist has led to horrific practices on minority groups—for example, the legalized practice of eugenics in the U.S. which led to the forced sterilization of people of color and people with intellectual disabilities.¹²⁶ The results of racist science have been used to shore up racist beliefs. Science is not a panacea. Facts read and interpreted by the scientific method cannot neutralize complex social/cultural problems like racism, at least not without wading into the messy knot of beliefs.

Aware of the looming specter of belief in any system that claims to answer the question “why live,” the final chapter in *Enlightenment Now* proposes “Humanism” as a general principle for evaluating human actions. Despite his claims about the moral good achieved through science (remember the small pox vaccines), Pinker opens his chapter by asserting “Science is not enough to bring about progress”.¹²⁷ Science, Pinker admits, can be used to good or to evil ends. His answer, therefore, to the problem of ethics is “humanism,” which he describes as “good without God.”¹²⁸ In other words it seems that for Pinker progress requires that humankind *gives up* religion.¹²⁹ Faith is unreasonable,

¹²⁶ For example: Adam Seth Cohen, *Imbeciles: The Supreme Court, American Eugenics, and the Sterilization of Carrie Buck*. (New York: Penguin, 2016).

¹²⁷ Pinker, *Enlightenment Now*, loc 1167-1168.

¹²⁸ Pinker, *Enlightenment Now*, loc 8289.

¹²⁹ Pinker is a notable member of the New Atheist community. For example, he defends the New Atheist Movement alongside Dan Dennet, Richard Dawkins, Sam Harris in a blog post on the site *Why Evolution is True*. Jerry Coyne, “Is New Atheism really dead? Four New Atheists respond,” *Why Evolution is True*, February 15, 2019, <https://whyevolutionistrue.com/2019/02/15/is-new-atheism-really-dead-three-new-atheists-respond/>.

argues Pinker, to “take something on faith means to believe it without good reason.”¹³⁰ Of course, Pinker’s definition of the religion that requires faith is linked to a “supernatural” God, which is extremely limited and does not take into account process theologies or the radical theology I use later in the project.¹³¹ Pinker is likely targeting the kinds of fundamentalist, charismatic-evangelical Christianities I use as case studies in this project, but softens the language in order to be less directly offensive.¹³²

Charles Taylor theorizes the secularization of the United States in his book *The Secular Age*. Taylor’s project traces a narrative that takes the U.S. population from “a society in which it was virtually impossible to not believe to one in which faith [in God], even for the staunchest believer is one human possibility among others”—and correspondingly “Belief in God is no longer axiomatic.”¹³³ Taylor explains that a popular definition of secularity is a reduction in religiosity: as secular sphere grows, the need for religion dies and so eventually religion will disappear. For Pinker, religion—especially evangelical Christianity—is unreasonable and therefore hinders progress. Human progress requires the elimination of religion or as Pinker writes, “Good without God.”

Pinker’s version of Humanism, which is his first principle, is rooted in, of course,

¹³⁰ Pinker, *Enlightenment Now*, loc 97-98.

¹³¹ Pinker likely is directly targeting the kinds of fundamentalist, charismatic-evangelical Christianities I use as case studies in this project, but softens the language in order to be less directly offensive.

¹³² In May of 2020, Pinker wrote on Twitter, about the push to reopen the economy and society after initial lockdowns in response to the coronavirus “Belief in an afterlife is a malignant delusion, since it devalues actual lives and discourage action that would make them longer safer, and happier. Exhibit A: What’s really behind Republicans wanting a swift reopening? Evangelicals.”

¹³³ Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 3.

science. Pinker argues at the beginning of his book that two scientific theories, evolution and entropy, offer the basis for Humanism. Pinker claims that the social/emotional skills of humankind evolved in order to fend off the ravages of decay and death (entropy). However, the social, emotional, and physical desires of human beings are often in conflict. So Pinker defines ethics as the process of navigating these conflicts. At the end, because no one is immune to entropy, Pinker argues, everyone has the need to return to the realm of morality, because morality sustains group flourishing. In other words, Pinker argues that because all humankind faces inevitable death, they will all do what is best for group survival, rather than what is best for the individual.

Pinker's position is hopeful and reasonable, but was not born out in the U.S.'s fight with Covid-19. Conflicts about how to respond to the pandemic bifurcated along political lines with each side making different claims about to act responsibly given the spread of the virus. Pinker tweeted (and then deleted) in May of 2020: "Belief in an afterlife is a malignant delusion, since it devalues actual lives and discourages action that would make them longer, safer, and happier. Exhibit A: What's really behind Republicans wanting a swift reopening? Evangelicals."¹³⁴ While Pinker is correct that there were factually better and worse ways to deal with the pandemic, his assertion that it is the "malignant" belief in an afterlife that stops people from responding reasonably is reductive. He does not account for the role of the president in downplaying the pandemic, nor does he begin to address capitalism hold on the lives of people. Instead, Pinker

¹³⁴ Dennis Prager, "The Lockdown, Evangelicals and the Afterlife: A Response to Stephen Pinker," *RealClear Politics*, May 26, 2020, https://www.realclearpolitics.com/articles/2020/05/26/the_lockdown_evangelicals_and_the_afterlife_a_response_to_steven_pinker_143290.html.

blames religion for people not acting the way he wants—for people not acting reasonably. His anti-Christian stance is belied by the Humanism that is the anchor for ethics in *Enlightenment Now*. He claims Humanism is the value-set closest to science and most proven by reason. Remember that reason is self-affirming and almost tautological for Pinker: when human beings start down the path of reason, their “confidence” grows as they recognize the correspondence of reason and reality. Humanism depends on the power of human beings to reason.

Pinker spends the bulk of his chapter on Humanism refuting religion as a first principle for ethics.¹³⁵ Pinker explains that according to the historical record, religion has failed many times as an ethical anchor for political truth (though he admits at other times, it has succeeded). This partial failure is enough for Pinker to reason that religion has no value for ethics. So despite the fact that important strands of knowledge, “like the language and allegories of the Bible and the writings of sages, scholars, and rabbis,” originated in religion, the forms of knowledge associated with religion—“faith, revelation, dogma, authority, charisma, conventional wisdom, hermeneutic parsing of texts, the glow of subjective certainty”—should be dismissed.¹³⁶

Yet, the question that remains for me at the end of *Enlightenment Now* is *how* to spread the message of Humanism. Is Humanism an *effective* first principle for truth, like what is communicated explicitly or implicitly at the Creation Museum? Or will Pinker’s

¹³⁵ Pinker’s other focus is possibility of nationalism as a first principle, a target which I find more sympathetic, but do not have space to discuss here.

¹³⁶ Pinker, *Enlightenment Now*, loc 1235-1236.

Enlightenment ideals fail because they cannot speak to “primal human needs?”¹³⁷ Pinker bemoans the need to engage the human senses, asking “Should humanists hold revival meetings at which preachers thump Spinoza’s *Ethics* on the pulpit and ecstatic congregants roll back their eyes and babble in Esperanto.”¹³⁸ Pinker answer this question with a definite no, because “a vulnerability” to feeling “is not the same as a need.”¹³⁹ For Pinker, just because human beings are susceptible to emotions, passions, and desires—to what he describes as “cognitive illusion”—it does not mean they should be embraced as part of the ethical, or arguably political, decision-making process.¹⁴⁰ In fact, again, religious forms of knowledge “faith, revelation, dogma, authority, charism, conventional wisdom, hermeneutic parsing of texts” are generators of error.¹⁴¹ As a result, Pinker’s shared value, Humanism, is left to be communicated by reason alone, which he claims is the only valid source of knowledge.

I argue that Pinker’s disavowal of affect as part of human knowledge production is key to fully understanding the failure of the progressive agenda in the era of Trump. Effective truth is affective: truth-claims, for example, at the Creation Museum are more than merely conceptual. Truth at the Creation Museum is performed with the aura of scientific authority in order to seem, *to feel*, plausible to listeners who are entrenched in modern liberal epistemologies, which elevate reason and science above other forms of

¹³⁷ Pinker, *Enlightenment Now*, loc 9193.

¹³⁸ Pinker, *Enlightenment Now*, loc 9193.

¹³⁹ Pinker, *Enlightenment Now*, loc 9193.

¹⁴⁰ Pinker, *Enlightenment Now*, loc 8732.

¹⁴¹ Pinker, *Enlightenment Now*, loc 7919-7925.

knowledge. The experience at the Creation Museum acts across all the senses—sight, sound, touch, even smell are all activated as visitors move through the exhibits at the Creation Museum. The Creation Museum acknowledges that a fundamentalist-literal reading of the Bible serves as a first principle for their claims. At the same time, other less articulated or even sublimated first principles, like racism and white supremacy, act on visitors to the Creation Museum. The Creation Museum, as Trollinger and Trollinger assert, “seeks...to arm millions of American Christians as...warriors for what it understands to be the ongoing culture war in America.”¹⁴² In other words, the Creation Museum does more than communicate concepts. In the long tradition of Christianity pressing against science in order to shape citizens, the Creation Museum undertakes a project of subject formation the Creation Museum creates individuals who participate collectively in its culture war.

Part of subject formation, the formation of both individual subjects and collective subjectivities, is the ability to make decisions; or conversely the limiting of subjects’ capacity to make their own decisions. Control of the process of subject formation therefore co-occurs, co-emerges with the power to set first principles for truth-making. If truth, as Pinker claims, requires reason, theories to scaffold reason (for Pinker this is science), and some shared values for making decisions about how to act in the world, then the people or institutions, like government or religion, that set first principles have power over the kinds of actors who emerge. Shared first principles anchor ethical decisions in first principles like a literal Biblical hermeneutic or Humanism and shared

¹⁴² Trollinger and Trollinger, *Righting America*, 2.

values help determine how people act within a society. Institutions participate in the formation of subjects, because the laws, norms, doctrines, that they assert constrain the freedom of individuals to act in the world, while simultaneously encouraging them to act in particular ways. Ethics take place as individuals make choices about how to act, but these decisions are always imbricated in the possibilities presented by the institutions that shape subjects. People are therefore formed individually; and the same time people are formed as part of a collective.

Take again the example of the Creation Museum where, according to “Graffiti Alley,” the death of God, coupled with “Man’s” growing confidence in autonomous reason, has led to a decline in (what AIG understands to be) moral actions in U.S. society. In response the Creation Museum creates actors who will respond by going to war against the failing morals in society. AIG explicitly pushes back on science that says the universe is older than 6000 years; but I suggest the Creation Museum’s work of subject formation also activates other first principles, which they might not explicitly or even consciously endorse, which circulate as nodes of power, which emerge as concepts and as feelings, in the larger U.S. political system. These nodes of power include, for example, authoritarianism and white supremacy.

If the Creation Museum is actively creating subjects who act together in the world, then what kind of subjects is Pinker attempting to form and what does he want them to do? Pinker has a model of subjectivity undergirding his triad of reason, science, and humanism, though it is not explicitly named. I propose that *Enlightenment Now* seeks to form people as the modern liberal subject or the “buffered self,” the model of selfhood that Charles Taylor argues defines the secular age. The difficulty is that Pinker assumes

the modern liberal subject as the truth without questioning its parameters. He does not evaluate the modern liberal subject as a starting place and an anchor for his claims that the world is progressing. Pinker believes in the modern liberal subject and assumes it aligns with the way human beings *really are made*. Pinker's assumption of the modern liberal subject as natural works to obscure complexity of subject formation, which though it is imbricated with knowledge production, is more than conceptual, vibrating across multiple registers as embodied, conceptual, and collective.

Most scholars do not presume the modern liberal subject is the natural and true form of human beings. Charles Taylor describes the "secular age" as the shift from a world where most people believe in God to a world where belief in God is one choice amongst many. Possible definitions of secularity include the "emptying of religion from autonomous social spheres" or "the falling off of religious belief and practice."¹⁴³ Pinker's book seems to conflate all religious faith with a belief in a supernatural God. Pinker writes, "Few sophisticated people today profess a belief in and hell, the literal truth of the bible, or a God who flouts the laws of physics."¹⁴⁴ All of Pinker's push in the book is for "Good without God," or for the elimination of the beliefs he assumes are held by evangelical Christians (he never examines their religion beyond the irrationality of the claims listed above). Pushing back on definitions of secularity focused on the existence of religion, Taylor argues that the most important shift in the secular age is in the changes to the "conditions of belief," which manifest as a change in the form of the human

¹⁴³ Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 2.

¹⁴⁴ Pinker, *Enlightenment Now*, 1135-1136.

subject.¹⁴⁵ I seek to push back on Pinker by making clear what definition of the human subject undergirds his thought.

According to Taylor premodern personhood reflected the “porous self” or a self that was “vulnerable, to spirits, demons, cosmic forces, and more.”¹⁴⁶ The porous self was affected by people, things, creatures, outside of them—in the porous self “the boundary between agents and forces is fuzzy.”¹⁴⁷ In contrast, Taylor argues that modern individuals understand themselves as closed off from the world, as what he calls the “buffered self”—and what I call “the modern liberal subject” or “sovereign subject.”¹⁴⁸ To be a buffered subject “is to have closed the porous boundary between the inside (thought) and the outside (nature, the physical).”¹⁴⁹ This version of the self “can see itself as invulnerable, as master of the meanings of things for it.”¹⁵⁰ If the self is separated from the world, if there is space between the self and other actors, then the subject has the “ambition of disengaging from whatever is beyond the boundary, and of giving its own autonomous order to its life.”¹⁵¹ In other words, if the subject is separate from the rest of

¹⁴⁵ Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 3.

¹⁴⁶ Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 38.

¹⁴⁷ Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 39.

¹⁴⁸ It will become clear later in the chapter that I choose “modern liberal subject” and “sovereign subject” because these terms have deeper roots into the modern liberal state and the power that upholds the state. Taylor does not use these terms, but I argue, with Mayra Rivera, his buffered self describes the same or a very similar form of subjectivity as “modern liberal subject” or “sovereign subject.” It’s also worth noting that one of the ethnographies of charismatic Christianity that I read in chapter two uses the language of “porosity” to describe the charismatic self, depending on Taylor’s work. Using Taylor here offers some continuity into the next chapter.

¹⁴⁹ Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 300.

¹⁵⁰ Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 38.

¹⁵¹ Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 38-39.

the world, then it is able to imagine it is in control of its destiny.

Pinker's description of science assumes that it is possible to separate scientific work from other human forms of knowledge like racism or sexism, which result from the humanities. This control, I propose, is the work of the buffered, or modern liberal subject. For Pinker, science takes on the sheen of a first principle, revealed, for example, when he praises the moral good of the polio vaccine. Yet, Pinker is forced to admit that science alone will not fuel progress, because science itself is not guided by values. To fill this void, Pinker asserts Humanism, which he identifies because of its eminent reasonableness, demonstrated by its correspondence with the scientific theories of evolution and entropy.

Pinker's dependence on reason is another marker of his belief in the sovereign subject. According to Taylor the buffered self is heightened by an "ethic of rational control."¹⁵² I propose that an "ethic of rational control," is closer to what is described by Pinker than Humanism, because, again Pinker assumes that reason can be separated from other human impulses, from other desires. Indeed, Taylor explains that more than buffered from the world, modern subjects are in control of their desires, "able to stand back from all of them, and determine rationally how we should best dispose of them."¹⁵³ This is what Pinker argues, that reason is prior to everything else. Taylor continues by arguing human desires are "under the instrumental control of reason" and therefore "are

¹⁵² Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 134.

¹⁵³ Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 135.

controlled by the will.”¹⁵⁴ In other words, the buffered self, the modern liberal subject uses reason to exercise sovereignty over its world.

Ultimately reason, under the control of the buffered sovereign subject, is the first principle in Pinker’s argument for progress. Pinker believes in the human that is the root word of his “Humanism,” the shared value that anchors ethical decisions in his economy of political truth. Because Pinker does not acknowledge anything like the buffered self as a starting place, I don’t know if he makes note of older versions of subjectivity, like the porous self that is described by Taylor. Even if Pinker recognizes that the form of the subject has changed, it is clear that the modern liberal subject who exercises sovereignty over its world and its passions is the ideal model of subjectivity for Pinker. Even more, Pinker’s assertion that reason is prior to everything else, and should be evaluated by its coherence with reality, suggests that reason is natural. The sovereign modern liberal subject is the real human being—the buffered self is the true form of the human subject. I contend that Pinker’s long lists of facts that prove the human race is progressing serve to obscure an underlying belief in human beings. Pinker is a crypto-fundamentalist believer in the buffered self; he believes in the sovereign modern liberal subject.

Religion has not disappeared from U.S. life. The booming business at the Creation Museum makes the power of fundamentalist-evangelical Christianity evident. Religiosity has changed and is changing: there is an on-going demographic shift towards the “nones” or people who do not identify with an institutional religion. Nonetheless, as the introduction explains, religion continues to thrive and to deeply influence the

¹⁵⁴ Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 131.

supposedly secular sphere. In other words, the increase in human knowledge via science has not resulted in the elimination of religion. Instead of arguing that religion ought to be eliminated, or even continuing the fight between religion and science, I seek to understand why evangelical Christianity continues to be so compelling. I propose that the recent bifurcation of truth, split into feeling-only truth and a crypto-fundamentalist version of the facts is, in part, a reaction against the modern liberal subject for whom reason is first and foremost and the passions are something to control or even suppress. Again, I propose that affective truth is effective—and even more, I propose that there is a backlash against the modern liberal subject that is operated by reason and exercises sovereignty because it is an insufficient model of subjectivity, which produces a limited—and even boring—version of the truth.

So what kind of collective subjectivity does Pinker seek to form through *Enlightenment Now*? The Creation Museum works to form Christian warriors who will defend their proposed social values. Pinker mocks the suggestion that humanists might communicate with the kind of charismatic passion that Christians (and many other religious groups) so effectively wield. Pinker seeks to form a group of modern liberal subjects, who are led by reason and science. Is everyone included in that group? Who might excel and who might be left out?

To underscore and explain the problem presented by Pinker's dependance on the sovereign modern liberal subject—the buffered self—I turn to the work of theologian-philosophers Mayra Rivera and J. Kameron Carter. They each argue that racist colonial assumptions that underpin the sovereign subject. According to Carter, the sovereign modern liberal subject is made in the image of the white colonizer. The sovereign (read

ruling) subject is a white, cisgendered heterosexual, able-bodied man and people who do not conform to that identity are therefore not granted subjectivity—and to not have subjectivity within the modern state is to not have citizenship.

I argue that Steven Pinker's assertion that U.S. society will be saved by returning to the principles of the Enlightenment is unable or perhaps is unwilling to wrestle with the first principles—racism, sexism, heterosexism, etc.—that undergird the sovereign modern liberal subject. Pinker's crypto-fundamentalist belief in the modern liberal is obfuscated by the claim that reason is self-verifying. What results from Pinker's belief in the buffered self is the crypto-fundamentalist version of the facts that currently dominates liberal politics and which cannot address the feeling-driven lies posing as truth that shored up Donald Trump's power.

The Racist Sovereign Subject Mediates Citizenship in the West

Philosopher Mayra Rivera argues, resonating with Taylor, that in the modern period—the secular age—humankind shifted its worldview. Where once humankind saw a divinely ordered world that made meaning in relation to a distant, transcendent source—*God*—they turned to the human person as a source of meaning and value. Key to developing this argument further is to follow the transcendence that is no longer associated with God in modernity. What happens to that power when there is no longer a first principle *above* humankind? In the previous section I argue that the power to set first principles for truth is linked to the power to form subjects; and I claim the ethical decisions made by individuals are informed by and limited by the institutions that have the power to set norms, laws, doctrines, and other first principles for society's truth. Individual subjectivity is entangled in collective subjectivities, such that they emerge

together, interdependently.

Rivera adds an analysis of hierarchy to my reading of the secular age: if transcendence placed God *over* human beings as sovereign then what happens to that transcendence when it is brought down to earth into the control of the sovereign human subject? What happens to the “external source of value associated with vertical dimensionality itself”?¹⁵⁵ Rivera observes that “intraworldly hierarchies have always been in place, making their own appeals to height.”¹⁵⁶ Appeals to hierarchy, to vertical dominance within the world categorize human beings, for example, according to superior race, sex, gender, or body. Rivera argues that intraworldly hierarchies exist in space doing work like separating the dominant West from the dominated East; and in time separating, for example, the “primitive” premodern from the “civilized” modern. In other words when sovereignty is invested the human subject, some people have power over other subjects.

Rivera’s observations about power return us here to the question: what collective subjectivity does Pinker seek to form in *Enlightenment Now*? Is everyone included in the collective subject? The Creation Museum works to create an army of people to participate in a culture war. What does Pinker’s group of “sophisticated people” look like? What if the modern subject, assumed by Pinker to be transparent, autonomous, and universal is *a he*—even worse, *a white he*. Theologian-philosopher J. Kameron Carter has

¹⁵⁵ Rivera is working with the Radical Orthodoxy of John Milbank here. Milbank is bitching that the postmodernity has caused all distinctions between people to be erased, resulting in homosexuality and other abominations. Rivera’s project is a nuanced challenge of these claims. Mayra Rivera, *The Touch of Transcendence: A Postcolonial Theology of God*, Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2007), loc 292.

¹⁵⁶ Rivera, *Touch of Transcendence*, loc 292.

incisively parsed the false-idol of the humanist subject in the contemporary Western context, naming such idol the “White, Global Masculine.”¹⁵⁷ Even more, Carter makes explicit the theological sovereignty that was conferred upon the White Man in the modern the turn to the subject. Carter argues that at the end of WWI, the old form of domination through imperial dynasties gave way to a new form—the *nation*. According to Carter imperialism was theologically upheld by a *white messianic figure*, an “imperial divinity,” who attempted to carry out a “soteriological or missionizing project of salvation—the civilizing project of the west—aimed at ruling the world.”¹⁵⁸

What if sovereign subject who serves as Pinker’s first principle cannot be separated from the “White, Global Masculine?” Because Pinker’s dependance on the buffered self is obscured by his tautological reliance on reason, which manifests as a “crypto-fundamentalist” version of the facts, Pinker inadequately evaluates the history of the modern liberal subject. As a result, *Enlightenment Now* is unable to address the systems of power in the U.S., like racism, sexism, heterosexism, ablism, and more, which constantly seek to inform subjectivity.

Even more, I suggest that Pinker’s project of “progress” which seeks to prove the world is better than it has ever been shares the teleological and theological DNA of the western project of civilization. The link between imperial power and the sovereign subject refines the connection that Rivera makes between hierarchy and subjectivity,

¹⁵⁷ Kameron J. Carter, “Between W.E.B. DuBois and Karl Barth: The Problem of Modern Political Theology,” in *Race and Political Theology*, ed Vincent W. Lloyd, (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2012), 85.

¹⁵⁸ Carter, *Between W.E.B.*, 84.

demonstrating that the white modern liberal subject is in power *over other non-white people*. By suggesting that we should all return to the ideals of the Enlightenment, Pinker seems to assert that we should return to a time when white people were in power. Is the collective subjectivity formed by Pinker's book a group of "sophisticated" white imperial actors?

Even if Pinker denies he seeks imperial conquest (which he likely would do) the form of governance that replaces empire, the nation-state, is still imbricated in white supremacy. The nation state is often presumed to be natural, like the modern liberal subject is presumed to be natural. Carter demonstrates, however, that the nation is formed through a subject-creating origin story that binds citizens to an *ethnos*—the American people. Hidden (in plain sight) in this origin story is a recapitulation of the white supremacy (slavery for example) of the imperial dynasties. The contemporary West, Carter explains, continues to be is "an *eschaton* that a false mediator, a Christ figure secures."¹⁵⁹ Indeed, there are good reasons to challenge, with Pinker, the role of Christianity in establishing the naturalized norms for society. This Christ's mediation continues to affect bodies by serving as the standard by which potential subjects are evaluated. Citizenship is awarded to people who conform to image of the *White Savior*. If the ideal actor in the West is still a white man, then others—women of color, people with diverse gender or sexual identities, people with disabilities—are not free to choose or act as they desire.

While Pinker might not have intended to explicitly recapitulate imperial power, he

¹⁵⁹ Carter, *Between W.E.B.*, 85.

does so by depending on a supposedly neutral sovereign subject to prove that the world is getting better. Subjectivity takes place where the supposed neutral subject exercises the freedom to act that is awarded differently to different kinds of bodies. If the Creation Museum makes white Christian cultural warriors, then Pinker makes antichristian imperial white people. People react to Pinker's version of truth-making in part because it refuses to acknowledge the role of the senses in human subjectivity and therefore is often boring. At the same time though, perhaps Pinker's book acts on people in ways that are not apparent on the surface. For instance, I felt viscerally angry when I read Pinker's assertion that "sophisticated people" don't believe in God. I believe that I am reacting to the implicit white supremacy in Pinker's work. My anger is a reaction against the power that seeks to act on me. Other readers (probably white men) might feel pleasure when they read Pinker's book, because they feel an affinity to the ideal Pinker proposes; or because they are excited by the ideal that Pinker holds up. Read this way, depending on the reader, feeling-only truth or the crypto-fundamentalist version of the facts might arise as reactions to Pinker's book, which demonstrates again that the economy of political truth must be able to work across facts, feelings, and power. Even more, the seduction of particular kinds of subjects by particular events of reading, further demonstrates the unconceptualized, perhaps even unconscious or preconscious principles or values work that are transferred in moments of truth creation.

All this matters, because subjectivities at the individual level and the collective level continue to mediate power in the U.S., and correspondingly to set first principles for truth. Carter describes these processes when he writes, "Subjectivity, then, is that space where internal and external relations of force meet, and it is at this meeting point that

nationalization occurs.”¹⁶⁰ It’s at this point, when I encounter nation-formation, and I have made my case that arguments about conceptual knowledge work to obscure projects of subject formation and that individual subjects are always formed as part of a collective that mediates historically hierarchical power that I turn to a brief definition of sovereignty, which I seek to analyze and dismantle throughout the rest of this project.

Sovereignty has already appeared as the kingly power attributed to the sovereign God and as the mind’s control over desires in the human subject. In the next section I build on Carter’s link between the modern liberal subject and political power by reading the controversial political theorist Carl Schmitt, whose work warns of the link between sovereign power and authoritarianism, and with Carter extends to nationalism, but also demonstrates the work of affect in the transmission of sovereignty, which is crucial to my explanation of the current economy of political truth. The current economy of political truth is not bifurcated between feeling-only truth and a crypto-fundamentalist version of the facts—but rather, just as the conceptual fights between religion and science serve to obscure projects of subject formation, so the divide between feeling-only truth and a crypto-fundamentalist version of the facts obscures projects of subject formation. A political economy of truth that seeks to work across facts, feelings, and power must re-evaluate the modern liberal subject; even more, my alternative economy of political truth must also be a project of alternative subject formation. I seek in Chapters Two, Three, and Four to reevaluate subjectivity and to assert a form of collective subjectivity that resists Schmittian sovereignty as it has shored up imperial white supremacy.

¹⁶⁰ Carter, *Between W.E.B.*, 85.

Liberal Democracy at the Limits: Carl Schmitt's Political Theology

One of Carl Schmitt's most famous (and controversial) claims in his 1920 work *Political Theology: Four Chapters on the Concept of Sovereignty* is "All significant concepts of the modern theory of the state are secularized theological concepts."¹⁶¹ Indeed, both Rivera's and Carter's work reflect the undeniable insight of Schmitt's claim by demonstrating the entanglement of political power and theological claims. Rivera explicates the hierarchical dimension of God's transcendence that is critiqued or assumed to surpassed in narratives of the secular age. Additionally, she points out that hierarchy has always already transferred to intraworldly dimensions by placing, for example, West over East or modern over premodern. Carter goes further by asserting that the West is an eschatological horizon is secured by a "Global, White Masculine" Christ-figure who mediates subjectivity and therefore citizenship in the West. I similarly draw on Schmitt's claim, arguing that like the boundary around the so-called secular sphere is not absolute, the boundary between political and theological discourse is porous, allowing the two to interact. As I move on through this project, I draw on examples of charismatic-evangelical theological/political/affective discourses in order to parse the current economy of political truth, which is marked by the supposed bifurcation of feeling-only truth and a crypto-fundamentalist version of the truth. Ultimately I demonstrate the way contemporary religious-political discourse in the U.S. tells new stories that transmit the old powers of white supremacy and authoritarianism; or evangelical-charismatic discourse works to make entrenched powers feel exciting, thereby allowing white people

¹⁶¹ Schmitt, *Political Theology*, 36.

to claim power without acknowledging their long history of oppressive power.

The second claim famous claim made by Carl Schmitt: “Sovereign is he who decides on the exception.”¹⁶² Again, Schmitt’s once obscure German political thought has ignited a cascade of political theology, particularly amongst “radical” or “death of God” theologians critical of the supposed secularity of the modern liberal state.¹⁶³ The relationship between left-leaning radical theologians and Schmitt is difficult and tenuous at best, because while both groups are critical of the modern liberal state, their reasons are opposed: Schmitt is critical of the *lack* of absolute power in the modern liberal power and seeks a return of sovereign power.

Schmitt’s later book *The Concept of the Political* is critical of the liberal democratic republic—he has the Weimar Republic in mind—*because* it depends on the sovereign subject. According to Schmitt, it is difficult to make decisions if everyone is allowed to have a say, as is ideal in a democracy.¹⁶⁴ Even more, Schmitt argues that the systems of laws and norms set up to govern the state result in a toothless judiciary, or what Schmitt scholar William Scheuerman calls a “crisis of legal indeterminacy.”¹⁶⁵ Schmitt is worried that because norms can never account for every decision that must be made, the law will eventually fail. At the limit of the law there is always some outside possibility that risks collapsing the whole system.

¹⁶² Schmitt, *Political Theology*, 5.

¹⁶³ I mean the non-fundamentalist branch of political theology. Though it does sound like the radical orthodoxy people would like sovereignty.

¹⁶⁴ The degree of say that each person (in theory) has depends on the kind of democracy. The U.S. is a representative democracy: the people elect representatives to make decisions for them, etc.

¹⁶⁵ Scheuerman, *Carl Schmitt*, 19.

In response, Schmitt asserts the need for *sovereignty*. He dramatically asserts in his *Political Theology*, “Sovereign is he who decides on the exception.”¹⁶⁶ Sovereign power is wielded by and is concentrated in the person or institution who decides cases at the limit of the law. Schmitt calls the category of decisions that exceed the law “the exception.” So when a republic encounters an emergency, “a crisis,” sovereignty is the power that allows for the law—the constitution—of a state to be suspended, or placed in a “state of exception.”¹⁶⁷ The sovereign exception is therefore the usually-hidden power that facilitates the existence of the law—the sovereign exception is the outside that allows the law to exist. Again, Schmitt’s analysis of sovereignty coupled with his critique of the modern liberal state lead him to an affinity with dictators (read Hitler) who wield exceptional power.

My project is an analysis of Schmittian sovereignty in U.S. life; and once I have located some strains of sovereignty, I seek to assert alternative, non-sovereign forms of power. Building on the work of Rivera and Carter, I argue that in the secular age, Schmittian sovereignty appears is implied in project of subject formation held up by the modern liberal subject, as I describe that subject following Pinker and Taylor. Then with Rivera and Carter I propose that Schmittian sovereignty works to make some people exceptional: white men, led by reason and in control of their passion, are elevated as the ideal form of the subject. At the same time, other people are excepted from subjectivity by Schmittian sovereignty. People who do not conform to the white male, cisgendered,

¹⁶⁶ Schmitt, *Political Theology*, 5.

¹⁶⁷ Schmitt, *Political Theology*, Contents.

heterosexual, able bodied ideal are not granted full citizenship. Remember that the buffered sovereign subject is subsumed—and serves as a first principle—for Pinker’s claim that facts can save the world. As this project continues, I refer to white supremacy and later authoritarianism as forms of Schmittian sovereignty operating overtly and covertly in U.S. life. Schmittian sovereignty is at times imposed explicitly by the state, take for example the police violence against Black lives; and Schmittian sovereignty works in less explicit ways, as I suggest in chapter two, when I propose that prophecies remade to be less overtly racist, still carry the exceptional power of Schmittian sovereignty. Even more, in the next chapter I propose that both white supremacy and authoritarianism are woven into the collective subjectivity of charismatic-evangelical Christians in the U.S.

The final claim I draw from Carl Schmitt’s work is an uncomfortable agreement that exception is animating force for political truth. Carl Schmitt argues the action of the exception is exciting, even intoxicating: “In the exception the power of real life breaks through the crust of a mechanism that has become torpid by repetition.”¹⁶⁸ Political truth must remain rooted in reason and scientific knowledge; however, political truth must also move people. Schmitt quotes Soren Kierkegaard’s assertion that “the exception...thinks the general with intense passion.”¹⁶⁹ The exception is understood to be at the limit. For Schmitt, it is the limit of the law; and for me the exception occurs at the limit of the human subject. In moments where the monotony of life seems to open up, sovereignty

¹⁶⁸ Schmitt, *Political Theology*, 15.

¹⁶⁹ Schmitt, *Political Theology*, 15

has a space to act; in chapter three, I really parse imbrication of knowledge, power, and affect, in order to understand the movements of force relations. For now it's enough to say that sovereignty is more than conceptual: it is a force that acts on subjects in material ways.

For Schmitt, the “the exception in jurisprudence is analogous to the miracle in theology.”¹⁷⁰ This quote provides the framework for reading the work of prophecy, with its miraculous quality, as a location of the exception. Based on this work, I make two arguments about the exception: first, that the contemporary U.S. has an established pattern of conflating moments of intense emotional excitement with novelty, which allows old forms of Schmittian sovereignty to be reasserted and to feel new; second I propose the occurrence of the exception at the limits of subjectivity demonstrates the need to move beyond the modern liberal “buffered” subject. Building on charismatic-evangelical Christian case studies in Chapter Two and radical theology and affect theory in Chapter Three, I propose human beings are not closed and autonomous, rather we are porous and interdependent. According to Schmitt, “the exception confounds the unity and order of the rationalist scheme.”¹⁷¹ Here Schmitt means that the exception challenges the system of laws that govern the democratic state. However, I read this and see a challenge to Steven Pinker’s claim that reason, science, and humanism can save the world. The implicit Schmittian exception I seek to parse is the white supremacy and the other old entrenched forms of dominance that have been sublimated into our institutions and seek

¹⁷⁰ Schmitt, *Political Theology*, 36.

¹⁷¹ Schmitt, *Political Theology*, 14.

to continue making white people exceptional, while seeking to except everyone else from citizenship. There are always decisions to be made, no matter how sovereignty is abstractly conceived, it is a decision about a “concrete situation.”¹⁷² Contemporary political truth co-emerges with contemporary political subjects. Ideas about what it means to be a Christian or a U.S. citizen therefore have concrete consequences for the people they form.

Conclusion: Unveiling Creation Science

At the end of this chapter, I want to return to the Creation Museum, because the scientific arguments so central to the Museum’s claim of a young earth, are underpinned not only by a literal reading of the Bible, but also by revelation—a prophecy. The connection, albeit an unintentional one, between a prophecy and flood-geography science is outlined by Susan Trollinger and William Trollinger in *Righting America at the Creation Museum*. After the publication of Darwin’s *On the Origins of Species* in 1859, Christians were forced to consider the creation account in Genesis—how could all of these different creations have taken place in six days? Some responded by seeing the scriptures as a human document, subject to criticism; but others, notably a cadre of Princeton theologian responded by articulating the “inerrancy” of the Bible. Trollinger and Trollingers explain that a second belief about the scripture immediately connected to the inerrancy—the claim that the bible “foretells the future.”¹⁷³ Dispensational premillennialism argues that the apocalyptic texts of the Bible provide a guide to the

¹⁷² Schmitt, *Political Theology*, 10.

¹⁷³ Trollinger and Trollinger, *Righting America*, 3.

past—and to the future.

However, the “creationism” of this early fundamentalism, codified in *The Fundamentals*, was not fully the creationism of AIG and its museum. *The Fundamentals* offered the possibility of a theistic evolution.¹⁷⁴ Surprisingly, the origin of the claims made by the Creation Museum are tied a prophet, Ellen White, the founder of the Seventh Day Adventist movement, though it is unlikely that AIG is aware of the connection. In a 1864 vision, White observed the creation of the world in six literal days. She confirmed the claim that the earth was six thousand years old—and she “declared that Noah’s Flood had reconfigured the Earth’s surface and produced the fossil record.”¹⁷⁵ In the early 20th century, a convert to Seventh Day Adventism named George McCready Price began writing books to explain and make known White’s claims with titles like *Outlines of Modern Christianity and Modern Science*, and *The New Geology*. Price was named as a trusted scholar of the earth’s age by none other than William Jennings Bryan. In 1961, a theologian named John C. Whitecomb Jr. And a scholar of hydraulic engineering joined forces to write *The Genesis Flood: The Biblical Record and its Scientific Implications*, the book which cements the science that is central to The Creation Museum.

In other words, the claims made at the Creation Museum are not only grounded in their literal reading of the Bible; AIG’s claims also rest on an obfuscated revelation, albeit probably through a happenstance of history instead of their conceptual apprehension. The fundamentalist Christians at AIG would renounce any direct

¹⁷⁴ See the footnote in Chapter One, page 30 for a full explanation of the different approaches to fundamentalism.

¹⁷⁵ Trollinger and Trollinger, *Righting America*, 3.

connection to Seventh Day Adventists; yet the now-hidden revelation is what provided the content of the “science” that allows the museum to claim the bible as inerrant truth. A mechanism of affective breakthrough drove the claims that allow the Creation Museum to maintain its project of subject formation.

The introduction to my project argues that feelings are increasingly becoming a marker of truth in political discourse—and that politicians on the right, like Newt Gingrich, are purposefully trafficking in feelings because they seek to mobilize groups of people for their political ends. At the same time, I propose that the left tends to be caught in a cycle of fact-checking the lies made by politicians on the right, most notably Donald Trump. I suggest that behind the belief in the power of facts to reset the political narrative is a trust in the modern liberal subject, like what is modelled by Steven Pinker. Democratic politicians, like Hillary Clinton, become frustrated, lashing out at perceived “deplorables” who refuse to accept reality and therefore to support the progressive policies she offers in their best interest.¹⁷⁶ As I explain in introduction, the “crypto-fundamentalist” clinging to the facts on the left is a failure to recognize the complexity of U.S. subject formation, because it assumes the naturalness of the sovereign subject, and correspondingly fails to generate the kinds of political truths that are effective.

I hold that effective political truth is affective: conceptual, but also para-conceptual, co-assembling with feelings. Political truth is therefore part of a project of subject formation. If political truth on the left relies only on the modern liberal subject,

¹⁷⁶ Amy Chozick, “Hillary Clinton Calls Many Trump Backers ‘Deplorables,’ and G.O.P. Pounces,” *New York Times*, September 10, 2016, <https://www.nytimes.com/2016/09/11/us/politics/hillary-clinton-basket-of-deplorables.html>.

who is led by reason, then it will fail to adequately affect people. Political truth-making acts on the will of human beings in both pre-and post-discursive moments, though as I argue, with Donovan Schaefer, in the introduction, the pre-and post-discursive moments cannot be disentangled in any straightforward manner. Despite the interrelation of different knowledges in moments of subject formation, I propose political truth on the left can be better attuned to the role of feelings, and other forces, in moving people to belief. And therefore, the left can make more effective truth claims.

To pursue these questions, the next chapter looks to a case study that makes explicit the operation of revelation, specifically as contemporary prophecy, the International House of Prayer in Kansas City, Missouri (IHOPKC). Revelation and prophecy as terms that touch the supernatural, open up the possibility of thinking differently about the role of affect, feelings, and knowledge in producing political truth. At IHOPKC, intensely affective practices of prayer and worship work to pull through time the claims of their “Prophetic History,” a constantly revised collection of stories that locate the organization in the past, present, and future of God’s plan. At the same time, IHOPKC demonstrates the openness of the human subject, which presents some first material for thinking differently about how human beings make truth together.

CHAPTER 2

WHEN GOD FEELS TRUE: CHARISMATIC-EVANGELICAL PRAYER,
PROPHECY, AND AFFECT

Constant prayer, fueled by upbeat music, creates a heightened atmosphere, weighty with purpose and rich with imperative, at the International House of Prayer in Kansas City, Missouri. The self-identified “prayer ministry,” founded by charismatic leader Mike Bickle, recently celebrated its twenty-first year of 24-hour-a-day, seven-day-a-week prayer.¹⁷⁷ Tuning into their internet live stream confronts viewers with the steady rhythm of a bass drum, a thumping bass guitar rhythm, and a jangling distorted guitar. A woman standing on a platform at the front of the auditorium is praying for the salvation of Israel, asking for a “spirit of grace and supplication” to be “poured out” on the Jewish people. The singers, standing in a semi-circle so that they can see each other, work together picking up the language of the prayer, singing spontaneous phrases: “open their eyes and hearts” “when their eyes are open they will come back to you.” At the same time, the rhythm intensifies, and then a chorus emerges, “Pour out on the house of David the spirit of grace and pleas for mercy, pour out on the house of David, a fountain to cleanse them from inequity.” The music swells with heavier drums, more guitar, and a choir of voices harmonizing the new chorus. Then, the music drops again, and the woman praying takes over again. Thus the pattern of constant prayer is sustained.¹⁷⁸

¹⁷⁷ The organization began its prayer on May 7th 1999, “The History of IHOPKC,” IHOPKC, Accessed March, 20, 2021, <https://www.ihopkc.org/prophetichistory/>.

¹⁷⁸ The Global Prayer Room, International House of Prayer, YouTube, Accessed approx 11am, on

This prayer for Jerusalem is a moment of political-theological-affective truth-making that is unconcerned with the performance of “scientific respectability,” that shapes the truth-making of AIG and the Creation Museum. At IHOPKC, God speaks directly to people—to individuals and to communities. God speaks in moments of intense emotion: the opening scene depicts a group of Zion-enthused charismatic-evangelical Christians praying for the Christian conversion of the Jewish people living in Jerusalem. Their prayer is motivated by IHOPKC’s particular brand of millenarianism called historic or apostolic premillennialism, which claims that the church will be raptured after the tribulation, but will in their resurrected forms rule the earth with Christ as part of a 1000-year theocracy.¹⁷⁹ These claims portray a familiar relationship between evangelical Christianity and politics: Donald Trump’s decision to move the American consulate in Israel to Jerusalem early in his presidency was designed, in part, to address passions of these kinds of Christians.¹⁸⁰ The ever spinning “resonance machine,” to use William Connolly’s language, created by the interaction of evangelicalism and GOP politics has been a source of intense scrutiny *and fear* on the part of political theologians on the left in recent years.¹⁸¹

November 7, 2019. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qJdhYmWdXQQ>.

¹⁷⁹ Mike Bickle, “Historic Premillennialism and the Victorious Church,” Joseph Company Conference, *The Mike Bickle Library*, Transcript from June 4, 2011, PDF, Accessed March 27, 2021, <https://backup.storage.sardius.media/file/akamaiBackup-ihopkc-103762/IHOP/525/326/20110604-T-Historic-Premillennialism-and-the-Victorious-Church.pdf>, 9.

¹⁸⁰ Alexia Underwood, “The controversial US Jerusalem embassy opening, explained,” *Vox*, May 16, 2018, <https://www.vox.com/2018/5/14/17340798/jerusalem-embassy-israel-palestinians-us-trump>.

¹⁸¹ Clayton Crockett’s book *Radical Political Theology*, which I read in the next chapter starts from precisely this observation. Clayton Crockett, *Radical Political Theology: Religion and Politics after Liberalism*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 2013). William Connolly, “The Evangelical-Capitalist Resonance Machine,” *Political Theory* 33, no. 6 (Dec 2005): 869-886.

Carefully examining the affect-laden truth-making processes of charismatic-evangelical Christians offers crucial insights for the alternative economy of truth that I argue in the final chapter of this project as a political theology of revelation. First, this chapter demonstrates how charismatic-evangelical Christians have been trained to understand intense feeling as a marker of authenticity—of truth—which has contributed to the slippage of fact into feeling. I argue that the practice of verifying truth with feelings has contributed to the rise of the “feeling-only truth” that I describe in the introduction to this project, where political discourse in the U.S. seems to be split: on the right, truth is whatever a person feels with no relationship to facts; and on the left truth depends on a “crypto-fundamentalist” version of the facts that cannot account for the structures of power, like racism, sexism, and more, that seek to exert themselves as first principles in the production of truth. I argue that debates about the supposed bifurcation of truth obfuscates processes that form individual subjects as actors with the ability to perceive, comprehend, and freely act in the world. As I argued in Chapter One, the prevailing model of subjectivity in the U.S.—in the West—is the modern liberal subject who is led by the mind.

The modern liberal subject is presumed as the norm—as the truth—by T.M. Luhrmann in her ethnographic work, *When God Talks Back: Understanding the Evangelical Relationship with God* about the Vineyard Network of Churches. The Vineyard Churches and IHOPKC emerged in the 1980s in the same wave of neo-Pentecostal movements marked by charismatic practices. In fact, in the early 1990s, before IHOPKC began its 24-7 prayer, the community was briefly affiliated with the Vineyard as a member church. The shared history of the two movements allows me to use

Luhrmann's scholarship to begin my analysis of IHOPKC. Luhrmann argues that Vineyard members are trained through the practice of prayer to experience their mind "porous" in a limited sense. In the word "porous" I hear Luhrmann's juxtaposition of porosity against the prevailing model of buffered subjectivity.¹⁸² Individuals are therefore able *to hear God* in their mind. According to Luhrmann, God is therefore "'hyperreal': realer than real, so real that it is impossible not to understand that you may be fooling yourself."¹⁸³ For Luhrmann, this is evidence that charismatic-evangelicals are not beholden to older anti-scientific epistemologies, but rather are postmodern in their own way.

I argue Luhrmann's focus on individual subjects obscures the subject formation that takes place collectively in the Vineyard communities, especially in moments of intense affect that take place during worship or group prayer. Even more, I claim that Luhrmann's conclusion that individual Christian minds become porous in a limited sense, fails to ask whether human beings are in fact not closed, self-sufficient subjects, as is presumed in the U.S. context. In other words, does the limited porosity experienced by Vineyard members point to further openness in the subject?

To address the limitations of Luhrmann's project, I engage Jon Bialecki's ethnographic account of the Vineyard churches, *A Diagram For Fire: Miracles and Variation in an American Charismatic Movement*. Bialecki's work supplements Luhrmann's because it focuses on the collective process of subject formation in the

¹⁸² T.M. Luhrmann, *When God Talks Back: Understanding the American Evangelical Relationship with God*, (New York: Alfred A Knopf, 2012), 40.

¹⁸³ Luhrmann, *When God*, 309.

Vineyard network of churches. Bialecki theorizes the tension between novelty and orthodoxy—or the capacity for change—in charismatic-evangelical Christianity of the Vineyard Movement. He employs the Deleuzian “diagram” as the name for a set of force relations, arguing “the charismatic diagram is a lamination of ethical, linguistic, sensorial, affective, habitual, and biological strata, a series of relations that are undetermined at the level of potential.”¹⁸⁴ Bialecki names the excess in in the charismatic diagram at the Vineyard the “miracle” and argues that the miracle allows the Vineyard Churches to stretch the boundaries of Christianity without ever becoming unrecognizable to other evangelical Christians.

Luhrmann recognizes the central role of the practice of worship in *When God Talks Back*, but does not theorize its role in the formation of subjects. Bialecki takes up the practice and demonstrates how worship—a collective experience of music, movement, and more—can function as either a moment of repetition, enacting familiar patterns of surrender to God and orientation to community; or worship might at any moment become an “event” where “something,” perhaps God, “reconstitutes the subject.”¹⁸⁵ The unpredictable relationship between repetition and possibility in subject formation is key to the political theology of revelation that I offer at the conclusion of my dissertation.

My project as a political theologian intersects with Luhrmann and Bialecki by seeking the role of Schmittian sovereignty—of exceptional power—in the creation of

¹⁸⁴ Jon Bialecki, *A Diagram for Fire: Miracles and Variation in an American Charismatic Movement*, (Oakland, CA: University of California Press, 2017), 166.

¹⁸⁵ Bialecki, *A Diagram*, 28.

truth at IHOPKC. The charismatic practices at IHOPKC are what Bialecki calls an “intensification” of the charismatic diagram or a heightened version of what he observed in the Vineyard communities. Because there is scant scholarship on IHOPKC, my account of their practices and history is supported by reading primary sources, in particular their published “prophetic histories.” Mike Bickle has told their prophetic history multiple times over the life of IHOPKC (and even before the ministry bore that name). The prophetic history provides the ministry in the present with a mission that is supported by God’s words and works in the past, which pushes them toward the future return of Christ. I map the changes to Bickle’s narrative of their prophetic history by comparing different versions told across a span of 20 years. I argue that “prophecy” functions as a site of ambiguity for IHOPKC that allows Bickle to make and remake the history of the community. Instead of performing claims with the aura of science, Bickle remakes his claims about IHOPKC in order to maintain an aura of orthodoxy and to make claims that are less overtly racist or authoritarian and therefore are socially acceptable to the broader evangelical Christian community. By asserting IHOPKC’s history as prophecy, as a fresh revelation from God, Bickle makes his claims feel new, even though they carry white supremacy and authoritarianism, which are forms of Schmittian sovereignty and are familiar nodes of political power in the U.S. Bickle’s claims are made *exceptional* by their assertion with excitement in the prayer gatherings that take place 24-7 at IHOPKC. I argue at IHOPKC there is an affectively-charged apocalyptic folding of time, where the kingdom of God is present, but not yet fully realized, and in which nodes of power—like racial supremacy or theocratic control—are drawn through time with excitement and reasserted, albeit as shifting theological, biblical, or prophetic

claims.

The Vineyard Network of Churches and IHOPKC present the possibility of a different subject: a subject other than the buffered modern liberal subject. The practices and experiences in their communities demonstrate that subjects are *somehow* porous and open, rather than closed, autonomous, and independent. Further, the sharp distinction between individual subjects and collective subjectivities does not hold in the way modernity claims. Individuals are formed by the communities, the society, and the state in which they participate; and communities, societies, and states are formed by the individuals that compose them. Chapter Three of this project takes up the partially porous subject and theorizes it through the lenses of radical “death of God” theology, political theology, and affect theory: arguing that radical theologians doing political theology require affect theory in order to name democratic subjects who work together to dismantle systems of white supremacy, fascism, and more.

So while on one hand IHOPKC demonstrates the possibility in theorizing the subject beyond the modern liberal subject; on the other hand, IHOPKC models the intransigence of political powers like white supremacy and authoritarianism in the U.S. There are durable nodes of political power that move themselves with exceptional intensity, obscured by an aura of novelty in order to re-assert themselves as the first principles for political truth. Because these political powers are established in the U.S. it is easy for them to be repeated with an excitement and intensity that breaks through day-to-day life and makes white supremacy or authoritarianism *feel new*. If white supremacy feels new, the white people enacting it feel less accountable to the long history of oppression in the U.S.

Importantly, therefore, the economy of knowledge at IHOPKC demonstrates that truth-making occurs as part of what affect theorist Donovan Schaefer calls an assemblage of “*knowledge-power-affect*.”¹⁸⁶ In the next chapter of this project, I develop Schaefer’s reading of affect theory, which argues that human beings have developed durable forms of affect through deep biological history. I also take up his claim that any theory of power requires an account of affect, in order to set the parameters for proposing a political theology of revelation. Building on Schaefer, I argue that white supremacy and authoritarianism are intransigent nodes of political power that are resistant to change because of their deep history in the U.S. With Schaefer, I argue the human subject is not instantly mutable, but rather changes slowly in iterative moments. Effective truth is affective: an alternative economy of political truth must encompass facts, feelings, and power. In Chapter Four, I propose an alternative economy of political truth takes place at the limits of the human subject where an *affected God* is revealed. This is a God of the im/possible, where the limited potential of the human subject allows for iterative, incremental change. In Chapter One “revelation” serves as a straw figure of unverifiable truth for Steven Pinker, and therefore as the antithesis of his valorized Enlightenment reason. In Chapter Four, I develop a political theology of revelation in dialogue with Jean Luc Marion who argues that the doctrine of revelation holds together, as a paradox, reason and the impossible in such a way that they touch, affecting one another.

I argue that prophecy should be part of revelation, but is not sufficient for the generation of truth. Even Mike Bickle compares prophecy to biblical parables and argues

¹⁸⁶ Donovan Schaefer, *The Evolution of Affect Theory*, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2019), 3.

that prophecy “makes truth difficult.”¹⁸⁷ I trace the role of prophecy in the Vineyard and IHOPKC because it tends to be the name for individuals directly hearing God—and because “prophetic history” is the name for Mike Bickle’s making and remaking of IHOPKC’s origin, mission, and imagined future. “Prophecy” is therefore a useful lens for exploring the ways novel claims of truth emerge in the midst of intense emotional experience. And in the context of IHOPKC, prophecy is a mechanism that allows old political powers to be reasserted, with fresh intensity and fresh exceptionality.

In the next section, I offer some introductory framing of prophecy, naming four basic categories for its analysis, as they are described by scholars of biblical prophecy. These categories include prophecy as novel knowledge revealed by god to an individual, prophecy as presented to a community, prophecy as located in time by its prediction of the future or confirming the past, and prophecy as connected to political power. These tools aid in my analysis of the prayer, worship, and knowledge revealed by God in Vineyard Communities and at IHOPKC.

Finally, remember that behind the flood geology at the Creation Museum, unbeknownst to the fundamentalist-evangelical Christians of AIG, is a prophecy given by Seventh-Day Adventist leader Ellen White. In other words, even the Creation Museum, which is not a charismatic-evangelical Christian organization like the Vineyard or IHOPKC, is also touched by prophecy. Part of the overarching goal of this project is to

¹⁸⁷ Mike Bickle, “Session 1 The Early Days, Cairo, and the 1983 Solemn Assembly,” *Encountering Jesus: Visions, Revelations, Angelic Activity From IHOP-KC’s Prophetic History*, *Mike Bickle Library*, Transcript August 17, 2009, PDF, https://backup.storage.sardius.media/file/akamaiBackup-ihopkc-103762/IHOP/907/887/20090917A-T-The_Early_Days_Cairo_Egypt_and_the_Solemn_Assembly_IPH01.pdf, 1.

see how moments of intense excitement, exceptional moments, coupled with novel knowledge, work to move political powers in our U.S. system. I propose that my examination of prophecy in contemporary charismatic-evangelical Christian communities, while not the only model for the movement of power in the U.S., nonetheless serves as a heightened example of how power moves more broadly in our politics, particular at the juncture of evangelical Christianity and GOP politics.

The final chapter of my project attempts to offer an alternative economy of political truth that takes up Jean Luc Marion's work on the doctrine of revelation. For Marion, revelation is where reason touches the impossible. Building on Marion's description of revelation, I argue revelation can facilitate an economy of political truth where facts, feelings, and power circulate. At the limit of possibility, humanity touches the im/possible, the space that paradoxically limits human beings while also facilitating the possibility of speaking or being at all. At the limits of the individual subject are other subjects, who inter-affect one another, forming new collective subjects. Seeking collectives that work against Schmittian sovereignty, I propose listening as a first principle. Listening as Jean Luc Nancy describes it: listening for sense, across the senses, and with a sense of place, as a first principle for an alternative economy of listening. Listening for the movements of the people, allows us to collectively amplify resistance. Listening takes place, performing new claims to truth and performed truth is, hopefully, change.

Tools for Analyzing Prophecy

As I explained in the introduction, the charismatic Christian community at IHOPKC was at one time a member of the Vineyard Network of Churches. However, the

two group eventually parted ways and the most commonly reported reason for their split was a disagreement over the role of public prophecy in their communities. Public prophecy, as it is practiced at IHOPKC, often includes people anointed with the title “prophet” and always includes claims made during large events as words from God for both individuals and for whole communities. It is not hard to imagine why the Vineyard and IHOPKC disagreed about public prophecy which, in contrast to the quotidian prayer and response by God that is experienced by individuals, is a much more dramatic practice. The Hebrew Bible presents a wide variety of prophets, or “men or women believed to be recipients through audition, vision, or dream of divine messages that they passed on to others by means of speech or symbolic action.”¹⁸⁸ Prophecy is, first, about *revelatory* knowledge—new or novel knowledge understood to be from God—that comes from the experience of a recipient. Second, prophecy is passed on to a *community*, whether through language or some other form of communication. It is because prophecy is interwoven with knowledge, community, and positions of power that it is a useful site of analysis for my project. Unravelling the imbrication of prophecy in truth, individual/collective subjectivity, and politics, begins to draw out a line of power that moves in contemporary U.S. life.

The third element of truth-making that prophecy demonstrates is temporality. David Potter in his historical analysis of prophetic practices in the Roman/early Christian world, *Prophecy and Cult*, asserts that prophecy is “divine revelation about past, present,

¹⁸⁸ David Hill, “Prophet” in *The Oxford Guide to People & Places of the Bible*, eds. Bruce Metzger and Michael Coogan (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2001), 247.

or future situations.”¹⁸⁹ I suggest that Potter’s definition can be read as an opening up of the liberal conception of prophecy as “speaking truth to power.”¹⁹⁰ While speaking truth to power certainly can be a part of prophecy the practice of prophecy in contemporary society, prophecy cannot be defined without taking into account time. According to Potter, apocalypticism—stereotypically defined—is a form of prophecy that predicts the end of the world is a form of prophecy. Even more importantly, despite the stereotype of prophecy as a form of foretelling, Potter argues that prophecy in the Roman/early Christian world was less interested in the future than in describing and validating the present. In the Roman world, where polytheistic religions co-existed (albeit not always peacefully), prophecies foretelling the future were interesting, but only inasmuch as they described something that might come to pass—and if it did come to pass, it could be added to a list of cultural touchstones. In other words, Potter argues that despite the religious variety within the Empire, there was shared a cultural history, or what might be called, anticipating IHOPKC, a *prophetic history*. For example, Potter explains that prophecies made by both the Sibyl and the Musaeus predicted the betrayal of the Athenians to the Spartans by Alcibiades in 404 B.C.E. worked to facilitate the creation of a shared history in the Empire.

As the reader might intuit, Potter argues that prophecy “is implicitly connected

¹⁸⁹ David Potter, *Prophets and Emperors: Human and Divine Authority From Augustus to Theodosius*, (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1994), 3.

¹⁹⁰ Jade Greear, “Speaking Truth to Power,” *Huffington Post*, December 22, 2016, https://www.huffpost.com/entry/speaking-truth-to-power_2_b_8824094. The phrase “speaking truth to power” comes from Quaker peace movements.

with power.”¹⁹¹ This is the fourth key component of prophecy: prophecy makes claims that seek to anchor political truth-claims. In Roman society, the language of religion, of cult, “is intimately connected with the expression of ideas about earthly authority.”¹⁹² And so, Potter explains, prophecy might be used to shore up an existing political regime; or prophecy might support an uprising against a group that is in power; or prophecy might serve to introduce a divine mediator into a conflict. In other words prophecy connects knowledge—new, novel claims—with power within a community or a society.

I propose prophecy has the ability to make exceptional claims: claims that break through the torpid repetition of life, claims with the ability to supersede the rule of law. Potter understands his reading of prophecy in the Roman Empire as carrying insight into later prophetic movements, during the reformation and into the present, when, for example, the public trusts that it is possible to predict the invisible hand of the market. In other words, contemporary prophets continue to make exceptional claims. Prophecy, then, in the terms of political theology, provides a tool for making claims that move Schmittian sovereign power. The claims of prophets might, for example, become the foundation for political norms. Or a prophet might unsettle a system of thought, by offering an alternate vision, like Ellen White did for the geological record. And, again, explicit first principles for truth can obfuscate or hide other, deeper, anchors for truth—like racism, xenophobia, and more.

This chapter argues that prophecy is a *practice* that makes evident the intertwining of

¹⁹¹ Potter, *Prophets*, 3.

¹⁹² Potter, *Prophets*, 3.

knowledge, power, and affect—and that examining this practice allows me to draw out a thread of power woven into U.S. life. Prophecy often feels like intense excitement—prophecies come with ecstatic practices or through dreams and visions—but the affect is also in the bodily contact that results from the listening, telling, enacting of prophecies. As the introduction explains a simple definition of affect is “the capacity to act and be acted upon.”¹⁹³ Again, prophecy is not merely the location of novel truth claims, it is a site of power that moves across bodies and communities. The power in prophecy must be analyzed apart from and in relationship to the production of knowledge.

The next section of this chapter considers the practices of mainly white contemporary charismatic-evangelical communities for whom prophecy is a live, knowledge-generating *practice*: both in the quotidian everyday experience of God; and also in the generation of community. First, the section reads T.M. Luhrmann’s ethnographic work on the charismatic-evangelical Christian individual re-training of the mind to hear God in a time when the supernatural is supposedly made impossible by science. I argue that in her analysis of the prayer that evangelical Christians use to train their minds, Luhrmann pays insufficient attention to the role of feeling. I also suggest that the text does not consider the role of collective practices of prayer and worship, which might work to form communities or collective subjects. Finally, I propose that Luhrmann assumes the sovereign subject as natural for her starting place and does not consider the possibility that the “buffered” subject’s “limited porosity” might demonstrate that the subject is dramatically less closed than modernity might believe.

¹⁹³ Melissa Gregg and Gregory J. Seigworth, “An Inventory of Shimmers” in *The Affect Theory Reader*, (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2010), Loc 50.

Next, this section engages Jon Bialecki's *A Diagram for Fire*, another ethnographic account, which looks at the way charismatic-evangelicals are able to maintain a consistent identity through time, despite engaging in practices of the "miraculous" which press at the boundaries of what can be identified as orthodoxly Christian. Bialecki's text takes seriously practices like worship by suggesting that they offer either a moment for the re-assertion of familiar forms of Christian practice as part of a community or might suddenly open into a re-instantiation of the subject. This dual possibility is key to my reading of IHOPKC: I propose while prophecy moves Schmittian sovereign powers at IHOPKC, those durable, familiar powers in the U.S., each movement is iterative, which opens the possibility of repetition with difference, however slight the difference might be. In other words, understanding this path for the movement of power opens up the possibility of directing power differently and therefore of claiming new political truths.

Ethnographic Accounts of Charismatic-Evangelical Practices: Making Christian Subjects, Making Christian Truth?

T.M. Luhrmann's ethnographic work, *When God Talks Back: Understanding the American Evangelical Relationship with God* argues that when faced with the revolution of knowledge that took place during the Enlightenment and into modernity charismatic-evangelical Christians turned inward to re-conceive their minds. Luhrmann's book aims to present "to non-believers" in accessible, mainly non-political terms, "how people come to experience God as real."¹⁹⁴ To make her argument, Luhrmann recounts her time as a

¹⁹⁴ Luhrmann, *When God*, xv.

participant-observer in two different Vineyard Churches, which she discovered while seeking for her research “a non-denominational church” that teaches “people to hear God speak back.”¹⁹⁵ Luhrmann presents the communities she observes as accessible: as the people who might be found in any U.S. neighborhood. In fact, that is how Luhrmann first encounters a Vineyard Church in her local “neighborhood club.”¹⁹⁶ At first, Luhrmann sees nothing “to suggest they were much different from the people in the liberal mainstream churches” of her childhood.¹⁹⁷ Yet, these seemingly average Christians lured Luhrmann on an ethnographic adventure, because they are the kind of Christians who not only experience God as real, but as speaking to them. The seeming “averageness” of her subjects is meant to support her bridge-building goal for the text: Luhrmann seeks to explain belief in God when such a thing seems impossible according to the contemporary U.S standards of truth, because there is no data, no science that proves God is real.

At the same time, the Vineyard communities present a connection to the charismatic practices of IHOPKC. The Vineyard network is a loosely connected group of churches (they push back against any formal status as a denomination) that traces its origin to the leadership of John and Carol Wimber in Southern California during the late 1970s. John Wimber, who was once a sessions player for the jazz duo, the Righteous Brothers, is known for his practice of the miraculous; and for teaching others to practice the miraculous through a famous course, complete with a hands-on lab in the miraculous

¹⁹⁵ Luhrmann, *When God*, 3.

¹⁹⁶ Luhrmann, *When God*, 3.

¹⁹⁷ Luhrmann, *When God*, 3-4.

at Fuller Theological Seminary during the 1980s.¹⁹⁸ During the late 1990s, John Wimber allowed a church in Kansas City Missouri, Metro Christian Fellowship, pastored by Mike Bickle to come under the umbrella of the Vineyard movement. The relationship between Bickle and Wimber was meant to provide oversight for the burgeoning practice of the miraculous in the Kansas City charismatic-evangelical community, which had recently come under fire for its practice of the prophetic.¹⁹⁹ Bickle's community was only known as Metro Christian Vineyard Fellowship for approximately five years before the organizations split, in part, because of disagreements over the practice of prophecy. It was after this split between the Vineyard Movement and Bickle's organization that IHOPKC began its 24-7 prayer ministry. Despite the disagreement that emerged between Wimber and Bickle, I propose that when it comes to the individual experience of God and practices of the miraculous, there is shared DNA in the two movements.

Luhrmann situates the Vineyard Churches within the modern history of knowledge—and truth—that this dissertation traces. Again, in modernity, knowledge brought down to earth, no longer anchored in God became the purview of the sovereign subject, verified through repeated testing of an observation. The final chapter of Luhrmann's book recounts some of this history, paying particular attention, like Charles Taylor, to shifting definitions of belief and the wholesale shift of Western society away from a worldview

¹⁹⁸ Bialecki, *A Diagram*, 28, 29

¹⁹⁹ Ernie Gruen's list of specific criticism, including evidence that many prophecies did not come true as Bickle claimed is still available on the internet. According to Bickle and IHOPKC, the two were able to come to a place of forgiveness. "Ernie Gruen and Mike Bickle's Joint Statement from 1993," Affirmations and Denials, IHOPKC, May 16, 1993, Accessed March 27, 2021, <https://www.ihopkc.org/press-center/faq/ernie-gruen-mike-bickles-joint-statement-1993-2/>. Ernie Gruen, "'Aberrant Practices' at the Kansas City Fellowship/Grace Ministries," transcribed Tricia Tillin, 1994, Accessed March 27, 2021, <http://www.banner.org.uk/kcp/kcp-gruen.html>.

where belief in God was almost universal. Luhrmann positions her work as an explanation for why the secularization thesis did not succeed; or why evangelical Christianity did not fade out of existence given the rising power of science, which made it “possible to explain reality without recourse to the supernatural.”²⁰⁰ For Luhrmann, the practices of listening for God that take place in Vineyard communities are a response to renegotiations of epistemology in modernity. However, she is careful to position their epistemology not as a “backlash” against science, just like I argue, following Trollinger and Trollinger, that the Creation Museum does more than communicate conceptual knowledge, it is designed as a project of subject formation.

Luhrmann describes the work in Vineyard communities as developing “a new theory of the mind,” which opens the buffered subject to a limited porosity, allowing God to speak to individuals.²⁰¹ I propose that rather than a limited porosity, an exception to the sovereign subject, what the Vineyard community demonstrates is the failure of the modern liberal subject. In the next chapter, I consider radical theology’s engagement with evangelical Christianity, noting in particular the tendency for progressive theologians to assume that evangelical Christians are engaged in a backlash against modernity; and that evangelical Christianity has been coopted by the GOP and capitalism powers. While there is truth to both those arguments, this project argues that progressive theologians tend to miss what makes evangelical Christianity a compelling and fulfilling practice for the people who are engaged in it: the experience of God that individuals experience as part of

²⁰⁰ Luhrmann, *When God*, 302.

²⁰¹ Luhrmann, *When God*, 40.

a community. And even more, I propose that charismatic-evangelicals demonstrate a more effective model of political truth than what is usually leveraged on the left, because charismatic-evangelicals understand that truth is affective as well as conceptual. Too often evangelical Christians are viewed as instruments for other powers, without any consideration of the power moved *by* evangelical Christians into the supposedly secular realm.

So, Luhmann argues that challenged to prove that God speaks to them—something that is impossible to demonstrate with scientific evidence—charismatic-evangelical individuals learn to hear God in their minds through the practice of prayer. Luhmann explains how learning that the mind is separate from the world is one of the basic accomplishments of childhood: young children learn that the mind is private and that it is not possible to know what is inside another person’s mind or for others to know what is happening inside theirs. This theory of the mind continues by teaching children that differing beliefs will lead to different actions in the world. Note the way this theory of the mind supports the correspondence theory of truth, where the basic division between the subject (mind) and the object (perceptions) is key. Yet the learning that takes place in charismatic-evangelical communities rethinks the divisions that govern the correspondence theory of truth, which in modernity depend on the relationship between the sovereign subject and the world. It is these pedagogical practices that I argue are helping to reshape the landscape of political truth in the U.S. context. Importantly, however, Luhmann’s own analysis of charismatic-evangelical Christians presumes the sovereign subject as the “truth” of the mind. By focusing on individual agency in interacting with the divine, Luhmann misses two important aspects charismatic practice:

first, the collective emotional experience that draws people to participate in these Vineyard Communities; and second, the collective identity-making that facilitates the creation of evangelical Christians as political identity.

Luhrmann argues that in response to modern renegotiations of truth, charismatic-evangelicals have developed a new theory of the mind. Such Christians learn to “experience the mind-world barrier as porous in a certain limited way.”²⁰² To make this claim, Luhrmann explains that human beings are very good at distinguishing between thoughts (which usually have an internal source) and perceptions (which usually have an external source). The practice of distinguishing is, again, based on the basic lessons of childhood which teach individuals to recognize their mind as separate from the minds of others. Luhrmann explains that in evangelical-charismatic prayer “the central act of prayer is paying attention to internal experience— thoughts, images, and the awareness of your body— and treating these sensations as important in themselves rather than as distractions from the real business of your life.”²⁰³ What results is a reconceptualizing of the mind as “porous” or as in a limited sense open to the interjection of commentary or knowledge, from an outside source—from God. However, the sensations or thoughts that are recognized as coming from God are still, for the most part, understood to be within the mind of the person who is listening. Yet, the boundary of the mind becomes increasingly blurry as the individual becomes more experienced at the practice of hearing God.

²⁰² Luhrmann, *When God*, 40.

²⁰³ Luhrmann, *When God*, 158.

Luhrmann interviewed people during her time embedded within Vineyard Churches to draw out the details of their experience of God and its emergence from the practice of prayer. One member whose story she followed closely is Sarah, whose experiences demonstrate the gradual blurring of the boundary between the mind and the world that Luhrmann describes. In her forties, after her children were grown, Sarah found herself feeling as though something was “wrong” though it was hard to put a finger on what was not right.²⁰⁴ After finding the Vineyard Church advertised in a newspaper, Sarah found something to feed the “hunger” she was experiencing in the practices of the Vineyard community.²⁰⁵ Following the directions of her new community, Sarah began to spend time daily in prayer. Sarah describes her prayer as a practice of listening for God and distinguishes between “meditating” and “thinking,” calling meditating the “space” she clears “for something else to come in.”²⁰⁶ At first, Sarah did not know what she was making space for, saying it felt “like crossing a line into total goofiness.”²⁰⁷ Luhrmann explains that the process of learning to hear God is described in Vineyard prayer manuals as a kind of tuning in, like a radio channel becomes clearer as it is precisely tuned.

Sarah explains that overcoming doubt about her ability to hear god required a choice to “deliberately act as if what she imagined she heard from God really was God.”²⁰⁸ This is the work of training that Luhrmann argues is key to hearing God. Over

²⁰⁴ Luhrmann, *When God*, 42.

²⁰⁵ Luhrmann, *When God*, 43.

²⁰⁶ Luhrmann, *When God*, 44.

²⁰⁷ Luhrmann, *When God*, 44.

²⁰⁸ Luhrmann, *When God*, 95.

time, through practice—for example, sitting at her window and watching people pass by and allowing thoughts about those people to arise—Sarah explains that the quality of her experience of God improved. Sarah claims that her experience was different than daydreaming: “the images that I see [in prayer] are very real and lucid.”²⁰⁹ Sarah reports that her ability to focus in prayer grew, and that her attention to all sources of sensory input became a medium for messages from God. Tulips that Sarah observed on a walk became metaphoric fodder for praying for a woman, “that it would be God’s timing that would open up those flowers, that she wouldn’t try to push a bud open before its time, that she would know what color she was going to be in and things like that.”²¹⁰ Over time, Sarah began to increasingly experience a kind of “flow” or “out of body experience” where she felt God as in control of her mind. She began to feel as though what she experienced was not summoned by her, but rather was “happening *to*” her.²¹¹

And then, Sarah’s senses all began to leak and she “began to have sensory experiences of immaterial things.”²¹² For example, once Sarah was awakened in the morning by an audible voice that said “*Read James*.”²¹³ Another time, while praying for a local school Sarah smelled a rotten smell like “baby poop or rotten meat or horrible” that she understood as demonstrating evil the at the school.²¹⁴ In other words, God not only

²⁰⁹ Luhrmann, *When God*, 134.

²¹⁰ Luhrmann, *When God*, 136.

²¹¹ Luhrmann, *When God*, 137.

²¹² Luhrmann, *When God*, 138.

²¹³ Luhrmann, *When God*, 138.

²¹⁴ Luhrmann, *When God*, 138.

spoke to Sarah within her mind; God also began to bleed into her sensorial experience. In the conclusion of this project, I propose listening as a first principle, but it is a listening across the senses, like Sarah's openness to God begins to affect all her senses. Similarly, the affective openness I propose hears resistance to Schmittian sovereignty in unexpected ways.

The possibility of listening for resistance is opened, because Sarah's experience of God presents a challenge to the traditional buffered or sovereign subject, which is imagined as bounded, closed off, and individual. Yet, rather than focusing on this opening of the subject that Sarah represents, Luhrmann focuses on the kind of God that is experienced by Sarah. Luhrmann argues that through this practice, God becomes a person, an individual with whom Sarah is able to have a relationship. Sarah develops an intimate relationship with God that she describes as "natural and relaxed"—she is able to get angry at God or laugh and joke with God.²¹⁵ Luhrmann explains that within the Vineyard community, God "loves unconditionally" and "forgives freely."²¹⁶ Luhrmann asks, "Why would one not believe" in this kind of God?²¹⁷ Despite asking this question in the context of describing this God who "loves and cuddles you," Luhrmann never seriously attempts to explain *why* people want to build a relationship with this God—only *how* it is possible to believe in a personal God given the modern scientific limits on knowledge.²¹⁸ The intimate personal God described by Vineyard congregants stands

²¹⁵ Luhrmann, *When God*, 95.

²¹⁶ Luhrmann, *When God*, xvi.

²¹⁷ Luhrmann, *When God*, xvi.

²¹⁸ Luhrmann, *When God*, 5.

alongside the traditional claims about God that the community affirms. Luhrmann writes, “God is of course understood as eternal, omnipresent, and everywhere;” and yet God is a “person”—a “lover, father, of course, but more remarkably, friend.”²¹⁹

In response to this tension, Luhrmann offers a description of God based on the epistemology of the Vineyard Church members. According to Luhrmann, the kind of God that people can believe in given the modern scientific limitations on knowledge is a God that “takes shape out of an exquisite awareness of doubt.”²²⁰ Luhrmann argues that the Vineyard Christians are not looking backward to an understanding of God that no longer makes sense, but rather have a novel understanding of God as “hyperreal;” or “realer than real, so real that it is impossible not to understand that you may be fooling yourself.”²²¹ Luhrmann argues that this God operates through something akin to magical realism, the literary form where the supernatural breaks into the everyday, and the prosaically material and magic are both “real and true” somehow at the same time.²²² The reader is left trying to discern whether the magic took place within “historical time or only in a symbolic dream.”²²³ Luhrmann argues that it is the work of navigating doubt that paradoxically allows God to appear as real. Even more, Luhrmann contends “this near-magical God is an expression of what it means to be modern.”²²⁴ In other words,

²¹⁹ Luhrmann, *When God*, 5.

²²⁰ Luhrmann, *When God*, 300.

²²¹ Luhrmann, *When God*, 301.

²²² Luhrmann, *When God*, 301.

²²³ Luhrmann, *When God*, 301.

²²⁴ Luhrmann, *When God*, 301.

Luhrmann claims the epistemology of the Vineyard Christians demonstrates something about what knowledge looks like in a post-Enlightenment, even postmodern world.

Luhrmann claims this modern epistemology allows Vineyard Christians to circumvent Enlightenment demand for evidence—for facts—to prove the existence of God. At the close of the final chapter, Luhrmann cites another interviewee who understands herself as “kind of postmodern in some ways.”²²⁵ By postmodern, the interviewee means she is not able to evaluate the experience of God that is claimed by another person with absolute certainty. She might think the person she observes is operating from a “falsehood” rather than a “truth.”²²⁶ However, the interviewee leaves it up to the other person to decide what “they did or did not experience or feel or didn’t feel.”²²⁷ Luhrmann is clear that the interviewee “really believes there is a truth condition: God did or did not speak,” but because “God speaks to each in his or her own mind” an outside observer will never know if God has spoken to someone else.²²⁸ In her account, truth retains an edge of uncertainty within in the charismatic-evangelical epistemology.

Is the Vineyard Community’s epistemology the same as the postmodern abandonment of reason that Steven Pinker so disparaged in the previous chapter? Is belief in this God what is holding people back from recognizing and embracing the progress that is being made in contemporary society? There is a case to be made that the God Vineyard members experience—friendly and personable though God might be—is

²²⁵ Luhrmann, *When God*, 313.

²²⁶ Luhrmann, *When God*, 313.

²²⁷ Luhrmann, *When God*, 313.

²²⁸ Luhrmann, *When God*, 314.

transcendent and sovereign in ways that are very familiar to political theology. God has the ability to suspend the normal laws of mental events in order to speak to human beings. Or, God's voice is the exception to the mental boundaries of the human mind. Luhrmann's focus on individual subjectivity as the location of experience of God, places the burden of evaluating the truth of God's voice on individuals and indicates that because the mind is a closed system human beings have no assurance that they have heard God. Yet, what about the excitement that comes with exceptional claims? What about the affective intensity that breaks through the torpor of everyday life?

I propose that Luhrmann misses the role of the affective intensity that accompanies the practices in the Vineyard community—and, importantly, the way intense emotional responses serve to verify that an experience is from God. In other words, because Luhrmann's analysis is so focused on the irrationality of belief in God, she misses that verification might be moved to another source. Even more, the affective experience helps to explain *why* people work so hard to hear God—rather than merely looking at *how* it is possible. Indeed the experience of affective intensity is what first draws many people to participation in the Vineyard Church. I return to Sarah who described a period of emptiness after her children had grown and the “hunger” she felt for something missing in her life. Sarah's searching for charismatic Christianity began when she visited gospel service and “as she sat there listening to the music—‘heaven came down and filled my soul’— she felt suddenly alive as she had never felt before, as if someone had thrown a switch and turned her on.”²²⁹ Sarah experienced intense feelings

²²⁹ Luhrmann, *When God*, 44.

that filled the sense of emptiness that she experienced in her everyday life. The first time Sarah visited a Vineyard Church, “she wept uncontrollably” because she was “singing directly *to* God” who “loved her openly and unconditionally.”²³⁰ Notice that Sarah’s initial experiences all take place during the music, during the worship time in a charismatic community.

The experience of God that emerges during worship time points to the *collective* experience of God that is downplayed in Luhrmann’s account of learning to hear God speak back. In the first chapter of her book, Luhrmann describes the “full thirty minutes” that are set aside for music during the Vineyard service.²³¹ People engage in worship with their whole bodies, sometimes raising their hands, sometimes kneeling, often with tears flowing down their cheeks. I propose that the intense feelings that emerge during this worship time train individuals to recognize intense feeling as a verification of God’s presence. Indeed, Luhrmann writes that at the Vineyard “music is prayer;” but she does not stop to reflect on the implications of the claim that the practice of prayer, which is central to the novel epistemology she describes, can take the form of music.²³² Music adds a layer of shared emotional experience to the learning that is accomplished with the practice of prayer. If prayer is initially experienced as a part of worship, which is a site of intensely affective community, then individuals learn to associate intense feeling with the presence of God; or feeling verifies the truth of God’s presence. Emotion as a marker of

²³⁰ Luhrmann, *When God*, 42.

²³¹ Luhrmann, *When God*, 4.

²³² Luhrmann, *When God*, 4.

God's presence plays out across a variety of prayer practices in Vineyard communities.

““Prayer,”” Luhrmann writes, “is the act of talking with God.”²³³ Luhrmann argues that Sarah understands prayer as “a technique, a bidirectional link created by an expert that enabled God to act through the Holy Spirit and enabled the person being prayed for to receive God’s act.”²³⁴ In other words, prayer cannot simply be understood as between two “people”—God and a human—prayer is an eco-system of communication that can affect other people. Indeed, according to Luhrmann’s description prayer is often practiced in a larger community. For example, prayer is a ministry that occurs before and after church services, when prayer ministers wait at the front of the room to lay hands on people who are in need. Prayer ministers are required to take a class in order to learn how to lay hands on people and to participate on the prayer team. They are expected to pay attention to their mind, looking for thoughts from God to share with the person receiving ministry, while also paying to attention the *emotional state* of the person. Luhrmann explains, “The implicit theory is that God will speak to the person in ways that lead the person being prayed for to be emotionally moved.”²³⁵ In other words, emotional responsiveness is a marker that God is speaking accurately to the minister and recipient.

Indeed, community truths are generated through prayer *and prophecy* in the Vineyard community. Luhrmann cites a community member’s claim, “A faithful person

²³³ Luhrmann, *When God*, 46.

²³⁴ Luhrmann, *When God*, 135.

²³⁵ Luhrmann, *When God*, 50.

should believe that God will give her insights into other people or tell her specific things to pray for on behalf of other people—insights that in general people call ‘prophecy.’”²³⁶ Even more, “The person who receives a word on behalf of another person is responsible for sharing that word.”²³⁷ In other words, the individual practice of hearing God generates conversation between the divine and the human, which then overflows into the community within which the person has learned to hear God. All of these are, of course, supported and verified through intense feelings.

Charismatic-evangelical Christians learn to experience intense emotions as a verifier of God’s presence and therefore as a marker of truth for themselves and their community. The practice of prayer or listening for God, described by Luhrmann is not adequately captured in the epistemology of the sovereign subject. Luhrmann’s description of the exquisite tension between doubt and certainty in God’s ability to speak, considers only the ability of the mind to assent to the claim that an invisible God who cannot be seen or heard (at least according to scientific standards) is real. I argue that for the Vineyard members there *is* evidence that God is present—feelings are the evidence—but it is not the kind of evidence that the modern scientific model of knowledge and truth-making would expect. The link between hearing God and prayer is what I propose spools out into the broader political world and reinforces “feeling-only” versions of truth. I suggest charismatic-evangelicals heard Donald Trump’s intensely affective lies during the 2016 and 2020 election seasons and were prepared to hear truth. This tendency was (and

²³⁶ Luhrmann, *When God*, 85.

²³⁷ Luhrmann, *When God*, 85.

continues to be) leveraged by politicians like Newt Gingrich who go with “what people feel” despite knowing other facts to be true.

The next chapter further develops the role charismatic-evangelical Christianities might play in shaping U.S. politics, because Luhrmann’s focus on individual subject formation results in her avoiding the relationship between politics and prayer in the history of the Vineyard movement. Luhrmann’s final chapter tells the story of Christianity’s confrontation with science and the existence of other religious traditions in modernity. Then she tells the rise of historical-critical biblical scholarship and the response in the form of *The Fundamentals* that I told in the introduction to this dissertation. When Luhrmann gets to the 1970s when holy-spirit embracing counter-culture Christianity met fundamentalist Christianity, which was the very location of John Wimber in Southern California, she observes that it “transforms the cultural and political landscape.”²³⁸ Yet she draws no connection between this transformation and the community that she observes—rather, she aims to help a reader understand how their “running partner” who “shares [their] tastes and humor” might also believe that God speaks to her.²³⁹ Luhrmann’s project, again, aims to build a bridge between those who believe in God and those who do not.

Another reason Luhrmann is hesitant to address the connection between politics and evangelicalism is because she rightly recognizes that evangelical politics is not uniform. Partially, this is a product of how thinly the term evangelical Christian has been

²³⁸ Luhrmann, *When God*, 311.

²³⁹ Luhrmann, *When God*, 300.

stretched in recent years, applied to people ranging from non-denominational white churches to Catholics. At the same time, not addressing the politics of evangelical Christians misses why the general public is so interested in evangelical Christians: because of their ascent to political power within the U.S. government. Even more, despite the vocal protestations of the more socially liberal contingents of the evangelical world, evangelical Christians still voted as a block in the 2016 election.

The role of collective subjectivity in charismatic-evangelical practices returns my discussion to the scene described at IHOPKC at the opening of this chapter. Prayer is at the heart of IHOPKC's ministry. Several documents and videos on the IHOPKC website indicate that their community members are trained to spend time praying and listening for God's voice in a way that approximates what takes place in the Vineyard Church. An emailed document, entitled "7 Tips to Hear the Lord Better" opens with the claim "God is always speaking" and asserts that a "key component of growing in intimacy with God is engaging in conversation."²⁴⁰ In other words, the IHOPKC God is the same Vineyard God who talks back to people who pray—and this speaking back is understood as prophecy.²⁴¹ The practical tips for hearing God are to spend time meditating on biblical texts, to fast, and avoid distractions—similar to the practices engaged by the Vineyard Christians.

Dale Anderson, a leader in the IHOPKC community, writes that he had "no

²⁴⁰ "7 Tips to Hear the Lord Better," IHOPKC, PDF, Received via Email, Accessed March 27, 2021, <https://www.ihopkc.org/lp/7-tips-hear-lord-better/>.

²⁴¹ Adam Wittenberg, "Prophecy and Hearing God's Voice," IHOPKC, March 9, 2017, Accessed March 27, 2021, <https://www.ihopkc.org/resources/blog/prophecy-hearing-gods-voice/>.

confidence” in his ability to hear God at first he had to learn. For Anderson, a series of biblical texts stating that God acts and speaks—“In the beginning was the Word”—became the promises that allowed him to assume that God might be speaking. Ultimately, however, Anderson had to decide that it was possible for him to hear God, just like Sarah reached a point that felt “goofy” and required her to decide to act as though she could hear God. Anderson writes, “I made a decision...to take God at his word,” which ultimately gave him “confidence that He would speak.”²⁴² In other words, the same kind of mental work to overcome doubt takes place in the prayer practice of the members of the IHOPKC community as at the Vineyard Churches. What makes IHOPKC an important supplement to Luhrmann’s book is the prayer and worship depicted at the opening of this chapter. The 24-7 prayer at IHOPKC is collective and it is political. A prayer leader directs the prayer to a topic, and then the “prophetic singers” respond by generating spontaneous phrases that pick up on the theme of the prayer and amplify parts of the prayer. There is a collective formation that takes place under those conditions that goes beyond the individual formation that is described by Luhrmann.

The next section engages another ethnographic account of the Vineyard Churches—one that addresses some of the limitations of Luhrmann’s text. Jon Bialecki’s *A Diagram for Fire* examines the way the Vineyard is produced as a recognizable Christian community despite their practices of the supernatural, which strain at the limits of Christian orthodoxy. Bialecki engages the affective work of charismatic practices—and the impact of community formation through affect practices. However, like

²⁴² Dale Anderson, “Gaining Confidence in Hearing the Holy Spirit,” IHOPKC, April, 18, 2018, Accessed March 27, 2021, <https://www.ihopkc.org/resources/blog/gaining-confidence-hearing-holy-spirit/>.

Luhrmann, Bialecki's work does not address any specific political formulations in the Vineyard community. This chapter will go on to address two specific political power formulations—racial supremacy and theocratic sovereignty—as they are pulled through time by IHOPKC in the final section of this chapter.

Jon Bialecki's ethnographic book *A Diagram for Fire* outlines a model, or diagram, of the capacity for change demonstrated by charismatic-evangelical Christianities. Bialecki argues that the Vineyard practice of the miraculous—which for Bialecki is a general name for all the practices that extend beyond the natural—is what allows the communities to press at the boundaries of Christian orthodox while still continuing to function as a legible Christian organization within U.S. society. For Bialecki, his project offers the building blocks of an anthropology of Christianity, whereby definitions of Christianity can move beyond the tension between nominalism and particularism. In other words, Bialecki attempts to bridge the seeming divide between a definition of Christianity that slips into whatever a particular group feels to be true and the “crypto-fundamentalist” definition of Christianity that cannot address the structures of power that uphold a universal definition of Christianity. Therefore, Bialecki's project aims to address, in its own way, the tensions in knowledge production that this dissertation addresses.

Bialecki's work is notable for following a different stream of philosophy than Luhrmann's. Instead of upholding the modern-liberal model of subjectivity that underpins Luhrmann's *When God Talks Back*, Bialecki pursues an “open” model of the subject, drawing on continental philosophy. While this open subject will correct for some of the limitations noted in Luhrmann's work, in turn the open model can tend towards a

groundlessness that does not account for the material conditions of oppressed peoples. For this dissertation, Bialecki's project makes two key interventions: first, the project offers a preliminary account of the interaction of individual subjectivity and collective subjectivity; and second, Bialecki addresses temporality as a layer of charismatic practice, which is key to analyzing contemporary charismatic prophecy.

Specifically, the model for mapping charismatic-evangelical Christianity deployed by Bialecki is the "diagram," which he draws from the work of philosopher Gilles Deleuze. Bialecki writes, "*diagram* is a term for a repeatable set of relations between forces."²⁴³ This thinking intersects with affect theory, which sees affect as the ability "to act and be acted upon."²⁴⁴ In "diagrammatic" thinking, the relationship between forces and the particularity of a specific instantiation is left "open"—as well as the "possibility of diminishing or intensifying the various forces in relationship to one another."²⁴⁵ In other words, the repetition of force relations is not fixed, but rather is subject to novelty and change, making this diagram particularly useful for describing communities that engage with the supernatural as it is understood by charismatic-evangelicals, where God has the ability to break into everyday life and act. Bialecki argues that particular diagrams can be "expressed as different phenomena" and diagrams can be used to express all kinds of phenomena, extending across the natural and social worlds.²⁴⁶ The diagram is not limited to expressing the miraculous (though this is a key term in the charismatic

²⁴³ Bialecki, *A Diagram*, 199.

²⁴⁴ Gregg and Seigworth, "Shimmers," loc 50.

²⁴⁵ Bialecki, *A Diagram*, 199.

²⁴⁶ Bialecki, *A Diagram*, 199.

diagram), but can express a variety of charismatic phenomena—and really, in Bialecki’s telling, the diagram can express all phenomenon.

According to Bialecki, “the charismatic diagram is a lamination of ethical, linguistic, sensorial, affective, habitual, and biological strata, a series of relations that are undetermined at the level of potential.”²⁴⁷ Again for Bialecki, the charismatic thrives on novelty—which starts at the level of potential, or pre-discursively. The diagram therefore allows for a certain “mutability and motility.”²⁴⁸ In other words, it is the changing relationships between various layers of meaning making that allow for novelty within the charismatic-evangelical community, but it is the repetition of parts of the diagram that maintains some semblance of a familiar structure. The diagram is what allows the charismatic-evangelical Christians to maintain their recognizable Christian identity across immense diversity.

For example, Bialecki argues that both textual and sensory knowledge operate in the diagram. The bible is a “stabilizing agent” giving people universal access to God.²⁴⁹ At the same time, God can be known through the sensorium, as “a voice, a vision, a feeling, a coincidence, an event,” like what was described in *When God Talks Back*.²⁵⁰ These two modes push and pull, making the vanishing transcendent God of the text immanent to experience, while also pulling God back from a slip into solipsism. Again, this is the tension between an anchor, or a kind of first principle that can set a starting

²⁴⁷ Bialecki, *A Diagram*, 166.

²⁴⁸ Bialecki, *A Diagram*, 166.

²⁴⁹ Bialecki, *A Diagram*, 5.

²⁵⁰ Bialecki, *A Diagram*, 5.

place for a chain of reasoning that can serve as truth for a community and the slipperiness of knowledge, particularly of supernatural knowledge, the kind that that Luhrmann pursues in her book, which cannot be proven according to modern scientific standards. At the same time, the “diagram” is not a dialectic and Bialecki resists any claim that would lock the diagram into a bi-polar pattern of text and voice or immanence and transcendence. Though, he does claim that “attractors” like, for example ritual and sincerity, tend to come in pairs, but then will intersect with other attractors.

Bialecki argues that the charismatic diagram is not a respecter of institutional boundaries or the boundaries of modern personhood—the “buffered” sovereign subject.²⁵¹ This is evident in Bialecki’s description of the worship time in the Vineyard communities he studies. Bialecki picks up worship time—both the time spent in worship and the temporality of that worship time—in Vineyard communities as an exemplar (though not archetype) of the evangelical miracle. Bialecki, in contrast to Luhrmann, seeks to illuminate the subject formation that takes place during/through the music that functions as prayer. He argues that worship time “reconfigures” the participant’s “sensory attunements and their affective states.”²⁵² Bialecki argues that the worship music tends to follow an arc: worship time connects the body to familiar lyrics, the same songs, the same phrases repeated over and over. The body remembers previous postures of devotion—arms raised, knees bent, perhaps dancing, sometimes tears. Worship time, Bialecki argues, connects participants with the past, but also—within an affectively

²⁵¹ Note the similarity to William Connolly’s “Evangelical-Capitalist Resonance Machine.”

²⁵² Bialecki, *A Diagram*, 28.

intense present—points towards a future, to the person that the worshipper hopes to become.

This becoming, Bialecki claims, is more than merely a process of learning to be a part of the evangelical community—though it is that too. This becoming is also the possibility of being different. Bialecki argues:

Worship always has the capacity to act not as mode of training the body or allowing believers to escape their cares, but as an event in which something—such as God—reconstitutes the subject through an encounter with *évènementiel* sign. In short, worship is a place where small miracles can occur.²⁵³

Here, Bialecki begins to challenge the sovereign subject that frames Luhrmann's description of the encounter between human beings and the God who talks back.

Luhrmann attempts to explain how it is possible for Vineyard members to claim they can hear God, given the closed nature of the mind. The closed status of the mind is part of modern liberal subjecthood, which centers thinking as the marker of what it means to be human. I argue emotion serves to verify truth in charismatic-evangelical truth, which links to the truth-making process that evolved from the modern model of truth where truth is determined by human reason. At the same time, I ask whether the slipperiness of truth making in charismatic-evangelical circles with its engagement of affect and power, might point towards alternate models of subjectivity that challenges the modern liberal sovereign subject and can speak to the relationship between collective subjectivity and individual subjectivity, facilitating a more integrated model of what it means to be

²⁵³ Bialecki, *A Diagram*, 28.

human.

Bialecki's analysis of the worship time, driven by music, points toward alternative models of subjectivity, where the subject has pre-discursive potential that is undetermined. In the next chapter, pre-discursive potential is engaged by radical political theologians as a site of immanent power, which challenges Schmittian sovereignty, manifesting as freedom for individual subjects. This chapter merely points to the way this kind of subjectivity, moving with pre-discourse potential, is evident in charismatic-evangelical communities, which becomes ground for supplementing the radical political theology of the next chapter. Charismatic evangelicals demonstrate, on one hand, that the popular discourse of truth on the left has failed to attend to the role of affect, which has pushed the popular media and politicians into ineffective fact-checking. On the other hand, the study of charismatic-evangelical practices through the lens of radical political theology demonstrates the shortcomings of relying on the pre-discursive potential of subjects alone to articulate a vision of a just world. The next chapter argues with Donovan Schaefer that an ontology of becoming that depends on plasticity alone assumes that subjects have the unlimited ability to act, like the autonomous sovereign subject. In other words, radical political theology inadvertently smuggles the corpse of the modern liberal subject into their novel models of subjectivity.

For this chapter, it suffices to demonstrate how music and the environment that fosters the intense affect that marks charismatic-evangelical practice, links to an ontology of becoming. Music, argues political theorist Jeremy Gilbert, "has physical effects which can be identified, described and discussed but which are not the same thing as it having

meanings.”²⁵⁴ He argues music is a part of the human experience that can be expressed in language, but its effects cannot be reduced to language. This, Gilbert claims, is the *affective* dimension of music. Gilbert draws on the work of affect theorist, Brian Massumi, for whom it is this pre-discursive layer of human experience that constitutes hope—hope as the potential for political and social change, though by no means a guarantee. Massumi argues that being present in the moment more intensely opens a “margin of maneuverability” and allows for experimentation with different ways of being.²⁵⁵ Gilbert argues that the felt experience of music is an example of the intensity Massumi describes. In other words, music moves affective intensity that demonstrates the limits of the modern liberal sovereign subject and points, as Luhmann’s description of a “porous” subject in the previous section, at the need to rethink the Enlightenment model of subjectivity. Rethinking subjectivity allows for a rethinking of knowledge producing economies: the modern truth economy, especially the political truth economy on the left, depends on the sovereign power of the human mind. Depending on the autonomy and sovereignty of the mind for truth claims has the effect of linking into familiar forms of power as first principles and therefore starting from a place of racism, sexism, or some other oppression.

Again, Bialecki’s engagement with Deleuze anticipates the affect theory that will be read in the next chapter. As the introduction states, affect theory encompasses both the

²⁵⁴ Jeremy Gilbert, “Signifying Nothing: ‘Culture,’ ‘Discourse’ and the Sociality of Affect,” *Culture Machine* 6, (2004), <https://culturemachine.net/deconstruction-is-in-cultural-studies/signifying-nothing/>.

²⁵⁵ Brian Massumi, *The Politics of Affect*, (Malden, MA: Polity Press, 2015), 7.

matrix of feelings experienced by human beings (and animals); and at the same time, theorizes affect as what comes before cognition. Bialecki appears to be dancing between the two kinds of affect theory in his description of worship time. He claims that music acts as a “mode of training the body”—think about Luhrmann’s informant Sarah, who wept for the first three months of her time in the Vineyard community.²⁵⁶ Sarah learned that God “loves” her and experienced the “joy” she sought after first experiencing a gospel worship service. These positive, albeit intensely felt, emotions inaugurated Sarah into the Vineyard community, filling a need she had and teaching her about the kind of God that is experienced in that community. This correlates to the affect theory that looks at emotions and their role in human experiences—and the role of emotions in shaping human beings as subjects or projects of subject formation, like what I described at the Creation Museum.

At the same time, Bialecki holds that worship time can at any moment become an “event” where “something,” perhaps God, “reconstitutes the subject” through an encounter with an “*évènementiel* sign.”²⁵⁷ This line of thought connects to the pre-discursive stream of affect theory. Again, as will become evident in the third and fourth chapter of this project, Bialecki attempts to connect the experience in worship time to a philosophy of the “event,” a line of thinking that is picked up by radical political theologians. The event is a slippery concept, at least as it is described by continental philosophers like Jacques Derrida. The event is a moment of possibility that is more than

²⁵⁶ Bialecki, *A Diagram*, 28.

²⁵⁷ Bialecki, *A Diagram*, 28.

knowledge alone, an event makes plain the conditions of any knowledge at all. These conditions show both the limitations of the current system of knowledge and the construction of the current system, demonstrating the possibility of an outside, of another way of being.

At the same time, this dissertation, with the help of Donovan Schaefer's work in the next chapter, will question relying primarily on a pre-discursive definition of affect—or of possibility. Just as the definition of political truth in the U.S. tends to hook into a pattern of white male cisgender heterosexual able-bodied power, because it does not question its grounding in the modern liberal subject, so might philosophies of potentiality smuggle a dependence on the sovereign subject into their thinking. In the next section, I propose that charismatic-evangelical Christians learn that Schmittian sovereignty feels exciting, which is often conflated with novelty; white supremacy and authoritarianism are made to feel new. Ontologies that depend on novelty, like what I observe in radical theology, risk conflating the feeling of excitement that transmits Schmittian sovereignty with genuinely novel experiences. Exceptional power seeks to except some bodies from participation in life—social, political, and cultural life. The aim of this project is to articulate political truth that can encompass facts, feelings, and power—therefore, concepts like potentiality, plasticity, and novelty must be understood in relation to the institutions that limit them. The individual freedom of subjects is networked into larger matrices of power and into larger histories of oppression.

Worship time, according to Bialecki, places the subject within a particular time-scape or a history. So time is a component of truth-making. Think of the way Ken Hamm of Answers in Genesis manipulates truth via time: arguing that historical science cannot

be thought of as “true” because it cannot be tested and repeated in the present. In a sense he is not wrong; yet it is obvious that Hamm manipulates time in order to make claims align with his first principle, biblical inerrancy. Truth tends to hook into the time, the history, of the person who is making it.

On the left in popular political discourse, modern political truth tries to obfuscate its first principles, leaning into an ideal of reason that can, truly, operate with no first principles through the triumph of human reason. Yet, as the previous chapter argued this results in a version of truth—political truth—that rests on the colonial history of the modern liberal sovereign subject, which smuggles in a particular notion of what it means to be human. The seemingly free modern liberal subject tends to be made in the image of a white, cis, het, able-bodied man. People who do not align to this image are not fully recognized as subjects and therefore often not granted citizenship. Political truth, therefore, must be manifest in time, but not in order to control what it is possible to say about the past as Ken Hamm of Answers in Genesis insists; rather, political truth must be articulated from the material situation of people who are not usually viewed as political subjects.

As the introduction to this chapter explains, temporality is one of the components of prophecy. I propose that contemporary charismatic-evangelical prophecy is a form of truth-making that recognizes the interplay of individuals, possibility (traditionally a divine source), community, and a history. Worship time, according to Bialecki, manifests not only as a time that is intensely affectively felt, but also as a style of history, with an apocalyptic arc, which results in a folding of time. The Holy Spirit rapturously felt, ecstatically felt, often shows up during worship time, but not always. Bialecki writes,

“The multifarious precariousness of charisma is called *the already/not yet*....it refers to an indeterminacy in eschatological time that Vineyard believers identify in the biblical narrative.”²⁵⁸ According to Bialecki, evangelicals call this “kingdom theology,” which argues that salvation is accomplished by the death and resurrection of Christ, but will be consummated in the Parousia.

Bialecki argues that the *already/not yet* of evangelical theology links back to George Eldon Ladd, a Baptist minister whose biblical and theological scholarship is highly influential in evangelical circles. Ladd argued for an “inaugurated eschatology,” which claims that the end times began, and were inaugurated, with the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. The *already* present kingdom is signified by God’s authority, his “sovereignty” which appears in activities of the Holy Spirit, which are manifest in the signs, wonders, and miracles in Vineyard Churches.²⁵⁹ God’s authority will be fully actualized in the coming, *not yet*, kingdom. God’s power moves as a marker of his promise, but not always, because the kingdom is not yet fully actualized. So the Holy Spirit appears and works, but as Bialecki describes in worship time, the Spirit might not appear, because of the imperfect presence of the kingdom. According to Bialecki, George Ladd came up with this theology in order to get around the hodgepodge of literalist and allegorical scriptural interpretations that fueled early 20th century dispensationalism. IHOPKC, who at the outset of this chapter were praying for the literal

²⁵⁸ Bialecki, *A Diagram*, 37.

²⁵⁹ George Eldon Ladd was an influential scholar at Fuller Theological Seminary, where he was particularly known for his work on eschatology. Ladd was nearing the end of his tenure at Fuller when John Wimber was there teaching his famous course on signs and wonders.

return of Jesus to rule Jerusalem, have clearly not given up literalist or allegorical readings of scripture (though they have given up dispensationalism). Nonetheless, I argue that this apocalyptic folding of time is key to understanding how novel truth-claims, manifest as prophecies, biblical interpretations, doctrines, or something else, are marked by a breakthrough of God's presence.

The next section of this chapter aims to demonstrate how claims—truth-claims, about the future, about the present, and about the past—get made and remade at IHOPKC and how, though the claims change, what anchors these claims, as a kind of first principle, is Schmittian sovereignty—and what pulls these claims through time is affective intensity.²⁶⁰ Attention to this form of truth-making, dependent not on facts, or even consistent content, but rather on reasserting authority via affective intensity, might begin to inform a political theology of affected truth that can address the current status of truth in the U.S.

Schmitt ties political power—*sovereignty*—to the ability to make an exception. The exception, he claims, is manifest, for example, as the ability to suspend citizens' rights in a state of emergency, therefore reasserting Schmittian sovereignty within a democracy. This chapter argues that the *already/not yet* of evangelical kingdom theology that is verified through charismatic practices, which in turn teach charismatic-evangelical Christians to trust feeling as a marker of truth. The novel claims of prophecy are verified

²⁶⁰ Indeed, George Ladd shows up in the apocalyptic teaching of IHOPKC too, though, again, they do not accept dispensationalism. For example: Mike Bickle, "The Gospel of the Kingdom (Mt. 24:14)," International House of Prayer University, May 21, 2016, Accessed March 28, 2021, <https://s3.amazonaws.com/ihopkc.org-prod-site/wp-content/uploads/2020/09/08161635/Week-4.-The-Gospel-of-the-Kingdom-Mt.-24.14.pdf>.

by the affect-laden practices of worship, prayer, prophecy, anything miraculous. I argue that the work of prophecy at IHOPKC is akin to the action of the exception in Schmitt's political theology; or in Schmitt's words, "the exception in jurisprudence is analogous to the miracle in theology."²⁶¹ Remember that Schmitt claims Kierkegaard recognized the "vital intensity" in theologizing and he cites Kierkegaard's claim that "the exception...thinks the general with intense passion."²⁶² I propose there are often two resonant—to borrow William Connolly's language—pieces in U.S. political truth-making. There is the making-sovereign, the making-authoritative of a claim—and the exceptional intensity. Schmitt claims, "In the exception the power of real life breaks through the crust of a mechanism that has become torpid by repetition."²⁶³ The mutable charism, or miracle in Bialecki's language, that allows IHOPKC to make and remake their apocalyptic truth is prophecy.

Persistent Political Power: Intransigent Schmittian Sovereignty in Prophetic History

Multiple versions of IHOPKC's "Prophetic History" have been recorded by the digitally prolific group. Each prophetic history is designed to tell, afresh, how the current activities at IHOPKC were foretold in prophecy, and how their prayer and worship will cause the end times, the apocalypse, to unfold. The group makes available their prophetic history, which recounts the various prophetic words, dreams, visions, and happenings that went into the formation of their community and organization. There are several versions

²⁶¹ Carl Schmitt, *Political Theology: Four Chapters on the Concept of Sovereignty*. trans. George Schwab, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005), 36.

²⁶² Schmitt, *Political Theology*, 15.

²⁶³ Schmitt, *Political Theology*, 15.

of the prophetic history, appearing between 1988 and 2019.²⁶⁴ The 2009 version is part of a series of eight one-hour sessions, which marked the ten-year anniversary of IHOPKC's 24-7 prayer.

Remember the scene depicted at the opening of this chapter. IHOPKC is a “prayer ministry”—tracing a lineage, in their telling, back to the Tabernacle of David. On their website, IHOPKC claims their community “exists to partner in the Great Commission by advancing 24/7 prayer and proclaiming the beauty of Jesus and His glorious return.”²⁶⁵ Constant prayer, taking a very particular form of music, scripture, making heavy use of repetition, is central to the activity that takes place at IHOPKC. “Night-and-day prayer,” explains the IHOPKC website, “is deeply connected to the release of the fullness of God’s power and purpose.”²⁶⁶ The prayer is enacted as a “solemn assembly” according to what Bickle calls the “harp and bowl” model, which is modeled on his reading of the Revelation 5 depiction of a throne room scene.²⁶⁷ The harp is the worship, which in large part takes the form of singing and instrumental music; the bowl is the offerings, the prayers being constantly made. The twenty-four hours of the day are divided into two-hour slots, which evenly split between the “intercession” format and the “worship with

²⁶⁴ A newer series of videos detailing the history came out after I wrote this description of the 2009 video. The 1988 version of the Prophetic History is easily located online, but is not posted on IHOP's website anymore, because, as I argue, they have revised some of the prophecies from this version. The newest videos, marking the 20-year anniversary of the movement are available here: “The History of IHOPKC, IHOPKC, Accessed March 28, 2021, <https://www.ihopkc.org/prophetichistory/>.

²⁶⁵ “About IHOPKC,” IHOPKC, Accessed March 28, 2021, <https://www.ihopkc.org/about/May2020>.

²⁶⁶ “About IHOPKC,” IHOPKC.

²⁶⁷ Adam Wittenberg, “IHOPKC’s Expression of the Harp and Bowl Model,” IHOPKC, June 18, 2019, Accessed March 28, 2021, <https://www.ihopkc.org/resources/blog/ihopkc-expression-harp-bowl-model/>.

the word” format.²⁶⁸ Intercession is prayer, usually on a theme, like the prayer at the opening was for Jerusalem. Intercession differs from worship on the word by featuring a charismatic prayer leader, who does not sing but rather interjects with long periods of spoken prayer. The prayer leader interacts with the worship team, which has a leader, an assistant leader, a group of prophetic singers, and a team of musicians. In contrast to intercession, “worship with the word” is “singing seminary” where central themes and scriptures are meditated upon by the singers and musicians.²⁶⁹ This format tends to be gentler and more reflective.

In both formats of prayer the worship leaders, prophetic singers, and musicians work together, an elaborate structure facilitating spontaneity, where new choruses are sung by the prophetic singers, and picked up as “antiphonal” songs or in a call and response pattern, which Bickle claims is modelled on the music-making in the temple of David.²⁷⁰ This interactive novelty is meant to make constant prayer “enjoyable” for the participants—one of Bickle’s most well-known claims is that prayer does not have to be boring.²⁷¹ (Remember that the exception, as described by Schmitt, is “exciting” and breaks through the drudgery of day-to-day life.) The prayer and worship at IHOPKC is

²⁶⁸ “About the Prayer Room,” IHOPKC, Accessed March 28, 2021, <https://www.ihopkc.org/prayerroom/about-the-prayer-room/>.

²⁶⁹ Jono Hall, “The Journey of Fully Alive,” IHOPKC, January 1, 2018, Accessed March 28, 2021, <https://www.ihopkc.org/resources/blog/journey-fully-alive/>.

²⁷⁰ Mike Bickle, “Global Worship and Prayer in the End Times,” IHOPKC, March, 7 2017, Accessed March 29, 2021, <https://www.ihopkc.org/resources/blog/global-worship-and-prayer-in-the-end-times/>. Bickle

²⁷¹ See this Charisma Magazine piece titled Mike Bickle, “Mike Bickle: How I Overcame a Boring Prayer Life,” *Charisma Magazine*, 2014, Accessed March 28, 2021, <https://www.charismamag.com/spirit/prayer/111-mike-bickle-how-i-overcame-a-boring-prayer-life>.

designed to generate intense feelings of excitement and interest. These concrete feelings of excitement, linked to love, repentance, and more, work to shape subjects as part of a community. Bickle explains that music helps people to remember the word of God, because scripture is more easily memorized when it is sung. There is pedagogy in the prayer and worship undertaken at IHOPKC.

At the same time, I return to Bialecki's claim that worship time might present something else, an "event." And music, according to Jeremy Gilbert, carries affect, but affect as pre-discursive potential, in the half second before cognition. Bickle similarly positions music, claiming it is "enjoyable." (I hear the affect moving in this claim). Even more, Bickle writes that music "essential in the economy of God."²⁷² Bickle explains, "the Holy Spirit has a musical dimension to his being" and that all members of the trinity "sing, create, and enjoy music."²⁷³ Bickle claims that the supernatural moves through music. Remember again that intense feeling marks the presence of God for Luhrmann's communities, offering proof that God is real. At the same time, the action of the Holy Spirit, often in music, breaks through with novelty, with possibilities—the possibility of revelation—as the prophetic singers hear the music of the Holy Spirit and the prayer leader intercedes. And, as Bialecki argues, the presence of the miraculous, the Holy Spirit, draws the IHOPKC into an inaugurated eschatology, where their experience of God in the present both promises the future coming of Jesus, but also is a fulfillment of

²⁷² Bickle, "Global Worship and Prayer," <https://www.ihopkc.org/resources/blog/global-worship-and-prayer-in-the-end-times/>.

²⁷³ Bickle, "Global Worship and Prayer," <https://www.ihopkc.org/resources/blog/global-worship-and-prayer-in-the-end-times/>.

promises that are made in the past. It is the multiple forms of affective action in the prayer room, potential overlaid with forms of feeling, that traffic in the exceptional power of the Schmittian sovereign, which make IHOPKC an excellent dialogue partner for thinking about an economy of political truth. In the model at IHOPKC, I recognize the possibility for change, while acknowledging that their practices mainly work to reinstate familiar forms of U.S. power. Their practices carry excitement, which is conflated with novelty, allowing old forms of power like white supremacy and authoritarianism to feel new.

Conveniently, IHOPKC, has published their prophetic histories, which demonstrate how they locate and then re-locate themselves within an apocalyptic narrative. At the same time, their prophetic histories must be read through their 24-7 practice of prayer and worship. It is in practices that excitement emerges to verify their self-understanding, which is written as their prophetic history and in turn forms them as a community. This chapter will go on to demonstrate that what is central to IHOPKC's prophetic history is not specific claims—not instances of theology or scripture—but rather the assertion of power. The re-making of their prophetic history links the current group into reoccurring claims to authority—claims to Schmittian sovereign authority. These claims—to white supremacy, to theocratic reign—are familiar political tropes, which are verified through the action of the Holy Spirit and intense feelings in the present.

The 2009 version of the prophetic history is presented as videos and is a classic example of the kind of content published by IHOPKC.²⁷⁴ Bickle stands at the front of a

²⁷⁴ Bickle, Mike. "Session 1 The Early Days, Cairo, and the 1983 Solemn Assembly,"

large auditorium, the prayer room where at most other times musicians and singers lead the constant prayer. Most of the video is a tight shot of Bickle, from the waist up, a music stand with his notes just visible at the bottom of the frame. The opening shot pans across the audience of mainly young, white adults. Behind Bickle hangs an orange, almost glowing set decoration. Bickle is a middle-aged white man, slightly thinning brown hair, square wire-frame glasses. His speaking delivery has the inflection of a preacher: part Black southern Baptist (though with a midwestern accent) and part anger. The sermon is guided by a series of detailed notes (available to read online) and weaves together personal narrative, scripture, and prophetic words and events. Bickle describes his message as a testimony: it is a testimony about what God has done for IHOPKC.

Bickle opens in prayer. Then he reads the first verses of Psalm 78 (NKJV):

I will open my mouth in a parable;

I will utter dark sayings of old,

Which we have heard and known,

And our fathers have told us.

Telling them to the generation to come and the praises of the Lord,

And His strength and His wonderful works that he has done.²⁷⁵

Reflecting on the scripture, Bickle explains, “Some of God’s ways are parables”—Jesus spoke in parables, and in fact, “Jesus still speaks today in parables.”²⁷⁶ Yet, “Parables are

Encountering Jesus: Visions, Revelations, Angelic Activity From IHOP-KC’s Prophetic History, *The Mike Bickle Library*, August 17, 2009, Accessed March 29, 2021, https://mikebickle.org/watch/mb_1642.

²⁷⁵ Bickle, “Session 1The Early Days,” https://backup.storage.sardius.media/file/akamaiBackup-ihopkc-103762/IHOP/907/887/20090917A-T-The_Early_Days_Cairo_Egypt_and_the_Solemn_Assembly_IPH01.pdf.

²⁷⁶ Bickle, “Session 1The Early Days,” <https://backup.storage.sardius.media/file/akamaiBackup->

a stumbling block” which are “meant to cause us to stumble.” Nonetheless, “Truth is given in the form of parables.”²⁷⁷ In fact, parables have two purposes, “to make truth easy” and to “make truth difficult.”²⁷⁸ In other words, for Bickle, prophecy is a site of truth, but also of epistemological complication. This instability of meaning is part of what draws this analysis of political truth into dialogue with the practice of prophecy.

Prophecy, like anything supernatural, has no place in a contemporary epistemology or in modern definitions of truth, especially if truth is a crypto-fundamentalist version of the facts. The prophetic practice at IHOPKC, however, points toward what I offer in the conclusion of this project, revelation. Revelation, as I read it in dialogue with Jean Luc Marion, is where reason touches the impossible. While Bickle’s prophecy ultimately falls short of an economy of political truth with a robust engagement of reason, it is his model that demonstrates what is possible beyond Pinker’s crypto-fundamentalist version of the facts.

Bickle continues his sermon by turning to the New Testament, where Paul charges Timothy, by saying in 1 Timothy 1:18. “This charge I commit to you, son Timothy, according to the prophecies previously made concerning you, that by them you may wage the good warfare.”²⁷⁹ In the 2019 version of IHOPKC’s prophetic history

[ihopkc-103762/IHOP/907/887/20090917A-T-The_Early_Days_Cairo_Egypt_and_the_Solemn_Assembly_IPH01.pdf](https://backup.storage.sardius.media/file/akamaiBackup-ihopkc-103762/IHOP/907/887/20090917A-T-The_Early_Days_Cairo_Egypt_and_the_Solemn_Assembly_IPH01.pdf)

²⁷⁷ Bickle, “Session 1The Early Days,” https://backup.storage.sardius.media/file/akamaiBackup-ihopkc-103762/IHOP/907/887/20090917A-T-The_Early_Days_Cairo_Egypt_and_the_Solemn_Assembly_IPH01.pdf

²⁷⁸ Bickle, “Session 1The Early Days,” https://backup.storage.sardius.media/file/akamaiBackup-ihopkc-103762/IHOP/907/887/20090917A-T-The_Early_Days_Cairo_Egypt_and_the_Solemn_Assembly_IPH01.pdf

²⁷⁹ Bickle, “Session 1The Early Days,” https://backup.storage.sardius.media/file/akamaiBackup-ihopkc-103762/IHOP/907/887/20090917A-T-The_Early_Days_Cairo_Egypt_and_the_Solemn_Assembly_IPH01.pdf

Bickle refers to this scripture as indicating prophecy's potential failure—or as he puts it prophecy is “promise.”²⁸⁰ However, in Bickle's understanding prophecy is not a “guarantee;” rather, it is a possibility that gives Christians a promise to aspire to, given the difficult task that has been set out. I hear an the echo of Ladd's inaugurated eschatology. The promised kingdom is here, but not fully realized. So, prophecy situates the listeners within “a vast and glorious storyline” that is being told by God and each person or ministry has a place within the storyline.²⁸¹ Bickle's message 2009 video is largely his personal testimony describing his positioning within this story—and the positioning of IHOPKC within God's story for all of humankind.

Bickle begins his 2009 telling of the history by explaining that he was “converted” into the charismatic-evangelical movement.²⁸² A “young, conservative, evangelical pastor,” who preached against the flamboyant gifts of the spirit, Bickle experienced his first prophecy before he had experienced any other part of the charismatic movement.²⁸³ In the video, he describes a prophet named Augustine Acula

[The_Early_Days_Cairo_Egypt_and_the_Solemn_Assembly_IPH01.pdf](#)

²⁸⁰ Mike Bickle, “Session 1 Intro to Bob Jones, Paul Cain, and End-Time Revival,” IHOPKC, *The Mike Bickle Library*, August 23, 2019, PDF, Accessed March 29, 2021, Video: https://mikebickle.org/watch/2019_08_23_1800_MB_FC, PDF: [https://backup.storage.sardius.media/file/akamaiBackup-ihopkc-103762/IHOP/569/803/Session%201%20%20Intro%20to%20Bob%20Jones%2C%20Paul%20Cain%2C%20and%20End%20Time%20Revival%20\(2019\).pdf](https://backup.storage.sardius.media/file/akamaiBackup-ihopkc-103762/IHOP/569/803/Session%201%20%20Intro%20to%20Bob%20Jones%2C%20Paul%20Cain%2C%20and%20End%20Time%20Revival%20(2019).pdf).

²⁸¹ Bickle, “Session 1 Bob Jones,” [https://backup.storage.sardius.media/file/akamaiBackup-ihopkc-103762/IHOP/569/803/Session%201%20%20Intro%20to%20Bob%20Jones%2C%20Paul%20Cain%2C%20and%20End%20Time%20Revival%20\(2019\).pdf](https://backup.storage.sardius.media/file/akamaiBackup-ihopkc-103762/IHOP/569/803/Session%201%20%20Intro%20to%20Bob%20Jones%2C%20Paul%20Cain%2C%20and%20End%20Time%20Revival%20(2019).pdf).

²⁸² Bickle, “Session 1 The Early Days,” https://backup.storage.sardius.media/file/akamaiBackup-ihopkc-103762/IHOP/907/887/20090917A-T-The_Early_Days_Cairo_Egypt_and_the_Solemn_Assembly_IPH01.pdf.

²⁸³ Bickle, “Session 1 The Early Days,” <https://backup.storage.sardius.media/file/akamaiBackup-ihopkc-103762/IHOP/907/887/20090917A-T->

coming through town and claiming to have “heard the audible voice of God” about Bickle’s life.²⁸⁴ This prophet tells Bickle that he will move from St. Louis, Missouri to Kansas City; that there will be “thousands of young people gathered from around the world;” and finally, that they will encounter a “false prophet” early in their ministry.²⁸⁵ Indeed, Bickle claims that all three of these prophecies were found to be true. First, through circumstances he claims were out of his control (an arrangement of his church’s pastors and elders), he became a youth pastor at a very large charismatic-evangelical Christian church, thereby speaking to thousands. Then, not long after, they asked him to move to Kansas City and start a new church plant, thereby fulfilling the second part of the prophecy. He admits there was a false prophet in his ministry, but it is difficult to identify which prophet is ultimately identified as false in the shifting prophetic history of IHOPKC.

It is after Bickle moves to Kansas City that he has his “Cairo experience.” Bickle set out to visit cities in developing nations in order to see “the poor of the earth.”²⁸⁶ It is during this visit to Cairo that Bickle has his first intensely felt encounter with God. In the 1996 version of his book *Growing in the Prophetic*, Bickle describes his encounter with

[The Early Days Cairo Egypt and the Solemn Assembly IPH01.pdf](#)

²⁸⁴ Bickle, “Session 1 The Early Days,” https://backup.storage.sardius.media/file/akamaiBackup-ihopkc-103762/IHOP/907/887/20090917A-T-The_Early_Days_Cairo_Egypt_and_the_Solemn_Assembly_IPH01.pdf

²⁸⁵ Bickle, “Session 1 The Early Days,” https://backup.storage.sardius.media/file/akamaiBackup-ihopkc-103762/IHOP/907/887/20090917A-T-The_Early_Days_Cairo_Egypt_and_the_Solemn_Assembly_IPH01.pdf

²⁸⁶ Mike Bickle and Michael Sullivant, *Growing in the Prophetic*, (Orlando, FL: Creation House, 1996), 29.

God in Cairo. He is very clear, “I didn’t have a vision, and I wasn’t caught up into heaven. I simply heard God speak to me.”²⁸⁷ It was not “the audible voice of God” but rather the “internal audible voice of God,” or the voice of God that is described by Luhrmann in *When God Talks Back*. The way that Vineyard communities hear and experience God is shared by a broader swath of evangelicals, which is part of what Bialecki attempts to account for in his diagram, the stretching and intersecting of various communities that fit under the name Christian. Bialecki identifies groups like IHOPKC as an “intensification” of the charismatic diagram, a group that heightens the practices of the Vineyard community.²⁸⁸ Bialecki argues that through the vast evangelical Christian media network, the teachings of Wimber or Bickle resonate more broadly across the evangelical Christian community. Important to Bickle as he describes his experience is the feeling—the encounter was “terrifying.”²⁸⁹ Bickle “literally trembled and wept,” or was deeply affected, as he heard the message that God will “change the understanding and expression of Christianity in the earth in one generation.”²⁹⁰ Now, from the vantage point of the present, at least the present of 2009 when the video was made, Bickle’s revelation describes the prayer movement at IHOPKC.

So, Bickle ends up “surrounded and caught up with a small group of unusual people who some referred to as prophets.”²⁹¹ Bickle does not view himself as a prophet—

²⁸⁷ Bickle and Sullivant, *Growing in*, 29.

²⁸⁸ Bialecki, *A Diagram*, 173.

²⁸⁹ Bickle and Sullivant, *Growing in*, 29.

²⁹⁰ Bickle and Sullivant, *Growing in*, 30.

²⁹¹ Bickle and Sullivant, *Growing in*, 13.

that is, as a person given the role and even office of prophet (which is popular in groups that embrace the New Apostolic Reformation, described later in the chapter.)²⁹² It is after the Cairo event that Bickle meets the first prophet who becomes part of his ministry, a man named Bob Jones. Jones, along with Paul Cain and John Paul Jackson, formed a group sometimes referred to as the “Kansas City Prophets.”²⁹³ Bickle met Bob Jones—not the Bob Jones of Bob Jones University—in March of 1983. He was a “strange looking fellow” and Bickle suspected him of being the warned-about false prophet.²⁹⁴ Jones walked into Bickle’s office and said “I’ve come to get you to believe in a movement that is world wide [sic] that is going to touch the nations of the earth with such power and glory that it will go far beyond the book of Acts.”²⁹⁵ Bickle, according to the story, was amazed and confused by this pronouncement. The next section of prophecies I recount are from the 1988 version of IHOPKC’s prophetic history, which was told by Bickle and Jones. Because this version of their history is from 1988, it is told before the 24-7 prayer had begun, indeed before there was an International House of Prayer. Bickle was still a pastor of a church that aspired to grow into a larger ministry.

In the 1988 version of the text, Jones’s position as prophet has a narrative history that includes a moment of calling. His calling is perhaps designed to place him within the

²⁹² Bickle and Sullivant, *Growing in*, 15.

²⁹³ Mike Bickle has disassociated himself from the Kansas City Prophets. See Mike Bickle, “Ask Mike Bickle: Who Are the Kansas City Prophets and Are You One of Them?” YouTube, January 9, 2015, Accessed March 29, 2021, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SD_fa_hdazI.

²⁹⁴ Bickle and Sullivant, *Growing in*, 34.

²⁹⁵ Mike Bickle and Bob Jones, “Visions and Revelations,” IHOP-KC Prophetic History (1988 Version), Accessed March 29, 2021, Original Transcript PDF: <http://www.ihopnetwork.com/ihop/BobIHOP/VisionsAndRevelations.pdf>, 30.

literary tradition of prophets within the Hebrew Bible. He claims his experiences of dreams and visions extend back to his childhood. At nine years old, walking down a dirt road in Arkansas, he “saw an angel come on a white horse and when the angel came, he came to rest in the middle [of] the road...and he had a great trumpet.”²⁹⁶ At age fifteen, “I was taken out of my body, I was taken before the throne. I saw things that so terrorized me and frightened me it took three months for my nervous system to calm down.”²⁹⁷ In other words, Jones encountered the throne of God and was affected, terrified, like Bickle in his first supernatural encounter. These visions, Jones claims, continued throughout his life—through a period as an addict and a visit to a mental health institution.

Jones’s experiences are taken by Bickle and his community to real; his experiences are manifestations of the supernatural. The Vineyard communities, I suggested with Luhrmann, tend to understand prophecy as individual words from God that members have for one another and share within a community. Bob Jones, in contrast, had an exceptional prophetic gifting. Remember that the practice of public prophecy is what caused a split between the Vineyard and Bickle’s ministry. The words that Jones gives to Bickle are for the whole community, indeed understood as for the whole earth. Bob Jones’s claims carry authority—power—for IHOPKC. And the prophecies were made public, woven into the narrative of the community in a way that tends not to be practiced in the Vineyard at the moment. Indeed, because Jones and Bickle have made

²⁹⁶ Bickle and Jones, “Visions,” PDF: <http://www.ihopnetwork.com/ihop/BobIHOP/VisionsAndRevelations.pdf>, 1.

²⁹⁷ Bickle and Jones, “Visions,” PDF: <http://www.ihopnetwork.com/ihop/BobIHOP/VisionsAndRevelations.pdf>, 1.

claims that are public, their claims have had to be revised. Specifically, I argue that Bickle has revised the prophetic history of IHOPKC to soften or eliminate prophecies that the broader evangelical Christian community considers heretical—or at least socially unacceptable. In fact, Bickle remade his prophetic history to write out Bob Jones after Jones left the ministry.²⁹⁸ The prophetic history is mutable; there is always power moving.

According to the 1988 version of the prophetic history, in 1975, Jones begins to prophesize about Kansas City, claiming that it would be one “stream” of an “end-time” movement.²⁹⁹ During an out-of-body vision, Jones, hovering over his body, saw two angels guarding his body; one angel said to the other “look it shall begin in Kansas City.”³⁰⁰ Then Jones began to see the Arrowhead stadium in the vision called “Truman Sport Complex,” which is an imagined name that carries meaning for Bickle and Jones because of their belief that President Truman loved the State of Israel.³⁰¹ In the vision, 50,000 people gathered to “lift their hands in unity” and then “it was like power came out of their hands and it began to shoot holes in the darkness of the second heaven.”³⁰² Then,

²⁹⁸ Jones is acknowledged, even celebrated, in the 2019 version of the history, I wrote this before the 2019 version of the prophetic history was released. Bickle, “Session 1 Intro to,” https://mikebickle.org/watch/2019_08_23_1800_MB_FC.

²⁹⁹ Bickle and Jones, “Visions,” PDF: <http://www.ihopnetwork.com/ihop/BobIHOP/VisionsAndRevelations.pdf>, 21.

³⁰⁰ Bickle and Jones, “Visions,” PDF: <http://www.ihopnetwork.com/ihop/BobIHOP/VisionsAndRevelations.pdf>, 18.

³⁰¹ Bickle and Jones, “Visions,” PDF: <http://www.ihopnetwork.com/ihop/BobIHOP/VisionsAndRevelations.pdf>, 19.

³⁰² Bickle and Jones, “Visions,” PDF: <http://www.ihopnetwork.com/ihop/BobIHOP/VisionsAndRevelations.pdf>, 18.

“a great bolt of light was put over the place” and the “people that this light touched would just start to dance and sing and twirl and other people within a block or so of it didn’t even affect.”³⁰³ Jones had “50-100 visions of this army that was going to be coming...the majority of them would be young people.”³⁰⁴

Jones’s prophecies seem to contain the seeds of what the IHOPKC ministry has become (indeed what it was already becoming in 1988). The story depicts Jones asking Bickle if he is a musician, a query later understood to depict Bickle’s oversight of the music ministry that flourishes at IHOPKC. Over the course of twenty years the ministry held gatherings of young people at an annual conference called One Thing where the people have intense experiences of God—people do “lift their hands in unison” (albeit in a different Kansas City venue than the one in the prophecy).³⁰⁵ Indeed, even intercession is part of the description at this point—later in the vision Jones sees the stadium filled with “grain,” which is an indication of a harvest to be had in Kansas City, metaphorically that “the Lord would set his heart to raise up intercessors in the heartland.”³⁰⁶ Again, in retrospect the visions and prophetic words laid out by Jones and Bickle in the 1988 version of the prophetic history appear to present the grounds for the ministry at

³⁰³ Bickle and Jones, “Visions,” PDF: <http://www.ihopnetwork.com/ihop/BobIHOP/VisionsAndRevelations.pdf>, 19.

³⁰⁴ Bickle and Jones, “Visions,” PDF: <http://www.ihopnetwork.com/ihop/BobIHOP/VisionsAndRevelations.pdf>, 28.

³⁰⁵ Mike Bickle, “Why This is Our Last Onething Conference for Some Years,” IHOPKC, October 26, 2018, Accessed April 4, 2021, <https://www.ihopkc.org/resources/blog/last-onething-conference/>.

³⁰⁶ There is also a literal claim that the heartlands will provide grain to meet a famine coming in the 1990s or turn of the century. IHOPKC has never, to my knowledge, become involved in farming. This prophecy is obviously easily disproved, but can be understood as a claim of control and authority that fits with what I argue later in the chapter. Bickle and Jones, “Visions,” PDF: <http://www.ihopnetwork.com/ihop/BobIHOP/VisionsAndRevelations.pdf>, 22-23.

IHOPKC. It is for this reason that IHOPKC continues telling these stories to their community, just like the Romans told the stories that made sense of their political past. The prophecies serve to shore up their self-understanding in the present, while imagining a future where the kingdom of God is fully present.

Yet, prophecy is not a *straightforward* truth, because while the kingdom of God has come, it is not yet fully present. Prophetic truth is, of course, supposed to be subjected to biblical truth—and IHOPKC’s claim to scriptural hermeneutics is similar to that of the Creation Museum. To find these claims, it is necessary to navigate to the “Affirmations and Denials” section of IHOPKC’s vast website. Here they claim “We deny that subjective prophetic experiences are equal to the inspired Word of God. In other words, all personal prophecy must uphold and honor the Scripture.”³⁰⁷ Further the IHOPKC’s website states,

We affirm that the Bible is the inerrant and sole objective source of direction and wisdom for the life of a believer. We believe in the operation of the prophetic ministry as a source of edification, exhortation, and comfort from the Lord (1 Cor. 14:3). We believe that the subjectivity of the prophetic ministry must be vigorously tested against the inspired and infallible Scriptures that God gave for doctrine, reproof, correction, and instruction in righteousness (2 Tim. 3:16).³⁰⁸

IHOPKC sees the biblical text as “objective” truth and prophecy as “subjective” truth. At

³⁰⁷ “What does IHOPKC believe about the use of prophecy,” Affirmations and Denials, IHOPKC, Accessed March 29, 2021, <https://www.ihopkc.org/press-center/faq/ihopkc-believe-use-prophecy/>.

³⁰⁸ “What does IHOPKC believe about the use of prophecy,” <https://www.ihopkc.org/press-center/faq/ihopkc-believe-use-prophecy/>.

first this sounds similar to what is claimed by the Creation Museum, where scripture serves to ground the “Word of God” and in turn anchors the claim that the universe is young. Yet the objectivity of scripture is not clearly defined. Remember that Bickle describes prophecy as a kind of parable. He claims, “Truth is given in the form of parables” and “parables have two purposes:” “to make truth easy” and to “make truth difficult.”³⁰⁹ In other words, for Bickle, prophecy is a site of truth, but also of epistemological disjunction, or difficulty—just as parts of scripture, for example parables, are a site of epistemological challenge.³¹⁰ I contend that IHOPKC’s assertion of scriptural objectivity is designed to assure the broader evangelical Christian and fundamentalist Christian community that they can still be identified as part of that community, rather than a reflection of a their commitment to a historical-critical reading of the biblical text.³¹¹

Indeed, IHOPKC’s need for an “Affirmations and Denials” section on their website indicates their ongoing struggle to remain within the boundaries of evangelical Christian orthodoxy. Several claims in the affirmation and denial section owe their

³⁰⁹ Bickle, “Session 1 The Early Days,” https://backup.storage.sardius.media/file/akamaiBackup-ihopkc-103762/IHOP/907/887/20090917A-T-The_Early_Days_Cairo_Egypt_and_the_Solemn_Assembly_IPH01.pdf.

³¹⁰ Bickle’s shifting relationship with scripture can also be seen in his reading of Song of Solomon, which made him famous. He read the book as an allegory for the pleasure it is possible to have in the presence of God. Bickle recommends the “historical-grammatical interpretation” of the text unless there is an indication it can be read otherwise. Bickle acknowledges that historical readings see the Song of Solomon as a love poem, but cites precedent for reading the text allegorically. See Mike Bickle, “A Note on Allegorical Interpretation of Scripture,” The Song of Solomon, February 7, 2014, Accessed March 29, 2021, https://backup.storage.sardius.media/file/akamaiBackup-ihopkc-103762/IHOP/275/751/20140207_Avoiding_The_Dangers_of_Allegorical_Interpretation.pdf.

³¹¹ While IHOPKC is deeply interested in the end of the world, there is not a great deal of interest in the literal age of the earth as far as I can tell.

appearance to the 1988 prophetic history that was later revised. The early version of the prophetic history is no longer available on their website, but has been archived by admirers of this ministry.

The use of prophecy at IHOPKC is informed by prophetic ministries reaching back to the World War II healing revivals that swept across the Midwest of the U.S. and Canada.³¹² Another of the founding prophets of IHOPKC, Paul Cain, was actually a prominent figure in these healing revivals and worked closely with the prophet William Marrion Branham. William Branham began his career as a healer, moving in the same circles as Oral Roberts, and ended it as an “eschatological prophet” whose mission was to “prepare the Bride for the rapture.”³¹³ Branham’s apocalypticism—the very dispensationalism that George Ladd’s kingdom theology attempts to harmonize—included a heightened sense of urgency that the end times were close and that Christians needed to be prepared for the coming of the Lord. IHOPKC’s mission carries a contemporary manifestation of this urgency.³¹⁴ At the end of his career Branham made claims that pressed the boundaries of Christian orthodoxy too far, and is now either forgotten or viewed as a heretic. After his death in a car crash in 1965, Branham’s complicated legacy continues in groups that maintain an archive of his preaching and

³¹² Richard Riss, “The Latter Rain Movement of 1948,” *Pneuma* 4, 2 (January 1982): 32-45, Brill. This article claims that these movements fell out of acceptance in the Pentecostal communities, but influenced the charismatic movements of the 1960s and 70s. (This article is from 1982, so before the 1988 history)

³¹³ C. Douglas Weaver, *The Healer-Prophet: William Marrion Branham*, (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 2000), 139.

³¹⁴ Bickle’s latest book and website project is a renewed effort to teach about the end times. “Did You Know There Are 150+ Chapters About the End Times,” The Center for End-Times Biblical Studies, IHOPKC, Accessed April 4, 2021, <https://www.ihopkc.org/cbets/>.

even a small group that view Branham as partially divine and the greatest prophet to have appeared on earth.³¹⁵

I hear echoes of several of the apocalyptically fueled prophecies circulated by Branham's ministry and other intersecting ministries, like the Latter Rain Movement, in the 1988 prophetic history presented by Jones and Bickle. The aim here is not to draw straight lines of historical causation, but rather to look at the resonances and intersections of similar claims in order to understand how they move through in U.S. Christianity and contribute to on-going projects of subject formation. This project, like Bialecki's diagram, seeks to understand how the practice of prophecy makes and remakes claims that press at the boundaries of U.S. evangelical Christian orthodoxy—just as the prophets and movements (segments of Latter Rain Movement are also viewed as heretical) who make those claims get written in and out of various versions of IHOPKC's prophetic history.³¹⁶ I argue that the remaking of prophetic claims is what makes it possible for

³¹⁵ Weaver, *The Healer-Prophet*, 141.

³¹⁶ IHOPKC also denies a connection to the Latter Rain Movement: We affirm that the Church will experience the greatest outpouring of the Spirit in history before Jesus returns (Joel 2:28–32). This outpouring will result in a great ingathering of souls and a renewing of the Church so that believers will walk in godliness as declared in the Sermon on the Mount (Mt. 5:1–7:28). We affirm the presence of the fivefold ministry for the equipping of the saints (Eph. 4:11–13). We deny the distinctive doctrines that go beyond Scripture that are often associated with the Latter Rain theology that was popularized in the 1950s. Explanation: Some have wrongly identified our ministry today with the false teachings that were popularized by some in the Latter Rain movement. At no time in the past did we have any relationship with this movement. “What does IHOPKC believe about ‘the Latter Rain’ theology,” Affirmations and Denials, IHOPKC, Accessed April 4, 2021, <https://www.ihopkc.org/press-center/faq/ihopkc-believe-latter-rain-theology/>. Interestingly, IHOPKC does not note what parts of the Latter Rain movement they specifically deny. In the 1949 minutes of the Assemblies of God annual meeting, the mainstream Pentecostal community deny a relationship with the “New Order of the Latter Rain,” first, because the Azusa Street movement was already considered the “Latter Rain.” Specifically they deny: 1. The overemphasis relative to imparting, identifying, bestowing, or confirming of gifts by the laying on of hands and prophecy; 2. The erroneous teaching that the Church is built on the foundation of present-day apostles and prophets; 3. The extreme teaching as advocated by the “New Order” regarding the confession of sin to man and deliverance as practiced, which claims prerogatives to human agency which belong only to Christ; 4. The erroneous teaching concerning the impartation of the gift of languages as special equipment for missionary service; 5. The extreme and unscriptural practice of imparting or imposing personal leadings by the means of gifts of

IHOPKC to remain within the boundaries of respectable evangelical Christianity while also claiming nodes of power that are tied to the prophecies. What this modern species of prophecy moves through time is *power*. Schmittian sovereign power makes exceptional claims that seek to make some people exceptional, while excepting others from citizenship. The claims that set the norms, the rules, the laws—implicit and explicit—for a community shape the subjects that move within that community. Truth-claims and subjects, individual and collective, co-emerge within a community.

One such claim, the “Manifest Sons of God” doctrine, appears in the list of denials published by IHOPKC. The denial says “Some uphold the false teaching that in this age believers can have faith that will enable them to attain the qualities of life that are reserved only for believers in the resurrection.”³¹⁷ Yet, hints of this doctrine appear in the 1998 version of their prophetic history. Jones claimed that the coming prayer movement will be staffed by “the best of all generations” who are “elected seeds” who are destined to “glorify Christ in the last days.”³¹⁸ This doctrine can be traced, in part, to a segment of

utterance; 6. Such other wrestings and distortions of scripture which are in opposition to the teachings and practices generally accepted among us. Accessed via the online archives, “The General Council-Assemblies of God,” *Consortium of Pentecostal Archives*, October 1, 1949, Accessed April 4, 2021, https://pentecostalarchives.org/digitalPublications/USA/Assemblies%20of%20God%20USA/Assemblies%20of%20God%20Ministers%20Letter/Unregistered/1949/FPHC/1949_10_01.pdf#search=%22latter%20rain%22 and “The General Council-Assemblies of God,” *Consortium of Pentecostal Archives*, April 20, 1949, Accessed April 4, 2021, https://pentecostalarchives.org/digitalPublications/USA/Assemblies%20of%20God%20USA/Assemblies%20of%20God%20Ministers%20Letter/Unregistered/1949/FPHC/1949_04_20.pdf#search=%22latter%20rain%22. Note that the teachings renounced by the Assemblies of God are very similar to ones still practiced by IHOPKC. So their renunciation, is a remaking, in its own way, of an earlier one made by the AOG.

³¹⁷ “What does IHOPKC believe about ‘the Latter Rain’ theology,” <https://www.ihopkc.org/press-center/faq/ihopkc-believe-latter-rain-theology/>.

³¹⁸ Bickle and Jones, “Visions,” PDF: <http://www.ihopnetwork.com/ihop/BobIHOP/VisionsAndRevelations.pdf>, 46.

the Latter Rain movement, which understood itself as part of a renewed outpouring of the spirit of God, meant to water a special generation of Christians, who would usher in the return of Christ.³¹⁹ Jones says that the young people who will come forth in Kansas City “will possess the spirit without measure—for they are the best of all the generations that have ever been upon the face of the earth.”³²⁰ The Latter Rain movement co-existed with and influenced William Branham whose eventual fall out of evangelical orthodoxy came when he began to be called the prophesied “Son of Man”—a title he did not give to himself initially, but appears to have accepted towards the end of his career. Branham eventually saw himself as a special manifestation of the spirit of God, something like what was predicted by the Manifest Sons of God Doctrine.

The Manifest Sons of God doctrine touches another controversial doctrine that was espoused by William Branham, “the serpent’s seed” doctrine. Branham claims Eve’s original sin was having sex with the serpent (though for Branham the serpent was not understood to be the devil), which resulted in a literal lineage of evil people through Cain whose descendants include “the giants of Genesis 6, Ham, Ahab, and Judas Iscariot.”³²¹ For Branham, the broader descendants of Cain are people—theologians and scientists—who appear Christian, but do not accept the “supernatural” gospel as preached by

³¹⁹ See Mark Hutchinson, “Chapter 12: The Latter Rain Movement and the Phenomenon of Global Return” in *Winds From the North*, eds. Michael Wilkinson and Peter Althouse, (Boston, MA: Brill, 2010), 265-282.—the phrase “spirit without measure” is from John 3:34. On the current Manifest Sons of God Doctrine see: David Cloud, “Latter Rain and Manifest Sons of God,” *Way of Life Literature*, March 8, 2012, Accessed April 5, 2021, https://www.wayoflife.org/reports/latter_rain_and_manifest_sons_of_god.html.

³²⁰ Bickle and Jones, “Visions,” PDF: <http://www.ihopnetwork.com/ihop/BobIHOP/VisionsAndRevelations.pdf>, 44.

³²¹ Weaver, *The Healer-Prophet*, 124.

Branham.

In the 1990s, the serpent's seed doctrine became the foundation of the "Christian Identity" movement. The movement, which spawned a group of U.S. churches, sees the descendents of Cain—or the Jewish people—to be literally the seed of the devil.³²² A contemporary version of the serpent's seed doctrine is written in Dan Gayman's 1994 book *The Two Seeds of Genesis 3:15*. According to the Southern Poverty Law Center, the influence of Christian Identity has waned since the late 1990s.³²³ Their 2019 annual hate map "noted a growing interest in Christian Identity beliefs among some neo-Confederates" though "Christian Identity churches dropped from 17 in 2018 to 11 in 2019."³²⁴ This suggests that versions of the serpent's seed doctrine disappear and reappear, reasserting racial superiority. The racial claims of the serpent's seed doctrine circulates alongside the claims of the Manifest Sons of God. Jones's description of "elected seeds" in the 1988 prophecy is not explicitly claiming racial superiority, but I argue it touches the power of the other prophecies, like the serpent's seed doctrine, which continues to move at the fringe of the charismatic-evangelical Christian movement.

Another now-controversial doctrine visible in the 1988 prophetic history is a

³²² See Jon F. Schamber and Scott R. Stroud, "Mystical Anti-Semitism and the Christian Identity Movement: A narrative Criticism of Dan Gayman's *The Two Seeds of Genesis 3:15*," Paper presented at the Eighty-sixth Annual Meeting of the National Communication Association, Seattle, Washington, November 2000, <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED447517.pdf>. Branham also preached at the People's Temple before Jones moved them all to Guyana. John Collins and Peter M. Duyzer, "The Intersection of William Branham and Jim Jones," *Alternative Considerations of Jonestown and People's Temple*, Accessed April 4, 2021, https://jonestown.sdsu.edu/?page_id=61481.

³²³ "Christian Identity," Southern Poverty Law Center, Accessed April 4, 2021, <https://www.splcenter.org/fighting-hate/extremist-files/ideology/christian-identity>.

³²⁴ "The Year in Hate and Extremism 2019," Southern Poverty Law Center, March 18, 2020, Accessed April 4, 2021, <https://www.splcenter.org/news/2020/03/18/year-hate-and-extremism-2019>.

theocratic vision of government. While young people are envisioned as the possessors of supernatural gifts granted by “spirit without measure,” they will not lead the movement; their parents will. Conveniently, Mike Bickle’s generation is imagined as the leadership for the elect generation. Bob Jones claims, “the church is raising up...government [that] will be the head covering for [this generation of elect seed].”³²⁵ This idea of “head covering” refers to some version of what has come to be called the New Apostolic Reformation (NAR), which claims that in the end times Apostles and Prophets will emerge to lead the church. As already noted, William Branham subscribed to some version of this doctrine as he saw the office of the prophet to be returned to the earth as part of an end-times scenario. The movement is connected to “dominionism,” which is the claim that a nation governed by biblical principles is possible—and the NAR is connected to efforts to have Christians take leadership in every area of life, which are often referred to as the seven spheres or mountains of society: religion, family, education, government, media, arts and entertainment, and business.³²⁶

There are multiple historical strands weaving this theocratic thinking through recent history. Clayton Crockett, whose work I engage in the next chapter in order to more explicitly tie charismatic-evangelical Christianity to the broader political scene, links the rise of the Religious Right to “Christian Reconstruction” a movement rooted in a form of Calvinism that can be traced back to 18th-century puritanism. Philosopher

³²⁵ Bickle and Jones, “Visions,” PDF: <http://www.ihopnetwork.com/ihop/BobIHOP/VisionsAndRevelations.pdf>, 44.

³²⁶ Amazingly, IHOPKC has a new version of the 7 Mountain movement live on their website: “Ministries,” IHOPKC, Accessed April 5, 2021, <https://www.ihopkc.org/ministries/>.

Rousas John Rushdoony notably popularized the “universal applicability of the Biblical Law of Moses.” Key to the discussion of the Vineyard and IHOPKC is C. Peter Wagner, who coined the phrase New Apostolic Reformation and whose movement Bialecki identifies as an intensification of the charismatic diagram.³²⁷ Wagner claims Kingdom Now theology can be “traced back through R. J. Rushdoony and Abraham Kuyper to John Calvin.”³²⁸ Wagner became interested in intercession that takes “dominion” over the land, stemming from a “Kingdom Now” theology, which claims that Satan has control over the seven “kingdoms” of society or “spheres” of society that are listed above to use Bickle’s language. Wagner was Wimber’s sponsor at Fuller Theological Seminary when he taught his famous course in the miraculous.³²⁹ Bialecki calls Wagner’s NAR movement an intensification of the Vineyard movement because of Wagner’s intense focus on praying for dominion over the land and the assumption of apostolic offices—like preacher, prophet, etc.—which eventually forced a wedge between Wagner and Wimber. Bialecki specifically notes that Wimber concentrated on democratizing the practice of the miraculous, while Wagner focused on elevating certain people to positions of power. Though Wagner and Wimber formally split ways, versions of the claim that God will take over government—perhaps the most literal claim to Schmittian sovereignty ever made—continue to circulate through various charismatic Christian movements.

Now, both the Manifest Sons of God and the NAR—the serpent’s seed is not

³²⁷ Bialecki, *A Diagram*, 174.

³²⁸ C. Peter Wagner, *Dominion!: How Kingdom Action Can Change the World*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Chosen Books, 2008), 59.

³²⁹ Bialecki, *A Diagram*, 301.

mentioned—are formally disavowed by IHOPKC on their website. And, as this chapter earlier stated, the 1988 version of their prophetic history is not made available by IHOPKC, a decision which is probably partially motivated by the fact that the prophet Bob Jones was asked to leave IHOPKC for alleged sexual misconduct.³³⁰ Yet, arguably, powers drawn from disavowed doctrines are still key to IHOPKC’s self-understanding. In other words, in the midst of the intense affective practices that make up the worship and prayer at IHOPKC, claims to power that resonate with the Manifest Sons of God, Serpent’s Seed, and Dominion Theology, are part of the learning that takes place and therefore the projects of subject formation at the ministry. However, these claims have been remade in ways that allow them to remain within the boundaries of “respectable” evangelical Christianity. What results is a demonstration of how white supremacy and authoritarianism become sublimated into their prophetic history and are drawn through time by their intensely affective practices.

The evangelical community has broadly rejected the claim that certain Christians are “manifest sons of God,” and so has IHOPKC. While the claim that Christians can be divinized has persisted throughout the history of Christianities, it is broadly understood as heresy amongst protestant Christians. The lesser claim made by Jones, that there will be an end-time generation with a greater anointing, is less obviously heretical—however, it carries the assertion that the Holy Spirit is not democratic in its anointing, which goes

³³⁰ Mike Bickle in recent years has returned Jones to the story, while admitting Jones was “flawed”. Bickle, “Session 1 Intro to,” https://mikebickle.org/watch/2019_08_23_1800_MB_FC. Mike Bickle, A website has gathered evidence of Jones’s misdeeds, but I am not in the position to evaluate this evidence. “Bob Jones,” Apologetics Index, Accessed April 5, 2021, <https://www.apologeticsindex.org/3721-bob-jones#return-note-3721-1>, PDF evidence: https://apologeticsindex.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/02/Bob_Jones_documentation_1.pdf.

against the contemporary impulse for social equality. Arguably, evangelicals seek to maintain, like Wimber, democratic access to the Holy Spirit. Indeed, again, IHOPKC is clear on their Affirmations and Denials page that “all born-again believers will be ‘manifest’ as sons of God after the second coming of Christ.”³³¹ In other words, all Christians will be able to manifest the supernatural gifts of the Holy Spirit.

Yet this denial does not attend to the ways the language of “son” and “seed” that is used to present the Manifest Sons of God doctrine is racially charged. To see a pair of white leaders position themselves as the parents of a generation who are “elected seeds” is to insinuate that people who come from and look like them—white, cisgendered, heterosexual, able-bodied men—are the ones who will manifest the power of God. Even if the prophecy is presumed to be metaphorical, I contend that it matters what the prophets look like, because white leaders bring a history of white supremacy and the attendant colonial impulse into the narrative, whether they mean to or not.

The prayer-ministers working at IHOPKC still understand themselves as “forerunners,” or as people called to usher in the return of Jesus.³³² The forerunner is modelled on their understanding of John the Baptist’s role in the gospel narrative—he prepared the way for Jesus. The ministers at IHOPKC are now preparing the way for Jesus to return, resurrect Christians (here are the “manifest sons of God”), and then rule for a thousand years over the millennial kingdom. Therefore, while they are aligned with

³³¹ “What does IHOPKC believe about the Manifest Sons of God theology” Affirmations and Denials, IHOPKC, Accessed April 5, 2021, <https://www.ihopkc.org/press-center/faq/ihopkc-believe-manifest-sons-god-theology/>.

³³² Adam Wittenberg, “Preparing People for Jesus’ Return,” IHOPKC, March 9, 2017, Accessed April 5, 2021, <https://www.ihopkc.org/resources/blog/preparing-people-jesus-return/>.

the Jewish people who hope for the success of Israel, IHOPKC hopes for them to be converted to Christianity, which perpetuates a supercessionist narrative that resonates with the claims of the serpent's seed doctrine. Interestingly, IHOPKC claims they do not support what they call "replacement" theology, which views Christians as a replacement for the Jewish people. Nonetheless, for IHOPKC the relationship between Christianity and Judaism has a racial vibration that links to the racial climate in the contemporary U.S.

In a video from the "Islam, Racism, and Israel" track at their 2015 young people's conference One Thing , Stuart Greaves, the one black man in senior leadership at IHOPKC, presided over a panel called "Understanding the Racial Atmosphere in America." The panel presented the strife between Black and white people in America as a precursor of the end-times events. At the outset of his remarks, Greaves quotes Jesus's words in Matthew 24:7, a passage that Greaves frames as the "signs of the times" or signs that the world will end. In the scripture, Jesus predicts "For nation shall rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom." Greaves interprets kingdom against kingdom as conflict between modern nation states; nation against nation is "ethnos against ethnos," which Greaves claims is a fight that pits people group against people group. To understand the contemporary racial climate in America, Greave creates slippage between ethnic group and racial group, arguing that the racial tensions between Black and white people are the "training context for the church of Jesus Christ." Greaves makes this argument because, "the greatest racial, most oppressive, most vile issue that is emerging in the whole world, the hostility between Jew and Gentile."³³³ This ethnic, or racial,

³³³ Stuart Greaves, "Understanding the Racial Climate in America," IHOPKC, YouTube, March

conflict between the Jews and the Gentiles is key to Mike Bickle’s apocalyptic narrative, which in turn fuels the mission at IHOPKC .

In a 2009 One Thing Conference Bickle presented a keynote called “The Battle for Jerusalem: Litmus Test for the End-times Church.” In the notes for this lecture, Bickle lays out the battle that will happen at the city of Jerusalem at the end of the world—“a spiritual, political, and military battle for the control of Jerusalem” that will only be ended by Jesus defeating Satan and taking the throne in the city.³³⁴ Before Jesus takes Jerusalem, according to Bickle’s narrative, Satan will try to stop the return of Jesus to power by controlling the Jewish people. And, according to Bickle’s reading of scripture, the Jewish people will make a covenant with the Antichrist, asking him to be their first messianic leader. Bickle claims Jesus will not take the city from the Jewish people; rather, their leadership will hand it over to him after one third have converted to the Christian faith (the other two-thirds will be killed).

Finally, Bickle explains that the “nations” or the Gentiles will rise up against the Jewish people as part of this battle. The “*litmus test*” for Christians is to obey “*Jesus’ sovereign leadership*” by supporting Israel against an army of Gentiles.³³⁵ The website

17, 2016, Accessed April 5, 2021, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yVcXLUtzxdY>. Found via Christina Bennett, “How a White Pastor Came to Understand the Evils and Hypocrisy of Racism,” *Faithfully*, May 16, 2017, Accessed April 5, 2021, <https://faithfullymagazine.com/white-pastor-evils-hypocrisy-racism/>.

³³⁴ Mike Bickle, “The Battle for Jerusalem: Litmus test for the End-Time Church,” December 31, 2009, Accessed April 5, 2021, video: https://mikebickle.org/watch/mb_2910, PDF Notes: https://backup.storage.sardius.media/file/akamaiBackup-ihopkc-103762/IHOP/87/415/20091231A_Introducing_the_Battle_for_Jerusalem-The_Main_Issues_WSS06.pdf, 1.

³³⁵ Bickle, “The Battle,” https://backup.storage.sardius.media/file/akamaiBackup-ihopkc-103762/IHOP/87/415/20091231A_Introducing_the_Battle_for_Jerusalem-The_Main_Issues_WSS06.pdf, 1.

for IHOPKC’s “Israel Mandate” more clearly makes this argument, stating “the Armageddon campaign is a battle for Jerusalem” and that “military forces of all nations [not the faithful Christians] will gather in one place and lay siege against Jerusalem.”³³⁶ In other words, IHOPKC understands a racialized war to be a part of the unfolding of the end of the world. The racial issues in America now—issues of black and white—are preparing Christians to fight a war against the “the Gentiles” on behalf of the Jews (who have become Christians).

Bickle’s latest book, *God’s Answer to the Growing Crisis: A Bold Call to Action in the End Times*, published in 2017, is a reaction to Bickle’s perception that secular humanism is taking over U.S. life. Bickle claims that there is not only a move to “secularize” America, there is a call to “*de-Christianize*.”³³⁷ As part of this narrative, Bickle positions what he calls “radical Islam,” as a force that will trigger the third world war, which will not be fought kingdom against kingdom, across nation-states, but rather will be ethnos against ethnos, a racialized fight. The third world war will consist of “guerrilla-warfare-type” attacks staged by terrorist groups who seek to have extreme Islamic “values, law, and religious practice... enforced with violence across the whole world.”³³⁸ Bickle positions “radical Islam” as having its own apocalyptic narrative, which operates as the gnostic antithesis of the Christian story.³³⁹ According to Bickle, Islam

³³⁶ “Prayer for Israel,” Israel Mandate, IHOPKC, Accessed April 5, 2021, <https://www.ihopkc.org/israelmandate/prayer-for-israel/>.

³³⁷ Mike Bickle, *God’s Answer to the Growing Crisis: A Bold Call to Action in the End Times*, (Lake Mary, FL: Charisma House, 2017), 5.

³³⁸ Bickle, *God’s Answer*, 12.

³³⁹ Bickle’s narrative of course does not address Islam’s rich apocalyptic traditions on their own terms; nor does it address the very real damage that the U.S. has inflicted on Islamic populations in the

seeks to control Jerusalem and therefore views the United States as “big Satan” blocking the way to Israel, which is “little Satan.”³⁴⁰ In other words, the battle for Jerusalem, which will be a racial war marked by anti-Semitism, is, at least in part, to be “radical” Muslim against Christian. Indeed, the overarching narrative of *God’s Answer to the Growing Crisis* is the claim that Christians will be persecuted, first socially and then physically, by being rounded up and thrown into jail.³⁴¹ Though the non-Jewish Christians are counted amongst the so-called Gentiles that will rise up against Jerusalem, Bickle’s claims about Islam’s role in this story has the effect of racializing Islam and presenting the United States, as a nation, as a force against Islam.³⁴²

For IHOPKC, the racial tensions in the U.S are a sign that IHOPKC is pushing towards the end of times. Though they make some gestures towards racial reconciliation in the present, their gestures continue to be in contest with the role of racial conflict in the end of the world and IHOPKC exists to usher in the end of the world.³⁴³ As a result, the Black Lives Matter movement is practice for a coming battle—“ethnos against ethnos”—which will end in the violent triumph of Gentile and Jewish Christians over what Bickle

Middle East and around the world. Bickle, *God’s Answer*, 12.

³⁴⁰ Bickle, *God’s Answer*, 27.

³⁴¹ Bickle, *God’s Answer*, 77.

³⁴² Here I am reading together the claims in *God’s Answer to the Growing Crisis* and claims from a variety of earlier sermons. Note that Bickle’s claims Islam also suggest that Muslims as decedents of Abraham will be converted

³⁴³ Even in a 2016 sermon in response to the murder of Black people at the hands of the police, Bickle argues that God is going to unify the Black and white community because it is promised as part of the end times movement, while also, saying that it is a matter of human dignity. The claim to end times power is always in tension with giving up power...
https://www.ihopkc.org/resources/asset/2016_07_10_1100_MB_FCF/auto/true/

primarily describes as Islam. Islam is the racialized other at the end of the world as Black people are now. The nationalistic view of the United States as aligned with Israel is fueled by white supremacy.

In other words, while Bickle might not currently espouse the Serpent's Seed doctrine, he might preach something about the sons of Ishmael that is equally founded on an idea of white racial superiority.³⁴⁴ The Serpent's Seed doctrine or even Bickle's current prophecies are not what matters—what matters is the claim to authority. At the beginning of this chapter, I explained that prophecy is linked to authority. In the Roman State, it was governmental authority. Here it is a claim of racial authority that makes and remakes itself but always seeks to assert the sovereignty of white people (even if white people includes Jewish Christians, or some Black Christians). So the intensely affective scene at the opening of this chapter is designed to reassure people that God is real—intense feelings are evidence that God is moving, just like at the Vineyard church. And then the intense experience, the music, connects people to an exceptional claim which exerts Schmittian sovereign authority. In this case, it is an apocalyptic narrative and while it is not explicitly racist, at least not in a stereotypical way, the excitement and intensity of its assertion moves familiar powers. The claim feels like a new revelation of what God is doing, recast as a new racialized battle for the end of the world, but it is actually a repetition of familiar forms of political power. Remember how the Creation Museum worked to activate racist claims in its Graffiti Alley? These kinds of Schmittian sovereignties do not need explicit concepts to move them—they are embedded within the

³⁴⁴ Anecdotally, I once had an insider to Bickle's community tell me that at that time (approx. 15 years ago) Oprah was being seen as the Antichrist!

power structures of the U.S. and are easily incited by excitement and linked to novel versions of the same old claims. The excitement at IHOPKC resonates with the Serpent's Seed claims or with an anti-Black sentiment, depending on the individual subject, and therefore shapes a collective who are mobilized as part of a nationalistic, racialized end times battle.

And when it comes to theocracies: Bickle claims that Jesus will rule over a literal thousand-year kingdom, assisted by resurrected Christians—his clarification, designed to separate his movement from the New Apostolic Reformation, states that Christians won't take over government until after the tribulation. Bickle has merely toned down his public language: IHOPKC removed the description of the millennial kingdom as a “theocratic dictatorship under Jesus Christ” from their website in the mid-2000s.³⁴⁵ While Bickle claims that Christians will not take over the government until after the return of Christ, Bickle still inserts himself into current politics. Notably, he endorsed Ted Cruz for the GOP nominee in 2015 because of Cruz's position on Israel (Bickle later had to clarify that some of the language of his endorsement was not anti-Semitic). After the election of Donald Trump, Bickle has had to double back on his language, adopting a version of the Darius/imperfect vessel argument, which sees Donald Trump as the flawed leader who will allow the people to return from Babylonian captivity.³⁴⁶ In other words, Bickle's

³⁴⁵ “Learning IHOP-ese: Glossary of Terms and Acronyms used at the IHOP-KC Missions Base” International House of Prayer <http://www.ihop.org/Publisher/Article.aspx?ID=1000002954>. Accessed March 13, 2021, via the Wayback Machine on the Internet Archive, <https://web.archive.org/>. This list was available at least from Dec 2007 until September 2008.

³⁴⁶ For example: James S Gordon, “Does the ‘Cyrus prophecy’ help explain evangelical support for Donald Trump?” *The Guardian*, March 23, 2017, Accessed April 5, 2021, <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2017/mar/23/cyrus-prophecy-evangelical-support-donald-trump>.

teachings, which are mediated through prophecies, are constantly attempting to reassert the authority of God in the government—which, arguably, is a literal call for Schmittian sovereignty in government. No wonder Donald Trump’s proto-fascism or authoritarianism-lite is appealing to his evangelical Christian audience. Carl Schmitt’s discussion of the sovereign exception led Schmitt to support the authoritarianism of Hitler’s regime and it is not hard to imagine Bickle’s discussion of the exception doing something similar. Donald Trump’s proto-fascism has been hungry for these kinds of claims.

IHOPKC’s practice of prophecy articulates exceptions—exceptions which position the community and their people, white evangelical Christians, as the leaders of the country. Bickle’s book opens not with a reflection on radical Islam but rather on the courts allowing same-sex marriage and how it is allowing a slippery fall into legal pedophilia. This is not a new claim; but it is being made with renewed conviction and new ability to convince the young people who make up most of the staff and participants at IHOPKC. Claims to white cisgendered heterosexual able-bodied masculine superiority are reasserted with new language at IHOPKC and then are coupled with music, with affective intensity that excites human beings and which for evangelical Christians demonstrates that that a teaching comes from God—is truth.

This chapter is arguing that the intense affective practices of IHOPKC, the prayer and worship, circulate their prophetic history. Their claims to authority, or to Schmittian sovereignty, are drawn through time by affective intensity, and reasserted as claims which have authority, but at times change conceptual shape. IHOPKC’s claims to power are broadly recognizable, claims that have long powered American political life—claims

of superiority by birth and claims of the dominance of God over all. These forms of dominance are verified by intense feeling and transmitted by the affective practices that take place during the prayer and worship at IHOPKC.

One reason that evangelical Christians have been drawn to Donald Trump seems to be his intense affect—the rallies present the kind of affective intensity that is expected as a verification of truth by evangelical Christians. On some level these intense collective experiences indicate that Trump’s message is right and true, despite the fact that Donald Trump does not take the good socially conservative form that evangelical Christians traditionally expected of their leader. Even when he does not say or do the right things, Donald Trump feels “true.” At the same time, Donald Trump’s affective aura hooks into forms of Schmittian sovereignty—durable nodes of U.S. political power—that are familiar to evangelical Christians, like white supremacy and authoritarianism. Remember that prophecy is about power—how the past is narrated in order to validate the current political regime. This is doubly supported in evangelical communities by the apocalyptic narrative, where the gifts of the spirit in the present are a reminder of God’s past actions and are the marker of God’s promise to come in the future. The exceptional—supernatural—action of the holy spirit folds time into an *already/not yet* that drives people into the future by becoming a motivation for further action. The excitement of the Holy Spirit’s action, verified by intense feeling now, promises increased future power—increased authority.

In light of this reading of IHOPKC, how should this project move forward? Two interrelated claims are made evident in this reading of charismatic Christianity in the U.S. First, that intense feeling serves as a marker of God and therefore of truth. This is, in part,

a response to the modern move to define truth according to a crypto-fundamentalist version of facts. At the same time, the experiences of charismatic-evangelical Christian communities in prayer and worship, where the mind is experienced as porous and an “eventive” moment can overcome a person, suggest that the modern liberal model of subjectivity, governed by the autonomous individual, is in need of revision. In turn, this suggests that knowledge—and truth—which relies on the enlightenment model of subjectivity needs revision.

The next chapter of this project turns to radical political theology and affect theory to create a framework for rethinking the way that subjectivity and truth work, in order to lay out in the final chapter an economy of truth that can encompass facts, feelings, and power. Ultimately, this project will argue that IHOPKC demonstrates that the mechanisms for moving authority through time in charismatic evangelical communities serve as a model for how, to use Donovan Schaefer’s language, intransigent political affects like racism and authoritarianism are pulled through time and granted fresh authority.

CHAPTER 3

“ONCE MORE, WITH FEELING:” DURABLE POLITICAL POWERS AND THE
POSSIBILITY OF ALTERNATIVE SUBJECTIVITIES

“Is God Dead?” and “Is Truth Dead?” have shared funeral moments on the cover of *Time Magazine*.³⁴⁷ Separated by fifty years, these two cover images speak to shifts in knowledge-making and power within U.S. society. In stark, blood red lettering set against a black background, *Time* presents a parallel between the perceived decline of Christianity in the 1960s and the decline of truth in politics during the 2016 presidential election cycle. Perhaps by questioning truth, *Time* magazine was attempting to revise its prophetic history by admitting that the epistemological turn to reason and science in modernity did not result in the evaporation of religion from society. Instead, the magazine finds that the push towards secularity in recent years actually killed truth—or resulted in the bifurcation of truth into feeling-only truth and a crypto-fundamentalist version of the facts.

Chapter Three moves from the specifics of case studies—the Creation Museum/Steven Pinker and The Vineyard/IHOPKC—to the work of radical theologians or theologians writing “after the death of God.” As the *Time Magazine* covers demonstrate, modern and post-modern renegotiations of theological possibilities and

³⁴⁷ Lily Rothman, “Is God Dead At 50,” *Time Magazine*, Accessed April 6, 2021, <https://time.com/isgoddead/>. Nancy Gibbs, “When a President Can’t Be Taken at His Word,” *Time Magazine*, March 23, 2017, Accessed April 6, 2021, <https://time.com/4710615/donald-trump-truth-falsehoods/>.

epistemology in Christianity do not take place separately from the supposedly secular sphere. The boundaries between the religious and secular spheres are porous. And so political truth and U.S. subjects emerge entangled with U.S. Christianity. Political and religious subject formation co-occurs in a resonance machine, where concepts, affect, and powers all circulate, working together in predictable and unpredictable ways. Truth-making and subject formation are intimately linked, the two processes are co-emerging.

Despite the stark question “Is God Dead” in the 1960s, radical theology find itself facing a continued “return of religion” both in the form of the New Religious Right and as an interest in religion within the continental philosophy that dialogues with radical thinkers.³⁴⁸ Because Clayton Crockett wants his radical political theology to be material and engaged in the current moment he links it to the rise of the New Religious Right. I follow his telling in order to demonstrate that radical theology too often sees evangelical Christianity as an instrument of capitalism or of the Republican Party. While it is true that evangelical Christianity is caught up in the larger networks of power, to view them as an instrument, fails to attend to the ways that these Christians have influenced the political world. In other words, Crockett’s work requires attention to the training evangelical Christians receive in their communities and how that shapes them as subjects, *affective* subjects who operate in the larger political scheme.

To explore a more nuanced link between evangelical Christianity and politics, I turn briefly to William Connolly’s work on the evangelical-capitalist resonance machine. I propose that forms of Schmittian sovereignty are part of a shared spiritual disposition

³⁴⁸ Clayton Crockett, *Radical Political Theology: Religion and Politics after Liberalism*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 2013), 2.

that works in conservative U.S. politics. In other words, the movement of exciting forms of intransigent political power is not limited to evangelical Christian communities, but also moves across other collective subjectivities, like at a Trump Rally where excitement moves with the chant “Build the Wall!!” All along this project has sought to unravel the seeming conflict between feeling-only truth and a crypto-fundamentalist version of the facts in order to parse out the projects of subject formation that are hidden by arguments over conceptual claims. Another way to frame this location of political truth and subject formation is as a shared spiritual disposition.

Once I make this link, I return to Clayton Crockett’s work as a radical theologian who is attuned to the political work of theology in his book *Radical Political Theology* which begins to address subjectivity by seeking an open, porous, “plastic” model of the subject. Crockett does this by drawing on the tools of poststructuralism to find the possibility of iterative change in the subject. In the open subject, Crockett finds a “law beyond law,” a “pure law” that allows for freedom to enter the subject.³⁴⁹ In order to extend this possibility to the material he ties it to the plasticity of the brain by drawing on neuroscience. Crockett argues, following Catherine Malabou, that history is plastic and the messianic future might be different. While I, like Crockett, seek to rethink the subject, I find myself asking what teeth his messianic future, governed by a law beyond law, has for making change in the world? So Reading the affect theory of Donovan Schaefer, I propose that plasticity alone cannot be used to facilitate an alternative to the modern liberal subject.

³⁴⁹ Crockett, *Radical*, 115.

Affect theory, which is attuned to the formation of individual subjects as part of collectives, is therefore an ideal supplement to Crockett's work. Donovan Schaefer, following phenomenologist Silvin Tompkins describes affect as a series of biological drives that have developed through deep evolutionary time: including "anger-rage, surprise-startlement, enjoyment-joy, interest-excitement."³⁵⁰ Affects are therefore durable, or intransigent, resistant to change. They are not, however, unchangeable. What results is not a "pristine set of working gears" but rather "a system in tension," which is "living multiplicity of diverging emotional drivers rather than a unified economy."³⁵¹

While Schaefer argues that affects change, albeit slowly and through deep time, he resists descriptions of human subjectivity which see the subject as "becoming." Becoming, he argues, draws, again, on the modern liberal subject, presuming that the subject is free to becoming whatever they want, instead of already partially determined by the deep affective history of humanity. This "sandbox ontology" which presumes that human beings are easily molded is comparable to the plasticity described by Crockett.³⁵² Radical theology is therefore haunted by the modern liberal subject. I propose that Schaefer's critique can be extended to argue that plasticity does not adequately account for the structures of power, like racism or imperialism, that work in U.S. society and limit the possibilities of subjects coming into being.

Drawing on Schaefer's work, I argue that the strands of Schmittian sovereignty I

³⁵⁰ Donovan Schaefer, *Religious Affects*, (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2015), 36.

³⁵¹ Schaefer, *Religious Affects*, 47.

³⁵² Schaefer, *Religious Affects*, 43.

find transmitted through the modern liberal subject and which I mapped as circulating at IHOPKC are *durable nodes of power* in the U.S. These nodes of power are not tied to specific feelings or to specific truth-claims, but work across facts, feelings, and powers that are imbricated within U.S. projects of subject formation. Racial superiority and white supremacy have a deep history within the U.S. So does theocratic power with its link to authoritarianism (no matter how secular the U.S. claims to be).³⁵³

How then, do these Schmittian sovereignties feel? While there is no one feeling linked to white supremacy or authoritarianism, I propose that in charismatic-evangelical Christian communities, “interest-excitement” tends to be conflated with conceptual novelty. I make this claim following Schaefer’s suggestion that philosophers of becoming tend to confuse excitement with novelty in such a way that they miss the deep history of feelings that work on subjects. When the prophetic history is made and re-made at IHOPKC, the excitement with which the new claims are asserted marks the new claims as both novel and as true, while also obscuring their anchor in older claims to Schmittian sovereignties, like white supremacy and authoritarianism.

I move into another example of subject-making in conjunction with prophecy in the Vineyard movement, drawn from Bialecki’s *A Diagram for Fire* to explore “interest-excitement.” This example of a young man named Justin who is prophesied over and experiences something like the exorcism of a demon, adds the element of the will to the subject formation in charismatic-evangelical Christian communities. Bialecki argues that Justin is prepared for the community to experience a “surprise” or a miracle, where the

³⁵³ “One nation under God” is another claim that spins out in contemporary politics activating a variety of forces.

charismatic diagram “freely traverses the boundaries of the person” and in an intensely affective moment.³⁵⁴ An “explosion of potential” results from Justin’s unwillingness meeting the miraculous moment and the boundaries of subject are opened. In the final chapter of this project, I build on the role of the will in my reading doctrine of revelation, which, as Jean Luc Marion proposes it, includes the action of God on the will. God acts somehow before the human mind works in order to generate faith. Yet, Marion does not allow that this is a straightforward line, where God makes the will of a person, rather the willingness/unwillingness of the human subject co-emerges with the work of the mind. Revelation, according to Marion, is where reason touches the impossible, therefore offering a model of truth-making, I propose, that can hold together facts, feelings, and power.

I return again to Donovan Schaefer’s work in order to extend the imbrication of the willing/unwilling subject within collective charismatic-evangelical Christian subjectivities that are explicitly political. Schaefer watches the film *Jesus Camp*, which follows a series of children in the U.S. conservative charismatic-evangelical Christian community, depicting their lives around the central event of a camp. He sees the film as presenting pedagogy of affect that trains the children to become part of a global charismatic-evangelical community, or what I call a collective subject. The work of the collective subject plays out differently on different individual people, demonstrated by the differing trajectories of the children depicted in *Jesus Camp*. At the same time, the affective training takes hold, in some way across all the people in the film.

³⁵⁴ Jon Bialecki, *A Diagram for Fire: Miracles and Variation in an American Charismatic Movement*, (Oakland, CA: University of California Press, 2017), 163, 159.

Finally, Schaefer's 2019 book *The Evolution of Affect*, proposes an analysis of power that builds on Michel Foucault's "analytics of power."³⁵⁵ Foucault proposed an analytics of power to move beyond the "*juridico-discursive*" model of power, where power comes from the top down and works by constraining. In contrast, an analytics of power follows "*power-knowledge*" in order to see the ways power is productive.³⁵⁶ Schaefer extends the analytics of power to "*power-knowledge-affect*" to include the material work of feelings that circulate as part of projects of subject formation.³⁵⁷ In the conclusion of this project I attempt to articulate listening—via Jean Luc Nancy, who describes as listening for sense, listening with the senses, and listening with a sense of place—a first principle for an economy of political truth that works across knowledge-power-affect, or facts, feelings, and power. My hope is that this economy of political truth can work across the non-Schmittian powers of the people in order to amplify the voices of the marginalized.

For now, I start this chapter by exploring the connection between the "Death of God" and the "Death of Truth" in order to make clear the connection between theological/epistemological renegotiations of modernity and the work at IHOPKC. This also makes a connection between radical theology and the work on truth that my dissertation undertakes.

³⁵⁵ Donovan Schaefer, *The Evolution of Affect Theory*, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2019), 2.

³⁵⁶ Schaefer, *Evolution*, 3.

³⁵⁷ Schaefer, *Evolution*, 3.

Is God Dead?/Is Truth Dead?

The 1966 “Is God Dead?” cover elicited more letters to the magazine than any had previously—3421—primarily from people who were outraged to see such a question on the cover of the magazine.³⁵⁸ Post WWII a strong wave of historical critical biblical scholarship crashed into U.S. religious studies and challenged the established truths of evangelical Christianity, raising questions about, for example, the historical Jesus and, as Chapter One explores, the age of the earth. In theological studies, “liberal theology,” brought modern hermeneutic tools into doctrinal formulations, resulting in “demythologized” theology challenged “superstitious” biblical claims. This changes in scholarship is linked to the renegotiations of epistemology in modernity; as chapter one argues, in modernity truth was brought down to earth to be mediated in the minds of human beings, who are understood as buffered or modern liberal subjects.

Correspondingly, as Luhmann argues in *When God Talks Back*, it became more difficult to believe in a supernatural God. At the time the “Is God Dead?” cover appeared in 1966, ninety-seven percent of people polled in the U.S. claimed to believe in God.³⁵⁹ Data from 2014 indicates that now only sixty-three percent of people claim to believe in God. Does this mean *Time* magazine accurately predicted the death of God? Not if the death of God is measured by the influence of religion in political life. The role of evangelical Christianity in U.S. politics has only increased, reaching a particular peak in the 1980s and 1990s with the influence of the Moral Majority and the Presidency of

³⁵⁸ Rothman, “Is God Dead At 50,” <https://time.com/isgoddead/>.

³⁵⁹ Rothman, “Is God Dead At 50,” <https://time.com/isgoddead/>.

George W. Bush.

Time's question, "Is Truth Dead?" was asked in March of 2017, shortly after the inauguration of Donald Trump, a figure who did not emerge from the Christian right (though he did not emerge without the New Religious Right). The 2016 election cycle was fueled by mistruths and conspiracy theories, like Trump's infamous "birther" claims about former president Barack Obama.³⁶⁰ And as the introduction states, the democratic establishment retaliated against Trump's lies by fact-checking the Trump campaign, which was an effective strategy on the left, but did nothing for the increasing slippage of conspiracy theories into mainstream political discourse on the right.³⁶¹

I argue in Chapter Two that charismatic-evangelicals—and through the network of evangelical media, evangelicals more broadly—have learned to associate intense feeling with an experience of God. Intense emotion serves as a verifier of the truth, allowing people to maintain belief in God that is recognizable as truth within the modern U.S. At the same time prayer allows all members of the community to practice prophecy, which includes hearing God for themselves, for others, and for their community. At IHOPKC, there is a heightened version of this practice, where truth-making is explicitly embedded within their "prophetic history." Their prophetic history has been rewritten and

³⁶⁰ Gregory Krieg, "14 of Trump's most outrageous 'birther' claims—half from after 2011," *CNN Politics*, September 16, 2016, Accessed April 6, 2021, <https://www.cnn.com/2016/09/09/politics/donald-trump-birther>.

³⁶¹ There is no innate connection between conspiratorial thinking and left-right alignment, though this kind of thinking can be shepherded towards either of the traditional poles of the political spectrum. Right now, conspiratorial thinking tends toward the right. Zack Stanton, "You're Living in the Golden Age of Conspiracy Theories," *Politico Magazine*, June 17, 2020, Accessed April 6, 2021, <https://www.politico.com/news/magazine/2020/06/17/conspiracy-theories-pandemic-trump-2020-election-coronavirus-326530>.

relearned in the foment of intensely affective practices of prayer and worship. The chapter argues that IHOPKC's practice pulls nodes of power—of American sovereign authority—through time and that the power is not permanently affixed to particular claims, whether biblical or doctrinal. The authority feels exceptional but is a durable form, familiar within the U.S., and does the work of maintaining white supremacy and authoritarianism. American sovereign powers set some people outside of the law with the freedom to act as they chose; and American sovereignties seek to except some people from appearing fully human within the U.S. system of law.

Both authoritarianism and white supremacy do exceptional work within the prophetic narrative of IHOPKC whose history has been made and remade to sustain a claim to a “super” generation of Christians, a claim which carries racial overtones, and arguably reasserts a form of durable racialized power. In IHOPKC's prophetic history some people are marked as exceptional, as a “breed” set apart. While IHOPKC does not openly make racist claims, at least not stereotypically racist claims, their suggestions that the “manifest sons of God” are a special generation endowed with an extraordinary gift of the Holy Spirit, arguably, resonates with arguments for racial superiority. Similar claims are taken up by groups who are explicitly white supremacist. Arguments about a chosen race or generation, especially when the generation imagined to sire them are mainly white, perpetuate white supremacy.

Racial superiority is an enactment of vertical hierarchies, as Chapter One argues in its reading of Mayra Rivera and J. Kameron Carter. Racial superiority is also embedded in the modern liberal or sovereign subject; who is made in the image of a white, cisgender, heterosexual, able-bodied man. In other words, these durable political

powers are not only moved by charismatic evangelical groups like IHOPKC; they are part of the fabric of U.S. society and have been since the nation was founded. The prophetic history of IHOPKC pushes a racial exception through time, but IHOPKC is not the only institution forming racist subjects, white supremacy emerges in multiple ways throughout U.S. society because it is a durable form of power.

As the boundary between the secular and religious has blurred—and has been recognized as always blurred—so the claims to power within white charismatic-evangelical communities are commingled, co-created with claims to power within the broader U.S. society. It is the reinstating of this power that takes endless explicit forms—from slavery to Jim Crow laws to on-going police brutality—which sustains the broader system of white supremacy in the United States. While the details of the claim to power might change, the node of power, white racial superiority, does not change. In other words, though this power is not welded to specific, repeated truth-claims, it is not abstract or metaphorical. It is power that manifests within communities, through communities and takes its form as the vertical power differential between people. It is the authority afforded to a white woman walking her dog in the park when she calls the police because a black man has angered her. It is the authority given to a resume with a name that sounds white versus one with a Latinx-sounding name.³⁶² White supremacy is not merely the feeling of hatred, distaste, or disdain a white person might have for a black person, though it encompasses those feelings. And white supremacy is not an abstract concept

³⁶² Dina Gerdman, “Minorities Who ‘Whiten’ Job Resumes Get More Interviews,” *Working Knowledge*, Harvard Business School, May 17, 2017, Accessed April 7, 2021, <https://hbswk.hbs.edu/item/minorities-who-whiten-job-resumes-get-more-interviews>.

that absolves particular people from culpability in its oppressive work. Rather white supremacy is a durable form of power that reasserts itself over and over again within U.S. life, through the institutions that empower and limit subjects, thereby maintaining a structure of power that is manifest in the day-to-day lives of people.

So far, my analysis of IHOPKC has merely described the intensity of the affect that arises from their practices. Worship, prayer, music, are all part of practices that induce heightened states of feeling. At times, individuals describe the practices, as does Luhrmann's female informant, as experiences of the love of God. Luhrmann interprets this love as part of a closed loop economy where individuals experience a personal, friendly God. Yet, as I asked in the previous chapter, what about the collective? How do these feelings play out over a whole community who participates in worship?

The intensity enacted in the musically-driven prayer for Jerusalem at IHOPKC, which I described at the opening of Chapter Two, is entrained with their prophetic history. I argue that the heightened state of affective intensity, which might, as Bialecki argues, induce a moment of reconstitution of the subject, is a feeling of excitement, of novelty, which rather than reconstituting the subject, serves to incite an exception, which moves Schmittian sovereignty in its U.S. forms. The intense novelty of a prophecy—a moment of revelation—serves to move, to traffic, to smuggle authority. At times, prophets knowingly use their claims to incite novelty and foment a political regime. Remember that prophecies were used to shore up power in the Roman Empire (though at times prophecy challenged Empire, like in Christian book of Revelation). Intense excitement like what is practiced at IHOPKC evokes a paradoxically familiar sense of novelty that gives their community a sense of purpose and destiny while also obscuring

the long history of racism and vertical authority in the U.S. In other words, I argue that the assertion of white supremacy tends to feel fresh and exciting, however many centuries old it actually is. The exercise of Schmittian sovereignty, which seeks to except black people, all people of color, from subjectivity, from citizenship in the U.S. feels intensely exciting. Novelty is an effective tool for squashing resistance because it refuses a history of racism and oppression. Novelty is an effective tool for evading resistance because it forces resistance to constantly rename and re-locate its foe. The American sovereign exception is exciting—and therefore it feels new.

The other durable political power evident in IHOPKC's prophetic history is a theocratic government, which, arguably resonates with authoritarian and fascist claims. Theocracy cannot be reduced to the assertion of doctrine or ideology—in fact, the novelty of Schmittian sovereignty allows the ideology to change. Truth doesn't matter when intense novelty marks power or sovereign power over other people. Donald Trump never “became president” as was repeatedly anticipated or claimed by the media when he was elected.³⁶³ At the end of Trump's term, he left the U.S. suffering under the weight of a global pandemic and the federal government's response fraught with misinformation. From the most basic claims like, “anyone who wants to be tested can be tested” to stranger claims, like the repeated touting of hydroxychloroquine, an anti-malarial drug, as a cure or perhaps preventative for Covid-19, Trump continued to lie.³⁶⁴ These false or

³⁶³ For example, after the first State of the Union in February 2017, Van Jones of CNN claimed that it was the moment Trump “became president of the United States.” Van Jones, “Van Jones: Trump became President in that moment,” *CNN*, YouTube, Feb 28, 2017, Accessed April 7, 2021, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CfNEHW3qgso>.

³⁶⁴ Christian Paz, “All the President's Lies About the Coronavirus,” *The Atlantic*, November 2, 2020, Accessed April 7, 2021, www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2020/11/trumps-lies-about-

misleading claims were often made on live television. The federal government's response to the Covid-19 crisis under Trump's leadership was woefully inadequate.³⁶⁵ Claims made by Trump on the 2020 campaign trail were even stranger, including an unspecified event called "Obamagate" which includes alleging then-presumptive Democratic nominee for president Joe Biden committed the "the biggest political crime in history."³⁶⁶ Trump's followers, especially those in the right-wing media, reverse-engineered a scandal, including the allegedly illegal "un-masking" of the subjects of government surveillance, including the convicted former National Security Advisor, Michael Flynn. Trump's justice department intervened in Flynn's conviction for making false statements to the FBI, a crime to which Flynn confessed, by attempting to drop all charges. Trump then exercised one of the most powerful presidential tools, he pardoned Flynn for "any and all possible offenses."³⁶⁷

In other words, Flynn, an early supporter of Trump's agenda, has received an exception to the law. Trump's flouting of the established norms in government—not releasing his tax records or hiring his close family members, for example—has progressed to openly undermining the law. As a result, center-left political pundits, not

[coronavirus/608647.](#)

³⁶⁵ Drew Altman, "Understanding the US failure on coronavirus," *BMJ*, September 14, 2020, Accessed April 7, 2021, <https://www.bmj.com/content/370/bmj.m3417>.

³⁶⁶ Michael Scherer and Josh Dawsey, "Faced with a Trumpian barrage of attacks, Joe Biden chooses to look the other way," *The Washington Post*, May 17, 2020, Accessed April 7, 2021, https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/faced-with-a-trumpian-barrage-of-attacks-joe-biden-chooses-to-look-the-other-way/2020/05/16/f5c64ddc-96c3-11ea-82b4-c8db161ff6e5_story.html

³⁶⁷ Josh Gerstein and Kyle Cheney, "'Any and all possible offences': Trump pardon grants Flynn a sweeping reprieve," *Politico*, November 11, 2020, Accessed April 7, 2021, <https://www.politico.com/news/2020/11/30/trump-flynn-pardon-reprieve-441527>.

only the far/Marxist/socialist left, began asking whether democracy can survive Trump's presidency.³⁶⁸ Donald Trump, who openly pandered to dictatorial leaders like Kim Jong-un, appeared to aspire to this kind of power for himself. Trump is swift to wield exceptional power and appeared to desire authoritarian power, as demonstrated by his attempts to overturn or even steal the 2020 election (all framed as Biden and the Democratic party committing a giant fraud against him). Trump's exercise of power beyond the law presented a real threat to democracy.

Carl Schmitt's political theology with its critique of liberalism was written in the context of the Weimar Republic. When Hitler ascended to power, Schmitt became a jurist for his administration and wrote in defense of Hitler's actions. Schmitt's critique of liberalism and recognition of the theological underpinnings of the modern state offers crucial insight to the current status of truth in this project. However, as is no doubt evident, this project cannot follow Schmitt—or Trump—into the dismantling of democracy.

In order to articulate an alternative to sovereign power, the project turns to radical political theology. The cover of *Time Magazine* asked "Is God Dead?" Yet, the article was less shockingly titled "Toward a Hidden God" introduced "radical" theologians like Thomas Altizer and Gabriel Vahanian, who worked to articulate a theology "without *theos*, without God" to the broader public (HG 82).³⁶⁹ Radical theology seeks to articulate

³⁶⁸ Jon Favreau, Jon Lovett, and Tommy Vietor, "Fired up and ready to Zoom," May 18, 2020, in *Pod Save America*, produced by Crooked Media, podcast, <https://crooked.com/podcast/fired-up-and-ready-to-zoom/>.

³⁶⁹ John T. Elson, "Toward a Hidden God," *Time*, April 6, 1966, 82.

a theology without God altogether; or at the very least to claim, “at least God in the image of man, God sitting in heaven, is dead.”³⁷⁰ Like these radical theologians, I am interested in what theology—specifically the political theology that analyzes the connections between political power and divine sovereignty—might offer to a project of thinking differently an economy of political truth. Theologian Karen Bray includes the “death-of-God and poststructuralist theories of event, plasticity, open relationality, and potentiality” as the tools that radical theologians use to argue for a “theology of immanence.”³⁷¹ A theology of immanence that moves power from a sovereign source into the fabric of the world, might offer alternative ways to theorize power within an economy of political truth.

First it is necessary to parse out how radical political theology and affect theory find themselves positioned within discussions about the status of knowledge in religious studies and philosophy. Both fields position themselves, at least as articulated by Clayton Crockett and Jefferey Robbins in radical theology and Donovan Schaefer in affect theory, as landing in a materialist understanding of the world. Yet, this chapter (with Bray) argues that radical theology in its political register has not adequately addressed the material conditions of the people who Schmittian sovereign powers seek to except from citizenship. Following Bray and Schaefer, I argue that when power is understood as pure potential, it smuggles the sovereign subject into economies of subjectivity and

³⁷⁰ Elson, *Hidden God*, 82.

³⁷¹ Karen Bray, *Grave Attending: A Political Theology for the Unredeemed*, (New York: Fordham University Press, 2020)

knowledge. And as I hold in previous chapters, the modern liberal subject tries to except some people—black people, queer people, and other minorities—from citizenship. In addition, the buffered subject is the foundation obscured by the crypto-fundamentalist version of the facts and it causes the left to double down on fact-checking and data as the solution to the decline of truth in political discourse. Again, I seek a model of truth that embraces and champions facts, but is aware of its starting place, even in something as supposedly neutral as the modern liberal subject. An economy of political truth must encompass facts, feelings, and power.

Luhrmann presumes the liberal modern subject as the starting point for her understanding of how Christians hear God talk back to them. On one hand, this misses the ideologies associated with the modern liberal subject that are carried into her conclusions; but on the other hand, she does not adequately theorize the way charismatic-evangelical Christians open up the modern liberal subject might indicate that human subjectivity is not fully captured in the modern liberal subject. An economy of political truth that overcomes the bifurcation between feeling truth and a fundamentalist version of facts requires a model of subjectivity other than the modern liberal subject. In addition to articulating the way Schmittian sovereignty in the U.S.—as racism and authoritarianism—feels exciting in this evangelical-charismatic configuration, this chapter articulates some first ideas for an alternative subjectivity. When power was brought down to earth and embedded in the modern state—truth was brought down and embedded in the modern liberal subject. Rethinking political power requires a rethinking of the modern liberal subject; and a rethinking of truth requires a rethinking of the subject.

Why Radical Political Theology? Why Affect Theory?

This chapter primarily works together Clayton Crockett and Jefferey Robbins in the field of radical theology and the work Donovan Schaefer in affect theory. Crockett, Robbins, and Schaefer all frame their work as part of a materialist turn in religious studies—albeit in slightly different keys. For these scholars a turn to the material indicates prioritizing study of religion as it plays out across the bodies, practices, and material conditions of people. Crockett and Robbins seek to make an ethical intervention—a progressive one—in the study of religion; while Schaefer is more interested in an accurate portrayal of the way affect functions in human beings. Yet, in striving to integrate science and theory more deeply and accurately, Schaefer’s work serves as a supplement to Crockett’s work—and to the work of radical theology. Radical theology requires a deeper understanding of the role of *practice* and correspondingly of *experience* in evangelical Christianity. By addressing this lacuna in the work of radical theology, especially in its political mode, I argue that a model of subjectivity begins to emerge that is able to account for the interpellation of human beings and for the durable forms of political power that seek to continually re-anchor political truth.

Donovan Schaefer’s *Religious Affects* maps the ways feeling and affect have been used in religious studies since the Enlightenment, through modernity, and into postmodernity. Schaefer describes in modernity a turn to approaches called “phenomenological” or “relating to the way things feel” by religious studies scholars.³⁷² He points to William James’s description of varieties of religion as private or Otto

³⁷² Schaefer, *Religions Affects*, 5.

Rudolph's phenomenology of holiness as an encounter with the "numinous" as examples that fit into this category.³⁷³ This approach to the study of religion presumes religion is an ahistorical phenomenon; "a transcendent source of meaning arriving from beyond human circumstances (or ineluctably bound to a sacrosanct individual religious subject."³⁷⁴ I hold that defining religion as ahistorical ties U.S. religion to Schmittian sovereignty—and specifically to Christian Schmittian sovereignty. The "sacrosanct individual religious subject" is the God that is challenged—even killed—by radical theology; and is the theological node of power that is subsumed into the modern liberal subject after the Enlightenment.

Theologian Friedrich Schleiermacher famously brought feeling to a phenomenological description of religion.³⁷⁵ In *On Religion: Speeches to its Cultured Despisers*, he asserts "feeling of absolute dependence" or "finitude" as a response to absolute transcendence.³⁷⁶ Crockett and Robbins open their intellectual history of radical theology with Feuerbach, whose philosophy emerges from Schleiermacher's work. They explain, "Feuerbach is not content with the ready-made definition of religion as a feeling of absolute dependence lodged in a pre-cognitive state of human consciousness."³⁷⁷

³⁷³ In-depth study of these scholars' work might challenge the universalizing tendency named here. Nonetheless, the trajectory of scholarship holds.

³⁷⁴ Schaefer, *Religions Affects*, 5.

³⁷⁵ Noting Schleiermacher here as part of an on-going dialogue with Chris Boesel. Schleiermacher rightly notes the role of experience as feeling in religion, but narrows this experience to a feeling of dependence in response to absolute transcendence. I seek to articulate a more dynamic definition of affect in this dissertation.

³⁷⁶ Friedrich Schleiermacher, *On Religion: Speeches to its Cultured Despisers*, (Cambridge, MA: Cambridge University Press, 2015).

³⁷⁷ Clayton Crockett and Jefferey W. Robbins, "Background" in *The Palgrave Handbook of*

Instead, he claims religion is “an historical religious construct, a product of the human mind that simultaneously explains humanity to itself and alienates humanity from itself.”³⁷⁸ Indeed, it is not far from Feuerbach to Marx, who wrote, “the basis of irreligious criticism is: *Man makes religion*, religion does not make man.”³⁷⁹ According to Marx people turn to religion as a comfort in the face of oppression. In Freud’s telling, religion is “wish fulfillment.”³⁸⁰ For Crockett and Robbins, the final step in a genealogy of radical theology is Nietzsche’s explication of the “transvaluation” of the “true world of transcendence” where the world depicted by religion—by Christianity—becomes unbelievable.³⁸¹ The transcendent God of the true world is revealed as a human creation or wish fulfillment and humankind is left with nothing but the “apparent world.” This narrative echoes the trajectory of secularization, where sovereign power was brought down into the hands of the people—and at the same time, truth was brought down into the minds of people, no longer anchored by God. The fundamentalist Christians, the charismatic-evangelical Christians, and the crypto-fundamentalists of facts like Stephen Pinker all respond to the seeming impossibility of belief in God. For the fundamentalist Christians at the Creation Museum truth is still anchored in the transcendent God, however, it is performed to feel like science. For charismatic-evangelicals belief in God is made possible by learning to reconceive the mind and to feel intensely as a verification of

Radical Theology, (Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave McMillion, 2018), 16.

³⁷⁸ Crockett and Robbins, “Background,” 17.

³⁷⁹ Crockett and Robbins, “Background,” 18.

³⁸⁰ Crockett and Robbins, “Background,” 21.

³⁸¹ Crockett and Robbins, “Background,” 22.

God's presence. Finally, the "progressive" turn to reason rejects all belief and therefore obfuscates the values—powers—like white supremacy that have shaped and continue to shape truth in the U.S.

Crockett and Robbins seek to move beyond this bifurcation of fundamentalist belief and a fundamentalist rejection of belief. It is the transvaluation of concepts like "God, Truth, World, Idea, Good, and Beauty" that motivate Crockett and Robbins to press further into the study of religion.³⁸² They explain that "finite temporal values" cannot be expected to offer the "same meaning and significance" and therefore seek to "transvalue" the apparent world and recreate what Deleuze calls "a belief in the world."³⁸³ Belief in the world is what Crockett and Robbins name the potential for a world that rejects the sovereign God, while locating some other site of shared power that can facilitate an alternative world anchored in non-sovereign powers.

Schaefer's aim is not—at least directly—to articulate an alternative world. Yet his work presses religious studies past the various intellectual options named by Crockett and Robbins. According to Schaefer, religious studies made a move away from treating religion as a *sui generis* phenomena, a move he links to the work of J.Z. Smith, beginning in the 1970s. This change at least in part, is responsible for the schism between religious studies and theology, where theology is assumed to take for granted the existence of a transcendent Christian god. Smith spearheads a shift in which scholars are "not presented with experiences in need of interpretation but rather with texts, narratives, performances,

³⁸² Crockett and Robbins, "Background," 22.

³⁸³ Crockett and Robbins, "Background," 22.

and so forth.”³⁸⁴ This is the so-called *linguistic* turn in religious studies. I propose it is yet another moment that results from the modern re-negotiation of knowledge, when truth was brought down to earth. The locus of knowledge in religious studies moved from the absolute and transcendent to the specific in observable texts: whether literal texts, or rituals, or communities, or something else. This turn from the experience of the transcendent as a locus of religion to the text as the site of religion can be read as another version split between feeling-only truth and a crypto-fundamentalist version of the facts. Though this overview does not do justice to the nuance of individual thinker’s work, it captures the trajectory of discourse in religious studies.

Schaefer roots the material turn in religious studies in the work of anthropologist of Islam Talal Asad. The anthropologist found a bias towards for Protestant model of religion, which includes a set of propositional beliefs, in the work of textual scholars like J.Z. Smith. I argue that this again points to power in truth-making: here the scholars who decide what method is appropriate for studying religion bring (often unintended) first principles that shift the power in claims made about religion. Obviously carrying a bias towards a Protestant/Christian version of religion limits understandings of non-Christian religions and might carry a bias towards white versions of Christianity. At the same time, viewing religion as a set of propositional beliefs prioritizes conceptual knowledge over other kinds of religious experience. Indeed, Schaefer reports that to challenge this tendency in religious studies, Asad argues religion should be understood as a series of *bodily practices*, rather than as a set of propositions. I similarly seek to locate political

³⁸⁴ Schaefer, *Religious Affects*, 6.

truth-making within an economy that includes robust facts/reason, but which can account for the affect-laden experience of truth-making.

This chapter therefore moves on to consider the work that Clayton Crockett has done to understand the recent “return of religion” in the public sphere. Crockett opens his *Radical Political Theology*, by describing the status of truth in postmodernity. He explains, “One way to characterize the postmodern world that we live in is the determination that things no longer correspond to their names, that names float freely, without anchor, just like monetary currencies.”³⁸⁵ A distorted version of poststructuralism might be blamed for the popular notion—and Steven Pinker is swift to place this blame—that all opinions are equally true and that all opinions should be given equal hearing in the public sphere. Naming, as described by Crockett, operates by the same mechanism as traditional philosophical truth-making, where correspondence serves as a standard of truth.

On one hand, I follow Crockett’s conviction that theological imagination can facilitate a renewed belief in the world. At the same time, I argue that there is a disconnect between radical theology’s reading of the return of religion to postmodern philosophy as modelled by, for example, Jacques Derrida or Jean-Luc Marion; and the resurgence of religion as the New Religious Right within U.S. politics. Specifically, I claim that radical theology’s narrative of the religious right requires supplementation with attention to practices, like prophecy, prayer, and worship within charismatic evangelical communities. If radical theology can engage practice, then it is opened to learning with

³⁸⁵ Crockett, *Radical*, 1.

affect theory, which in turn facilitates a conception of subjectivity that breaks open the modern liberal subject and challenges durable forms of sovereign political power.

Hopefully, this reimagined subject can flourish in an economy of knowledge where facts, feelings, power—and in the language of Deleuze belief in the world, can coexist.³⁸⁶

Radical Theology and Evangelical Christians in the U.S. Since the Civil War

Clayton Crockett opens his *Radical Political Theology* with a discussion of the “context and nature” of the Religious Right in the United States, because his political intervention requires a concrete context. In order to present this context, he turns to history, tracing the current relationship between politics and the Religious Right to the South’s loss of the U.S. Civil War. Crockett argues that while the fight over states’ rights and the right to hold slaves were crucial to the war, an under-reported element of the fight was economic. According to Crockett, the North’s burgeoning maritime capitalism, enabled by low-paid factory workers, became a competing economic structure to slave economy of the South’s plantation system. In other words, the Civil War was a fight for the means of production. Crockett argues that the South knew it could not compete with this new economic form and that realization was part of the push for separation and then war. Crockett argues that before the Civil War, the South was not driven by religious impulses, citing the fact that Second Great Awakening took place primarily in the North. After the war, Crockett argues, with historian George Marsden, that “white Southerners took refuge in religion and created a nostalgic picture of

³⁸⁶ Crockett and Robbins, “Background,” 21.

antebellum life.”³⁸⁷ According to Crockett, “this turn to religion constituted a repression of other, more explicitly political desires.”³⁸⁸

Indeed in the previous chapter, we see that white supremacy is an anchor for Schmittian sovereignty in the U.S. that is pulled through time by charismatic-evangelical Christians. Crockett rightly identifies the white supremacy that drives power in the U.S. And he notes, correctly, the way that racism is suppressed within the white evangelical Christian context. His argument continues by asserting that the “postwar struggle was not just a war of ideas” but a program of racial oppression implemented through Jim Crow laws.³⁸⁹ According to Crockett, the Civil Rights Movement of the 1950s and 1960s, which began to dismantle segregation was perceived as a second loss of the Civil War. This brings Crockett’s narrative closer to the present, closer to the emergence of the new Religious Right and current relationship between evangelical Christians and the U.S. presidency. For Crockett, the most recent “return of the religious” which reached a particular fevered pitch during the 1980s with the rise of the Moral Majority movement and the 1988 failed presidential campaign of Pat Robertson, which he asserts can be read as another “backlash” against the various progressive liberation movements of the 1950s-70s.

The influence of the Religious Right in its evangelical Christian form continued through the George W. Bush administration and into the present. Consider images of

³⁸⁷ Crockett, *Radical*, 5.

³⁸⁸ Crockett, *Radical*, 5.

³⁸⁹ Crockett, *Radical*, 5.

Donald Trump surrounded by evangelical leaders laying hands on them and praying.³⁹⁰

The alignment of evangelical Christians with president Donald Trump has presented a challenge to pundits, because it defies the association between evangelical Christians and conservative social values. Trump's life is not a model of conservative social values. Trump is thrice-married, crass, not a regular attendee of church, formerly pro-life, and more. In other words, Trump is not the kind of person usually endorsed by evangelical Christians. So why did eighty percent of white evangelical Christians vote for Donald Trump? Why did evangelical Christians continue to support him through the 2020 election season?

When looking at post-civil rights Southern Christianity, Crockett turns to the Christian Reconstruction/Dominionist movement that the previous chapter identifies as a node of Schmittian sovereignty in the U.S. for IHOPKC. Again, this movement emerged in the 1970s and 80s and makes the argument that Mosaic Law was never overturned, and therefore can be reinstated to govern contemporary society. Crockett names Rousas John Rushdooney as a pivotal thinker in this school of thought and identifies this movement as a shift from the negativity and withdrawal from public life that characterized the response of evangelical Christian communities to the encroachment of secularity in previous decades. Evangelical Christians began to demonstrate optimism about the influence that they could have on public life. I propose the narrative of "optimism" already begins to sound like a story shaped by feelings.

³⁹⁰ Antonia Blumberg, "Evangelical Leaders Lay Hands on Donald Trump in Group Prayer," *Huffington Post*, July, 12, 2017, Accessed April 7, 2021, https://www.huffpost.com/entry/donald-trump-evangelical-leaders-oval-office_n_596680ffe4b0d51cda5fc4c1.

C. Peter Wagner, identified in chapter two as the founder of the New Apostolic Reformation movement, which circulates in the same discursive sphere as The Vineyard and IHOPKC, identifies the NAR as the inheritor of Rushdooney's theology. Wagner writes, "The practical theology that best builds a foundation under social transformation is dominion theology, sometimes called 'Kingdom Now'. Its history can be traced back through R. J. Rushdoony and Abraham Kuyper to John Calvin."³⁹¹ In other words, the supernatural practices that indicate the operation of the Kingdom of God in the present at IHOPKC are also utilized in the NAR movement. Bialecki describes the NAR as an intensification of the charismatic diagram found in the Vineyard community. As I argued in the previous chapter, in order to understand fully the Christian movements claiming theocratic authority, it is necessary to consider the role of practice and experience in shaping their claims.

My analysis of IHOPKC therefore serves as a supplement to Crockett's telling of the rise of the Christian Right, which focuses on capitalism's and the GOP's co-option of religious authority. Crockett rightly identifies that, "the resurgence of determinate forms of religion today represents a crisis of modern liberal capitalism."³⁹² As wealth disparity continues to grow in the U.S. there has been both a turn to popular socialism like that put forward by Bernie Sanders and Elizabeth Warren during the 2020 presidential election; and there has been a doubling down on racist control of the economy, like Trump's efforts to build a wall to keep out undocumented immigrants who will steal jobs or commit

³⁹¹ C. Peter Wagner, *Dominion!: How Kingdom Action Can Change the World*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Chosen Books, 2008), 59.

³⁹² Crockett, *Radical*, 2.

crimes (neither claim is supported by data).

Crockett's assertion that the failure of capitalism is a driving force in the assertion of religious control is correct. But it does not capture the whole picture—it cannot explain on-going explosive popularity of these forms of religion. Crockett argues, “the Republican party which has historically been the party of big business, co-opted white Southern Christianity and used its energy, its anger and its pathos as cover to advance its own interests.”³⁹³ Crockett does note briefly that the Republican party has in turn been shaped by evangelical Christians, but does not dwell on the role of evangelicalism in shaping political feelings. My project fleshes the movement of the religious into the secular, by mapping parts of the influence of evangelical Christianity in the supposed secular sphere. A fuller picture of evangelical Christianity—emotional and exciting and adept at managing economies of truth—helps to explain why so many people find this form of religion compelling. Powerful experiences move people to become part of the collective subjectivities, which animate the institutions that structure society. Because Crockett does not develop the role of the religious right in shaping politics, he misses the importance of affect and experience in the creation of subjects and political economies of truth. I will further develop this disconnect when I closely read Crockett's philosophy.

A tidy narrative of the Religious Right—“evangelical Christians were used by Republicans to gain power”—is easily complicated by returning to the historical data, which presents communities as motivated by charisma and apocalypticism. For example, the assertion that the second Great Awakening did not impact the South is easily muddled

³⁹³ Crockett, *Radical*, 8.

by looking to, for example, the Churches of Christ, which emerged in the South and was linked to the Second Great Awakening—a link that included some of the charismatic practices of the Great Awakening. The Churches of Christ continues to be a unique and popular group of churches (they resist the term “denomination,” viewing themselves as a return to the apostolic church) which is mainly located in a region stretching from Middle Tennessee to West Texas.³⁹⁴ Historian and life-long Church of Christ member Richard Thomas Hughes, in part, traces the emergence of the Churches of Christ back to Barton W. Stone, who participated in a famous Kentucky revival, the Cane Ridge Revival of 1801, which featured people engaging in “bizarre exercises” like “jerking, barking, running, and falling”³⁹⁵ This revival presents a connection between renewed Southern religious activity—which eventually founded a new form of religious community—and the charismatic practices of the Second Great Awakening. Stone was also responsible for bringing an apocalyptic energy into the founding of the Churches of Christ, specifically a post-millennial fervor that anticipated the return of Christ and which encouraged people to live as though the “kingdom of God were fully present in the here and now.”³⁹⁶ This version of apocalypticism, while it is no longer the dominant form in the Churches of Christ, is the same one that continues to move in the charismatic-evangelical circles. In other words, there is a thread of apocalypticism powered by affective practices that is connected to the Second Great Awakening that is easily linked to contemporary

³⁹⁴ Richard Thomas Hughes. *Reviving the Ancient Faith: The Story of the Churches of Christ in America*. (Grand Rapids, MI: Erdmans, 1996), 1.

³⁹⁵ Hughes, *Reviving*, 96.

³⁹⁶ Hughes, *Reviving*, 6.

apocalypticism.

What Crockett and others call the “Religious Right” is called the “New Christian Right” by some historians, in order to distinguish the current moment from past ones and to allow the present moment its own identity. Indeed, broader historical community has issued plenty of challenges to the oversimplification of the rise of the New Christian Right as merely a backlash narrative.³⁹⁷ While, yes, the New Religious Right is in part the result of backlash against the various civil rights movements of the 1950s-1980s; the New Religious Right was (is) in its own right *new*. One obvious place to look for this intersection is the role of the 1960s-70s counter culture in the Rise of the Religious Right. *Counter Culture Conservatives* by Axel Schäfer charts the influence of the counter culture, the hippies, in the rise of social conservatives. The book opens with the story of Lonnie Frisbee, a hippy turned evangelist who was key to the founding of none other than the Vineyard Movement that was documented in the previous chapter. Schäfer opens his book by challenging the assertion that orthodoxy “naturally” feeds into social and political conservatism, suggesting instead that it is a relationship of historical convenience. In addition, Schäfer suggests that rather than a backlash against the countercultural modes of the 1960s, the success of evangelicalism was in “its ability to merge the insurgent styles and rhetoric of the period with a forceful and unambiguous embrace of the dominant liberal capitalist order.”³⁹⁸ In other words, in part, it is the

³⁹⁷ See, for example, Axel Schäfer, *Counterculture Conservatives: American Evangelicalism From the Postwar Revival to the New Christian Right*, (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 2011), Kindle.

³⁹⁸ Schäfer, *Counter Culture*, loc 96.

practices, in this case Schaefer refers to the “therapeutic conversionism” of post-war evangelicals, that allows for the proliferation of capitalism through churches. Schaefer argues there is more than an instrumental relationship between evangelical Christianity and politics. The practices of the community become tools that advance a larger structure of political influence.

In the case of political truth-making, the previous chapter argued that one result of charismatic-evangelical practice is learning to trust intense feeling in prayer or in worship as a marker of truthfulness. Therefore, one source of the feeling-only truth that so markedly appeared in the age of Trump is the training that charismatic-evangelicals, and through the extensive evangelical media network, the training that evangelicals more broadly receive in their communities. I propose that charismatic-evangelical Christian practice offers a model for analyzing how political truth is made by the entrainment of facts, feeling, and power in contemporary society. The charismatic-evangelical example both influences the broader political discourse and illustrates how other configurations of feeling, facts, and power are moving together in order to maintain Schmittian sovereign powers that make some leaders exceptional and seek to except other people from citizenship in the U.S.

A dynamic way to begin framing the politics of charismatic-evangelicalism in relationship to radical political theology is with political theorist William Connolly’s evangelical-capitalist resonance machine. Connolly’s work presents a complex, integrated relationship between evangelical Christians and political conservatives in the U.S. Connolly argues that relationship between the ideology of neoliberal capitalism and evangelical Christianity cannot be reduced to cause and effect. Instead, Connolly sees

unpredictable networks of affinities—including a shared “spiritual disposition” that transcends doctrinal specifics of either evangelicalism or capitalism.³⁹⁹

I propose that a shared spiritual disposition that operates across doctrinal/ideological groups supports the Schmittian claim that Christian theological claims undergird the supposedly secular state. Remember Schmitt’s claim that “all significant concepts of the modern theological concept of the state are secularized theological concepts.”⁴⁰⁰ The *Time* magazine cover asking “Is God Dead?” seems to lean into the narrative of secularization, which theorizes in part, as I explained via Charles Taylor in chapter one, that religion would no longer be needed as human beings became better able to explain their world through science.⁴⁰¹ Schmitt’s crucial insight is that theological concepts shape the state, arguably, regardless of whether they are imposed directly by an authoritative religious institution or have been sublimated into the values and ideas that anchor the concept of the modern state in the U.S. In turn, theological or doctrinally influenced concepts, like the Manifest Sons of God or the Serpent’s Seed Doctrine continue to circulate in ways that affect the broader political context.

Connolly identifies an apocalyptically-motivated obedience as a shared spiritual disposition in the contemporary U.S. This spiritual disposition is not an explicit political ideology because for one community it is a spiritual reality and an allegiance to an end-

³⁹⁹ William Connolly, “The Evangelical-Capitalist Resonance Machine,” *Political Theory* 33, no. 6 (Dec 2005), 872.

⁴⁰⁰ Carl Schmitt, *Political Theology: Four Chapters on the Concept of Sovereignty*. Trans. George Schwab, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005), 36.

⁴⁰¹ The article, obviously, did not lean into this version of the secularization hypothesis. But the cover elicited responses as though it had.

time narrative and for another it is unwavering allegiance to an economic system. Nonetheless, this disposition moves across the publics of evangelical Christians and neoliberal capitalists. Connolly describes this resonance in affective terms, “The existential bellicosity of those infused with economic greed reverberates with the transcendental resentment of those visualizing the righteous violence.”⁴⁰² In other words, anger reverberates with anger, effecting a resonance machine, allowing nodes of power—white evangelicals, capitalists—to maintain control in U.S. life.

I seek to extend Connolly’s argument, looking at how it feels to be a part of the apocalyptic narrative at IHOPKC—and how that feeling might resonate with the broader discourse of truth in the U.S. To this end, while anger, love, and other feelings shape the experience of charismatic-evangelical practice, this chapter argues that acute excitement is a defining feature of the revelatory practices—like the 24-7 worship—at IHOPKC. This excitement is what allows doctrines, narratives, and more to be rewritten, and therefore to make claims to racist and authoritarian U.S. Schmittian sovereignty new. Or, put another way, racism and authoritarianism always feel fresh. The exceptional—the novel—quality of racism and authoritarianism is what moves it through so much time, while allowing it to be removed from a history of racism and oppression.

I hold that narrating the rise of the New Religious Right without attention to their affective practices fails in three ways. First, it fails to recognize the role of practices like worship and prayer, especially in their charismatic forms, in moving durable nodes of Schmittian sovereign power—racist or authoritarian—through time. Second, it misses

⁴⁰² Connolly, “Evangelical-Capitalist,” 876.

what makes these practices so enticing and compelling to people. Finally, this lacuna misses the opportunity to speak concretely about the movement of power between bodies and the concrete inscription of power in white bodies.

Plasticity at the Heart of the Free Subject?

Again, Crockett's book *Radical Political Theology* starts with a concrete historical account of the rise of the Religious Right and then moves to philosophy in order to articulate a constructive plan for moving forward, seeking to counteract the Schmittian sovereignty that underpins the secular state. It is the blurring of the lines between secularity and religion that make Schmitt's critique of liberalism seem so erudite. Crockett therefore positions his political theology as a third way between liberalism and neo-conservatism. But is clear he offers a political/theological solution that is completely divorced from any doctrine or dogma—somehow “pure law” (that's the phrase that Crockett uses).⁴⁰³ By getting at a kind of law beyond law, Crockett seeks to supersede the cycle of exception that maintains the current democratic structure and offer something that is more immanent, which presents itself as a paradox of scope.

Again, radical theology argues that “one way to characterize the postmodern world that we live in is the determination that things no longer correspond to their names.”⁴⁰⁴ This statement assumes that things once did match—or were assumed to correspond—with their names. Indeed, historian Molly Worthen explains the rise of modern biblical inerrancy as an attempt to adopt commonsense realism within

⁴⁰³ Crockett, *Radical*, 124.

⁴⁰⁴ Crockett, *Radical*, 1.

evangelical Christian scholarship—in other words, biblical literalism is a response to the feeling that things no longer match their names.⁴⁰⁵

Obviously, radical theology's response to liberal theology is different than evangelical Christianity's response in both its fundamentalist and charismatic forms. "Radical theology is the freedom to think God without God, liberated from traditional formulations that constrain its creativity in dogmatics and sap its vitality in apologetics⁴⁰⁶." This theology is "after the death of God," which argues Western Monotheism is living off "of the remains God's corpse" because belief in "a rational, benevolent and omnipotent deity has become incredible and has been replaced by reactionary forms of evangelicalism and fundamentalism."⁴⁰⁷ In other words, Crockett and radical theology identify the same crisis of belief in God, rooted modern epistemological re-negotiations that is the starting place for this project and for Luhrmann's book. However, unlike Luhrmann, I propose radical theology has not yet considered the negotiations of subjectivity that have allowed charismatic-evangelical Christians (and arguably a wide swath of other evangelicals) to experience God as true. This misses the work that feeling does to serve as a verifier of God's presence—and therefore truth. Even more, this misses the way power is transmitted through charismatic-evangelical Christian practices.

Finally, radical theology's failure to examine the current practices of the

⁴⁰⁵ Molly Worthen, *Apostles of Reason: The Crisis of Authority in American Evangelicalism*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014).

⁴⁰⁶ Crockett, *Radical*, 12.

⁴⁰⁷ Crockett, *Radical*, 13.

evangelical Christian communities who are the target of radical theological critique fails to observe what is compelling for people within those communities and with the practices of those communities. Why are people drawn to charismatic-evangelical communities? Why are charismatic-evangelical Christianities still spreading outside of the U.S. at a rapid pace? It is to answer these questions that this project insists that the negotiation of subjectivity in charismatic-evangelical communities is more than a tactic of maintaining control (though it is that); it also points to the failure of the modern liberal subject and offers an opening to an alternative economy of political truth that bridges the seeming bifurcation between feeling-only truth and a crypto-fundamentalist version of facts.

For Crockett thinking freedom is a theological project, as well as a political project, because “the idea of God traditionally grounds sovereign power and serves as its highest instantiation.”⁴⁰⁸ Here he and I acknowledge the relationship between state power and theological power—or the sublimation of Schmittian sovereignty into the modern secular state. At the same time, Crockett and I recognize the role of theological names in the production of knowledge—therefore truth—and the way that subjectivity shapes the power an individual has to act and to make truth claims that might infiltrate the political discourse of U.S. life. For Crockett and this project, poststructuralism is a feature and not a bug in the U.S. system of language (contrary to what is put forward by Steven Pinker). The struggle to name things, “the determination that things no longer correspond to their name,” illustrates the breakdown of a system of understanding that depends on linguistic

⁴⁰⁸ Crockett, *Radical*, 22.

structure that was (re)inaugurated by continental philosophy.⁴⁰⁹ While this breakdown might appear to be an existential black hole, it is in fact the location of possibility. Crockett suggests that “freedom”... in a formal sense captures the possibility of thinking God as well as thinking any thing at all.”⁴¹⁰ Crockett, thinking with poststructuralists, like Jacques Derrida, understands that the outside of language is what facilitates the possibility of language. Like the authority of a system of law sublimates Schmittian sovereignty into an exception—into the power that is outside the law—so language is governed by something outside, some authority that holds the system of language together. As Chapter One argues, authority is part of knowledge production, truth production, even if knowledge is understood to be governed by data and reason, as Pinker insists. Data requires theories to be held together as knowledge, which always risks importing some human assumptions, whether racist, sexist, or seemingly neutral like the sovereign subject. Indeed, the outside of thinking, the beyond thinking, is what makes possible the subject. In some sense, this claim is not so far from “I think therefore I am” except the possibility is not within the sovereign subject, but rather is the space that opens to and holds the subject’s thought.

For Crockett, therefore, freedom is something that can be located at the level of the subject. He describes freedom as an “unconscious event.”⁴¹¹ In other words, possibility is something concrete, that can be located within the experience of individual

⁴⁰⁹ Crockett, *Radical*, 1.

⁴¹⁰ Crockett, *Radical*, 17.

⁴¹¹ Crockett, *Radical*, 124.

people—it is phenomenological. Like this dissertation traces a connection between state power, knowledge production, and subjectivity, Crockett draws connections between these threads. “The event,” he explains, “is one of the names along with God, freedom, and potentiality, and others, that indicate a stirring beyond the immediate register of bodies and signification.”⁴¹² This move is in direct response to the failure of the law to speak for the majority—and evangelical Christianity’s attempt through the “Restoration movement” to create a country ruled by God. The desire to get behind the law as a conscious event is to, as Crockett follows Giorgio Agamben, “radically construct a ‘pure law’ that is messianic but also immanent, because it would be a law that is not grounded in life, morality, scripture, or institutions.”⁴¹³ In other words, paradoxically, the possibility behind the law is what offers hope for a different world.

In this scheme the messianic brings salvation. The messianic has the capacity to bring what Crockett, thinking with Derrida, identifies as justice. “Justice exceeds law,” explains Crockett, and justice is “not deconstructable.”⁴¹⁴ According to Crockett, Derrida’s later career was inaugurated by his claim “deconstruction is justice.”⁴¹⁵ The possibility behind the law is just because it exceeds the broken systems on earth. The question Crockett is left to answer is how is the justice behind or beyond the law not the same as the sovereign exception, which transmits an oppressive force into a democratic system despite what work might be done within that system to make it just.

⁴¹² Crockett, *Radical*, 145.

⁴¹³ Crockett, *Radical*, 115.

⁴¹⁴ Crockett, *Radical*, 116.

⁴¹⁵ Crockett, *Radical*, 116.

Indeed, Crockett is aware that “behind” is not the best choice of word, because it might import another exception into the subject, another location for Schmittian sovereignty. Crockett is careful to explain that the unconsciousness is not simply behind, but (here he’s drawing on Lacan) exists as potential that can get outside of the way human beings are trained to see the world. Crockett roots this claim in *plasticity* which is manifest as an event, while also arguing plasticity is something that reaches beyond “sense” and into “body”—into the material and into the real.⁴¹⁶ The event is something that is experienced; it is something at the level of phenomenon. The possibility of the event is real, making concrete change possible, argues Crockett, because it lines up with the way *the brain* works.

Crockett is deeply engaged with Catherine Malabou’s work on plasticity. For Crockett plasticity extension into biology—or into the materiality of human self-understanding. Plasticity, for Malabou, starts as a Hegelian concept, but extends to neuroscientific research. The brain, Crockett explains, is characterized by “neuroplasticity;” human brains therefore “give form, make connections, receive forms, and possess the ability to repair broken connections and forge new ones.”⁴¹⁷ Again, it is the moldable brain that Crockett understands as pushing his work into the material; the plastic brain offers a concrete emerging of alternative subjectivities. Luhmann theorizes charismatic-evangelical Christian as re-learning their theory of the mind, learning that the mind is partially “porous” and open to God’s voice. Instead of framing this as a partial

⁴¹⁶ Crockett, *Radical*, 120.

⁴¹⁷ Crockett, *Radical*, 105.

rethinking of modern liberal subjectivity, I propose that charismatic-evangelical Christians demonstrate the failure of the modern liberal subject to capture the porosity, plasticity, and possibility of human subjectivity. Because radical theology decenters sovereignty, it decenters the modern liberal subject and attempts to rethink power.

Because Crockett is engaging in radical *political* theology, he seeks to press beyond the initial unwinding movement of poststructuralism. According to Crockett, Malabou opposes plasticity of form to Derrida's trace, which she claims refers more directly to "the absence of form."⁴¹⁸ In contrast, Crockett claims that plasticity facilitates the re-making of history. Human beings can seize "the link between the genetically non-determined aspect at work in the constitution of our brains and the possibility of a social and political non-determinism, in a word, a new liberty, a new signification of history."⁴¹⁹

Messianism is linked to apocalypticism, which in its traditional forms defers justice, until the end of time. Within a framework of plasticity, history is not a linear concept and therefore the insistence upon justice is not deferred. Crockett argues, as I argue, that the form of subjectivity that governs knowledge-making also governs the movement of political power. For Crockett, plasticity "names the connection between our brains and our politics and names it in a radically decentralized and democratic way."⁴²⁰

In other words, Crockett, with Malabou, seeks to present tools that allow for the articulation of a fresh "prophetic" history, just like IHOPKC is constantly using the

⁴¹⁸ Crockett, *Radical*, 105.

⁴¹⁹ Crockett, *Radical*, 116.

⁴²⁰ Crockett, *Radical*, 105.

instability of truth to reassert their prophetic history. However, IHOPKC uses an intense experience of excitement—of novelty—to re-instantiate nodes of sovereign power. Crockett discerns a destructive charge in plasticity, arguing that plasticity explodes while giving form—a kind of dialectical action. This charge is what “immanently animates our brains”—it is a kind of force.⁴²¹ Reconfiguring the philosophical understanding of possibility as enacted by subjects is helpful—but how helpful is it without understanding the constraints that exist on it? Crockett’s account does not address how existing structures limit the ability of people, for example, black queer people or transgender disabled people, who are faced with a deep network of institutionalized oppressions, to use their potential.

A law beyond law which is an event is not a concrete solution to the problems of injustice in the world—and Crockett acknowledges this disconnect.⁴²² Indeed, philosophy is not necessarily reaching for specific solutions. Yet, what if this philosophy, rife with the potential of doing things differently, is still burdened with the deteriorating corpse of the modern liberal subject? Radical theology emerges after the death of God—after truth is brought down to earth and located in the ability of human beings to make decisions. If the potential of the human subject is the location of immanent transcendence that is meant to break sovereignty, then the exception that breaks the law takes place within the subject. Crockett’s theology after the death of God locates the ‘something like God’ in the subject and therefore, arguably, returns sovereignty to the individual subject. At the same

⁴²¹ Crockett, *Radical*, 106.

⁴²² Crockett, *Radical*, 124.

time, radical theology seeks to recover some ability to name political concepts, specifically for freedom to have some material meaning and material purchase. If freedom is dependent on the ability of individuals to act differently in the world, then it depends on a version of the autonomous subject—the sovereign subject—with the ability to act. As a result, the modern liberal subject haunts radical theology’s immanently-powered subjectivity.

I offer a turn to affect theory as a supplement to radical theology’s retooling of the subject. Affect theory also attempts to describe events in phenomenological terms—and like Crockett’s plasticity, affect theory works with biological (including neuroscientific) understandings of human beings. Affect theory has pressed back against the use of pure discursive plasticity as the location of freedom in the subject as, first, not attendant to the biology of affect; and second as yet another place that the liberal modern subject, with all the trappings of white, cisgendered, heterosexual, able-bodied masculinity, creeps back into seemingly neutral philosophical discussions. While radical theology seeks to bring attention to materiality, I contend that intersecting affect theory will allow radical theology to connect a rethinking of individual subjectivity to reimagined *collective subjectivity*. Specifically radical theology needs a collective subjectivity that actively engages the structures of power which strive to choke off the potential of people who exist in the world with black, brown, queer, crip, bodies. Recognizing infinite potential at the heart of all subjects does not help if the ideal citizen is imagined as a white heterosexual, cisgender able bodied man.

Sovereign power, which Schmitt argues is transmitted with excitement, is power that breaks through the torpor of everyday life. This newness has the function of

transmitting racist and authoritarian claims as fresh and urgent within communities who have learned to experience affect as a marker of truth. Remaking history—articulating an alternative prophetic history—requires attention to the role of affect in human subjectivity. In turn this project argues that viewing affect as part of a subject-making pedagogical network, begins to offer resources for thinking subjectivity as constituted collectively—constituted through networked bodies, structures, and more. Formed within this networked subjectivity, political truth must be attendant to facts, feelings, and the power that cuts across fact and feeling.

Rethinking Sovereignty and Subjectivity via Affect Theory?

Affect theory in its many non-resolvable forms is described in the introduction to this dissertation—the editors of the *Affect Theory Reader* Melissa Gregg and Gregory J. Seigworth write,

Affect arises in the midst of *in-between-ness*: in the capacities to act and be acted upon...affect is found in those intensities that pass body to body (human, nonhuman, part-body, and otherwise), in those resonances that circulate about, between, and sometimes stick to bodies and worlds, *and* in the very passages or variations between these intensities and resonances themselves.⁴²³

Affect theory theorizes the ability to act and be acted upon. When I write about power, the ability to “act and be acted” upon is the most basic unit of power. Understanding modern Schmittian sovereignty in the U.S. requires recognizing that the power of

⁴²³ Melissa Gregg and Gregory J. Seigworth, “An Inventory of Shimmers” in *The Affect Theory Reader*, (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2010), Kindle, loc 50.

sovereign individuals or institutions to make claims that are exceptions to the law has been sublimated into the modern state; and at the same time understanding modern sovereignty requires recognizing how sovereignty seeks to except certain bodies from subjecthood within the modern state where citizenship is predicated on the modern liberal subject or the white, cisgender, heterosexual, able-bodied male. Power moves at the institutional level and the individual level within the modern U.S. Radical political theology must be able to engage with power as its magnitude amps up and down. Therefore addressing power at the level of the subject offers little to make reform possible at the level of systemic injustice. I argue that affect theory supplements radical theology by offering tools to negotiate power as it operates simultaneously across a variety of magnitudes at the individual and collective level. If power is the ability to act and be acted upon then power is always simultaneously individual and collective. The model of subjectivity that holds together an economy of political truth that accounts for feeling, facts, and power must therefore must recognize the interconnection of human beings. In other words, subjectivity must move beyond the buffered modern liberal subject. Key to moving beyond the modern liberal subject is recognizing a subject that is formed in community, laden with possibility, that I propose takes shape within a network of intransigent political powers.

Again, there are at least three threads spooling out from affect theory: first, what Donovan Schaefer calls the phenomenological stream of affect theory, which sees affect as biologically evolved drives in human beings; second, what Karen Bray calls the “cultural” movement in affect theory, which theorizes affects as they circulate in particular cultural/political moments; and finally, the “pre-discursive” or “pre-personal”

stream of affect theory which builds on the work of Spinoza, Whitehead, and Deleuze. Donovan Schaefer's critique and development of this final category serves as a supplement for radical theology by demonstrating how potentiality is insufficiently materially intertwined in the world to fully address concrete problems, like racism or sexism. Further, Schaefer argues that affect theory's dependence on potential risks conflating the feeling of excitement, the feeling of novelty with actual change. As I argued through the first two chapters of this project, the feeling of excitement, which makes old power feel fresh, helps to move sovereignty through time and is what make sovereignty durable and resistant to change.

First, though, what is pre-discursive affect theory, why is it tempting to politics, and why is the pre-personal an insufficient description of affect? Affect theorist Brian Massumi strictly separates affect from feelings or emotions like love, happiness, sadness, etc. For Massumi there is a "missing half-second" at the granular level of perception" that is pre-linguistic or pre-personal or pre-discursive.⁴²⁴ In other words, Massumi claims there is a moment before language where affect has a chance to work on the body and this moment is what is called affect. For Massumi, theorizing this moment can provide renewed insight into subjectivity, knowledge-making (and therefore truth), politics, and more. Massumi's claim that affect shapes economies of perception and knowledge, has significant importance for a discussion of political truth-making, particularly where facts have come to be held as an absolute gold standard of truth, silencing any discussion of first principles serving to anchor truth-making (though as I argue in chapter one facts

⁴²⁴ Schaefer, *Religions Affects*, 26.

obscure a belief in the modern liberal subject).

Massumi's affect theory intersects with Bialecki's description of worship in the Vineyard church as "*évènementiel*" and as a moment of possible reconstitution for the subject.⁴²⁵ Remember again, that Jeremy Gilbert argues affect "has physical effects which can be identified, described and discussed but which are not the same thing as it having meanings"—if having meaning is reduced to signification.⁴²⁶ Music, Gilbert argues, is a part of the human experience that can be expressed in language, but its effects cannot be reduced to language—these effects are affective. Gilbert argues—citing Massumian affect theory—that affect has the potential to reconfigure human beings. In other words, affect theory offers a thread to begin stitching together radical political theology and the experience of worship at Vineyard communities/IHOPKC—the compelling practices that radical theology has not yet enfolded in its analysis of evangelical Christianity.

Brian Massumi's pre-discursive or pre-personal approach to affect theory is rooted in a dialogue with cognitive science, like Crockett's turn to plasticity. In *Religious Affects*, Schaefer recounts Massumi's engagement with a series of scientific experiments, for example, an experiment in which German test subjects were shown a series of differently narrated films about a snowman melting. Massumi uses the participants' reactions to the films to argue that respondents reacted not to the text, but rather to the intensity of the sadness depicted in the film—the preference for sadness, or claim that

⁴²⁵ Bialecki, *A Diagram*, 28.

⁴²⁶ Jeremy Gilbert, "Signifying Nothing: 'Culture,' 'Discourse' and the Sociality of Affect," *Culture Machine* 6, (2004), <https://culturemachine.net/deconstruction-is-in-cultural-studies/signifying-nothing/>.

“sadness is pleasant”—is indicative of forces that are other than linguistic working on the body.⁴²⁷

Schaefer recounts Massumi’s interpretation of a study of aphasic individuals watching a political speech given by Ronald Reagan. According to Massumi the study subjects process Reagan’s speech apart from the linguistic content react to “his body—the twitches, the spasms and ‘veers’” and end up laughing at his bodily affect.⁴²⁸ For Massumi, Reagan is not a political mastermind or singularly charismatic leader, rather it is his affective presence that allows him to gain political power. Massumi thus combines an analysis of power with an analysis of affect: power is not necessarily linked to the policy content, or even to a specific form of rhetoric, rather it was Reagan’s bodily comportment that “allowed him to maneuver his way into the interstices of America’s affective fabric and so achieve transformative political effects.”⁴²⁹ In other words, affect can move political power. The previous chapter argued that charismatic-evangelical Christians and by extension a broad swath of evangelicals have learned to trust intense feeling as a marker of divine presence—and therefore truth.

Political pundits have scrambled to explain the enthusiastic relationship between white evangelical Christians and president Donald Trump, whose life (divorces, cheating) does not conform to the expectations of the usually social conservative evangelical Christians. This project suggests that the intense feeling—intense affect—of Donald

⁴²⁷ Schaefer, *Religions Affects*, 26.

⁴²⁸ Schaefer, *Religions Affects*, 27.

⁴²⁹ Schaefer, *Religions Affects*, 27.

Trump's rallies, Twitter account, and general countenance are read as a marker of truth-telling for a key white evangelical Christian demographic in the U.S. At the same time, it is not only that Trump's affect is intense, it is that it is familiar, shaping people according to the exceptional power that seeks to except some bodies from citizenship in the U.S. The exception, I argue, feels exciting. Intense feeling is a marker of truth—and intense excitement generates an environment of revelation, where old power feels new and white supremacy or authoritarianism can be freshly transmitted. Again, I propose that carefully analyzing the exceptional feelings in charismatic-evangelical communities offers insight into how political power circulates through contemporary truth-making with its seeming bifurcation into feeling-only truth and crypto-fundamentalist facts.

Schaefer cautions that Massumi's reading of Reagan might be "underdeveloped," but he nonetheless is convinced by the claim that ideology is moved through affective forces.⁴³⁰ As Schaefer writes, Massumi's "point that we need to recognize how ideological effects are instigated by affective means, that the substantive precursor of ideology is not a rationalized matrix of concepts, data, and argument, but prediscursive compulsions circulating heavily within bodies, is a vital corrective for the linguistic fallacy."⁴³¹ Again, recognition of the linguistic fallacy is what pressed religious studies to turn to materiality—in hopes of overcoming the shortcomings of a textual approach to the study of religion, which relied on Protestant models of belief. Here, Schaefer begins to make the case that ideology is not a matter of belief alone—especially if belief is

⁴³⁰ Schaefer, *Religions Affects*, 27.

⁴³¹ Schaefer, *Religions Affects*, 27.

narrowly defined, as it is within traditional Protestant theology, as consent to a proposition, such as “Jesus is my savior.” The pre-personal component gets at the behind of beliefs or knowledges, as they are defined by modern society. If the sovereign subject is defined by their ability to act, to make choices, the suggestion that something acts on human beings before, complicates the autonomous definition of the human will.

Therefore, Massumi’s assertion that ideology can be affectively moved extends into this project’s claim that there are forms of political affect, or nodes of sovereignty that feel familiar to listeners; and that it is these patterns of power repeated with fresh intensity—like white supremacy, authoritarianism—that act on people/that people enact. Further, these nodes of durable power are not necessarily linked to specific doctrines or claims. I propose that while white supremacy and authoritarianism do not always emerge with the same specific feelings, the training that takes place in charismatic-evangelical Christian communities has caused a feeling of excitement to become conflated with novelty, which allows old claims to power be reasserted as though they are fresh.

Schaefer’s project in *Religious Affects*, challenges purely pre-discursive, pre-personal definition of affect that is put forward by Massumi. Schaefer argues that pre-personal affect theory requires correction by attention to the phenomenological stream of affect theory that is inaugurated by Silvan Tompkins and is rooted in evolutionary biology. According to Schaefer, Silvan Tompkins’s phenomenological affect theory recognizes a series of affects that have emerged through deep time, evolutionarily, and which work across all the layers of human experience, both pre- and post-discursive. For Tompkins, affect represents “an unlearned phenomenological matrix that emerges in bodies out of this evolutionary dynamic and operates prior to language and

acculturation.”⁴³² According to Schaefer, what results are a series of affects that are recognizable through time, like “anger-rage, surprise-startlement, enjoyment-joy, interest-excitement,” but are still subject to adaption through each individual’s world.⁴³³ What results is not a “pristine set of working gears” but rather “a system in tension,” which is “living multiplicity of diverging emotional drivers rather than a unified economy.”⁴³⁴ In other words, existing, bodily experienced emotions developed as part of human (and animal) biology, but these emotions are woven through the shape of the world each person encounters.

In other words, the plasticity of human subjectivity emerges in tension with a set of durable emotional responses. According to Schaefer, scholars of neuroscience like Antonio Damasio and Joseph LeDoux argue that the body’s non-cognitive dimension is at least in part “pre-adapted to initiate very precise, constrained courses of action.”⁴³⁵ This is because of the “*intransigence* of emotional conditioning”—the durability and inflexibility of affective responses. Schaefer argues, “[r]ather than viewing bodies entirely in terms of a set of plastic set of sculpted dispositions—a sort of phenomenological sandcastle—affect theory is interested in the ways that the shapes of emotions express intransigence.”⁴³⁶

Schaefer therefore critiques any purely discursive plasticity, arguing it is still

⁴³² Schaefer, *Religions Affects*, 46.

⁴³³ Schaefer, *Religions Affects*, 46.

⁴³⁴ Schaefer, *Religions Affects*, 47.

⁴³⁵ Schaefer, *Religions Affects*, 41.

⁴³⁶ Schaefer, *Religions Affects*, 37.

rooted in a liberal ontology, like the one that reinforces the ideal citizen in the U.S. context. Schaefer describes this model of subjectivity as a “sandbox ontology” where human subjectivity is understood as completely open and moldable. According to Schaefer, Massumi’s “affect is a sort of finely granulated field of vital energy sifting through bodies” which has “Spinoza’s vision of God/nature as a being made up of an ‘infinity of attributes’” in the background.”⁴³⁷ In this understanding, “affect comes to be defined as a space of becoming”—and again, affect is strongly opposed to “feelings” or “emotions” which come into the ecosystem of human bodies at the point of awareness.⁴³⁸ Schaefer contends that this ontology depends on the universal assurance that individuals are able to act as they choose and therefore carries the corpse of the modern liberal subject.

Given these observations, Schaefer’s project seeks to work across both types of affect theory—the Deleuzian and the Tompkins branch—seeing affect as “not exactly non-cognitive but extra or paracongnative, *coassembling* with the cognitive (Silvan Tompkin’s word) to shape the contours of thought, action, and experience.”⁴³⁹ (24). Schaefer proposes an ontology not of pure plasticity nor of rigid predetermination. Radical theology’s account of freedom—of law beyond law—recognizes the space that allows any subject to exist. However, by naming it “pure” and seeking the “behind” of the law, this account loses the messy, complex, materiality of the human body—of which

⁴³⁷ Schaefer, *Religions Affects*, 40.

⁴³⁸ Schaefer, *Religions Affects*, 40.

⁴³⁹ Schaefer, *Religions Affects*, 24.

the brain is only a part.

In *The Evolution of Affect Theory*, Schaefer challenges ontologies based on pure becoming or a worldview oriented to “the experience of novelty” by claiming novelty “*is one affect amongst many*.”⁴⁴⁰ Seeing novelty as an affect, argues Schaefer, corresponds to Tompkins’s continuum of interest-excitement. When the experience of excitement as part of a revelatory event is taken to verify novelty, there will always be a risk of instantiating sovereignty. I hold that when radical theology focuses on individual subjects experiencing the event as the locus of freedom within a democracy, it risks conflating excitement with true novelty. As a result, radical theologians carry forward the corpse of the modern liberal subject, which in turn infects their theology with a tendency to focus on the worldview of white heterosexual, cisgender, able-bodied men.

Schaefer’s view that affect co-assembles with the cognitive recognizes the immanence of any possible human transcendence. Even more, the immanent interpellation of human potential and forces between bodies, points to the necessity of theorizing *collective* subjectivity in addition to individual subjectivity. Schaefer’s ontology, I argue, can encompass facts, feelings, and power in their complex interrelation. Affect theory offers tools for overcoming the seeming bifurcation between truth as feeling-only and crypto-fundamentalist facts, by recognizing the deep interrelation between human beings. Schaefer’s project explores the bridging capacity of this ontology, explaining that it blurs the line between nature and culture—describing this bridging with

⁴⁴⁰ Donovan Schaefer, *The Evolution of Affect Theory*, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2019), 50.

Donna Harraway's language of "natureculture." For Schaefer, natureculture offers language to work across arguments that pit nature versus nurture in discussions of subjectivity—or to bridge Bialecki's dichotomy of comprehensive definitions of religion versus contextual ones.

However, simply assuming that it is possible to reconcile a structuralist view of the world with the insights of poststructuralism without specific attention to the forms of affect presented by culture risks an oversimple reading of political truth in the U.S. It's for this reason that Karen Bray's *Grave Attending* offers three lenses for affect "the psychobiological lens, the prepersonal lens, and the cultural lens."⁴⁴¹ For Bray, the *politics* of affect cannot be fully analyzed without considering "how these feelings get coded within cultures or how they come to stick to certain types of bodies, objects, and choices."⁴⁴² Highlighting the *politics* of affect makes evident that specific nodes of power operate within the U.S. Even more, the politics of affect reaffirms that political power is not only exercised individually, but emerges through a group of people, where some people are acting and some people are being acted upon. Human beings emerge as subjects—or as excluded from subjectivity—within a collective.

What if political powers operate as durable, or in Schaefer's language, intransigent forms of power? I argue that Schmittian sovereignty is a durable form of political power that manifests in the U.S. as white supremacy and as authoritarianism (and as other forms

⁴⁴¹ Bray, *Grave Attending*, 5.

⁴⁴² Bray, *Grave Attending*, 5.

of power).⁴⁴³ Schmittian sovereignty in the U.S. seeks to set some people outside the law in a position of authority and works to except other people—black, queer, crip—from participation in society. Durable powers have evolved within political-social-theological history of the U.S. making them both familiar, comfortable and resistant to change—particularly for the white male people in power.

Following Schaefer, feelings co-assemble with cognition, emerging within the complex historical-cultural location of people. Discussions following the 2016 election highlighted the anger and economic loss that working-class white people in places like Appalachia and the Midwest feel because of the continued decline of the manufacturing industry and the post-2008 recession rebound’s failure to reach those with the most economic precarity. These think-pieces were meant to explain the election results without resorting to calling Trump supporters “deplorable”—or to offer a bridge that might allow reconnect the left with people who voted for Trump. Pundits on the left pushed back on these claims highlighting the racism and white supremacy that clearly motivated support for Trump. The truth, of course, must account for all of these pieces: the feelings of anger, frustration, and racial animus; the historical context; the continued power of wealthy corporations over working-class people; and the white supremacy evident in the media’s focus on white people in the 2016 election rather than the variety of other people—people of color—threatened by having a racist in office.⁴⁴⁴

⁴⁴³ Sexism, Islamophobia, etc.

⁴⁴⁴ Amanda Taub, “Behind 2016’s Turmoil, a Crisis of White Identity,” *The New York Times*, November 1, 2016, Accessed April 7, 2021, <https://www.nytimes.com/2016/11/02/world/americas/brexit-donald-trump-whites.html?action=click&module=RelatedCoverage&pgtype=Article®ion=Footer>.

While there is no one “feeling” of white supremacy or authoritarianism, IHOPKC and the Vineyard Movement together present a case study that can speak to this assemblage of facts, feelings, and power. Contemporary charismatic-evangelical practice demonstrates that Schmittian forms of sovereignty are durable political power in the U.S. that manifest as white supremacy and authoritarianism. Further, their practices demonstrate that excitement—which makes power feel fresh—transmits Schmittian sovereignty as part of an ever-changing prophetic history. The specifics, the facts, of IHOPKC’s doctrine and history are less important than the authority—manifest as white supremacy and authoritarianism—that is re-instantiated through the practice.

I return to the practices in the Vineyard communities and IHOPKC and ask, what does the exception—that moves Schmittian sovereignty—feel like? Another example from Jon Bialecki’s book is helpful here. In the sixth chapter, “The Body, Tongues, Healing and Deliverance,” Bialecki recounts a visit from a prophet, an older white man, to the small group of Vineyard members he attended and the particularly intense reaction of a group member named Justin. As the prophet prays over Justin—saying “the Lord wants you to know he’s real, and that he’s not the author of your problems”—the young man collapses.⁴⁴⁵ Then the prophet asks questions designed to show his prophetic acumen by rightly identifying aspects of Justin’s life. For example, he asks if Justin works in computer science—he does not, he works in biology. Despite this disconnect, the prophet continues, “Those hurtful things in your family, God wants you to know that it’s not your

⁴⁴⁵ Bialecki, *A Diagram*, 149.

fault” and hearing these words Justin begins to weep.⁴⁴⁶ The prophet moves on to pray for the next person, encouraging Justin as he leaves to enjoy “the healing of the Holy Spirit.” Justin slouches forward in his chair, eventually crashing to the floor “coughing and moaning.”⁴⁴⁷ A group of community members—not the visiting prophet—gather to pray over him, gently, and then at the prophet’s behest they pray to “break the familiar spirit of death” (“familiar spirit” is a charismatic-evangelical name for a demon).⁴⁴⁸ The community members ask Justin what he wants and Justin responds that he wants to kill himself. Justin begins to vomit and is encouraged to cough it out. A pastor prays for Justin to “make a decision to reject” his sins.⁴⁴⁹ Justin eventually calms and is able to lie down on the couch. The prophet, Justin, and the community members interpret this event as an exorcism—Justin’s vomiting represented a demon leaving his body.

Bialecki theorizes this scene as an encounter between willingness/unwillingness and surprise—remember that the charismatic diagram “freely traverses the boundaries of the person” and in an intensely affective moment like the one experienced by Justin, interior and exterior laminate.⁴⁵⁰ As a result, Bialecki argues, the elements of the diagram, which here are willing/unwilling/willful, the miraculous (manifest as surprise), and the quotidian ground become entrained in a heightened moment. The spectrum of willingness marks how an individual person responds to a surprising event that is put before them.

⁴⁴⁶ Bialecki, *A Diagram*, 150.

⁴⁴⁷ Bialecki, *A Diagram*, 150.

⁴⁴⁸ Bialecki, *A Diagram*, 150.

⁴⁴⁹ Bialecki, *A Diagram*, 151.

⁴⁵⁰ Bialecki, *A Diagram*, 159.

The miraculous enfolds both the prophetic words given by the visiting prophet and the sudden appearance of the demon. The normal borders of each element are stretched, even while each element retains its “nature,” they are “clear but indistinct.”⁴⁵¹ The demonic encounter that Justin experienced was therefore facilitated by the heightened possibility opened by the prophet’s word, which as it met Justin’s unwillingness came together—in “the *explosion of potential*”—as his experience of demonic activity.⁴⁵² It is a catalytic moment between a person’s “openness to a validated and supernaturally understood but essentially stochastic process” and the “crisis of what is self and what is other.”⁴⁵³ In other words, an experience of the supernatural challenges the modern liberal subject, upending the autonomy that is usually the locus of reason, of truth-making for individuals. For Bialecki, the demonic is an expression of the charismatic diagram, what Deleuze might call a line of flight.

In the next chapter, I draw on Jean Luc Marion’s *Givenness and Revelation*, which parses how the divine acts on the will as part of revelation. For Marion, the action of God, the incitement to faith, is somehow before the work of the mind which operates according to reason. Reading Marion’s work in relationship to Derrida, I propose a subjectivity that can account for the powers, the forces that act on human beings as they come into being and is able to account for the structures of power that seek to oppress people in contemporary U.S. society. At the same time, this model of subjectivity

⁴⁵¹ Bialecki, *A Diagram*, 159.

⁴⁵² Bialecki, *A Diagram*, 163.

⁴⁵³ Bialecki, *A Diagram*, 163.

recognizes the porosity of human beings; that humans are open to the action of other people. In other words, the practices in the Vineyard communities demonstrate both how durable powers are easily repeated, while also challenging the modern liberal subject and therefore offering the possibility for theorizing power as part of an interrelated ontology.

For now though, Bialecki's project focuses on explaining the charismatic diagram that allows to evangelical Christians to engage the supernatural without losing their recognizable identity as Christian. The charismatic diagram holds together, for example, the Biblical text and individual revelation: the two sources of knowledge play off of one another, constraining what it is possible to claim, keeping the communities from falling into a new identity, becoming new religious movements. In a similar way, the prophetic history of IHOPKC is constrained by a kind of politics of evangelical respectability. Prophecies that have been declared heretical by the broader evangelical community, prophecies which clearly link evangelical Christianity to Schmittian sovereignty—to authoritarianism and white supremacy—are toned down and re-written, even as the power, the authority is re-asserted in a moment of excitement that forms individuals within a community. The feeling of excitement hides the work of the exception, freeing people from responsibility to histories of racism and oppression. This is not to say that every feeling of surprise or novelty is an instantiation of Schmittian sovereignty, but rather to return to what the previous chapter argues, that white supremacy and authoritarianism, which are forms of Schmittian sovereignty, are drawn through time and re-asserted with freshness via intense excitement. In the charismatic-evangelical communities I use as case studies, white supremacy feels novel: such that the very feeling of intensity, of fresh revelation is what instantiates the exceptional position of white

people.

At the same time IHOPKC demonstrates that subjectivity is both individual and collective. And their negotiations of facts, feeling, and power points towards the work of collective subject formation. In the next chapter, I argue that progressives—I am mainly speaking to white liberals—must understand themselves as embedded in a collective political subject. As part of a community of progressive thinkers and activists seeking to make political truth that encompasses fact, feeling, and power, progressives must learn to listen. Listening opens space to hear people whose voices are often silenced. Listening clears space for revelation, which allows reason to touch the impossible. Practicing openness to the interpellation of bodies will cause white people (hopefully) to be affected by the movement of powers other than Schmittian sovereignty. White people must listen for the powers of resistance woven through the collectivities of people who Schmittian sovereignty seeks to except from citizenship. Looking at other people lends itself to making others into an object; listening, I argue in the next chapter, opens up participation in an alternative economy of truth-making.

In the final section of this chapter, I look at the formation of collective subjectivities in charismatic-evangelical communities as they are woven into the contemporary U.S. political scene.

Pedagogies of Power: Collective Subjectivities

“What does it feel like to be us?” Schaefer⁴⁵⁴

Donovan Schaefer explores the role of affect in community formation and

⁴⁵⁴ Schaefer, *Religious Affects*, 75.

political power in his reading of the film *Jesus Camp* in chapter three, “Teaching Religion, Emotion, and Global Cinema” of his *Religious Affects*. The documentary film, released in 2006, depicts charismatic practices similar to the ones used by IHOPKC—prophecy, prayer, music, spiritual warfare, and more. In fact, one prayer-leader who shows up later in the film, Lou Engle, is a frequent collaborator with Mike Bickle. The film revolves primarily around a children’s prayer camp called the Kids on Fire School of Ministry and headed by a pastor named Becky Fischer, which takes place at a summer camp in North Dakota.⁴⁵⁵ Filmmakers follow three white children, depicting their lives before and after camp. The children’s lives present familiar tropes of evangelical Christian life in the mid-2000s. For example, Levi is homeschooled and the film depicts him reading from a book about young earth creationism; Rachel engages in evangelism at a bowling alley, after feeling led by the spirit to speak to strangers. More than the ethnographies in the previous chapter, *Jesus Camp* directly confronts the intersection of charismatic-evangelical practice and politics. The film opens with and is framed with excerpts from a liberal Christian radio show, whose host laments the “coalescence of religion and politics in contemporary American society.”⁴⁵⁶ Like Luhrmann’s project seeks to explain how contemporary Christians can believe in God to non-believers, *Jesus Camp* is meant to provide a window into the charismatic-evangelical world where politics take on a supernatural intensity.

At camp, the children are thrown into an exciting environment, filled with high

⁴⁵⁵ Rachel Grady and Heidi Ewing, *Jesus Camp*, 2006, New York, Magnolia Pictures.

⁴⁵⁶ Schaefer, *Religious Affects*, 69.

energy worship times and fiery speakers. Becky and a team of adult leaders hold an exuberant prayer session—marked by loud speaking-in-tongues—in the main meeting hall, praying for the children to experience salvation, the gifts of the spirit, and more. The film depicts children having intense emotional responses within their bodies during the camp meetings: “Children weeping, wailing, entranced, scornful, fearful, speaking in tongues, preaching, awestruck, and transported by joy.”⁴⁵⁷ Children kneel on the floor; raise their arms; embrace one another. The sermons depicted in the film are meant to lead the children to heightened worship and prayer, called “ministry time” several times a day. One of the most striking, and most frequently depicted images from the film is the children praying fervently, feverishly around a cardboard cutout of George W. Bush during a ministry time. The children are led to repeat “Mr. President, one nation under God!!,” which is simultaneously a prayer to God and an admonition to the president.

Schaefer explains that when the film was released it caused great alarm amongst liberal viewers, who concerned by the “brainwashing” they saw in the film. *Jesus Camp* caused a backlash against the indoctrination and manipulation of young impressionable people that liberal viewers see in the film. Schaefer continues, that when asked about the film, Becky Fischer, the children’s pastor who leads the camp sees the documentary as capturing moments of supernatural victory. For example, just two weeks after the children were praying and chanting for “righteous judges” to overturn *Roe v. Wade*, Supreme Court Justice Sandra Day O’Connor resigned, which eventually made space for Samuel Alito, a conservative judge, to be confirmed to the court.

⁴⁵⁷ Schaefer, *Religious Affects*, 68.

Schaefer asks does this bifurcated response to the film say about the status of truth in U.S. politics? Two political factions view the film as having two different messages. One group sees the film, as showing what is wrong with politics and religion; and the other sees the film as a celebration of what they are doing right. Reducing the “truth” of this film to the view point of either group risks missing the complexity of what is happening in the film. For Schaefer, all viewers of the film—liberal, Christian, conservative, secular, and many other identifiers—are participating in a pedagogy of global Christianity, just as the kids within the film are being taught how to participate in their charismatic evangelical Christian community.

For Schaefer, *Jesus Camp* is networked into a global feeling-scape that shapes contemporary religion at a global scale. Or the film depicts “religious formations of power through the circulations of affects along transnational media networks.”⁴⁵⁸ Specifically, he argues the practices in *Jesus Camp* demonstrate the globalization of Christianity—the collective formation of subjects both inside and outside the charismatic-evangelical Christian communities. In other words, subjectivity is formed at the individual and the group level. Individual subject formation is diverse, reacting to the specific social location of each child. At the same time, there are durable nodes of political power that seek to persist within the film and for viewers of the film. People who are already inclined towards the powers moved by charismatic-evangelical practice are further shaped in that direction. Viewers who are opposed to the powers pushed by *Jesus Camp* feel their resistance further entrenched.

⁴⁵⁸ Schaefer, *Religious Affects*, 60

One example of response to the film is Levi whose homeschool experience is portrayed and is given an opportunity to preach during the film. Later in life he is still a member of the charismatic-evangelical Christian community. In a follow-up article called “The Kids of Jesus Camp 10 Years Later,” Levi is described as working for an evangelical Christian evangelism organization. Levi is asked if he “is the way he is because of how he was raised” and responds “isn’t everybody?”⁴⁵⁹ He says, “I have peace in my mind, I have drive and purpose and character.”⁴⁶⁰ Levi’s participation in the charismatic-evangelical community as a child carries through to his adulthood. There is clear evidence that what he learned as a child shaped his sense of self—his subjectivity—and has located him within a collective subjectivity.

Another child in the film, Andrew Sommerkamp, is depicted as having doubts about his experience of God. Schaefer describes Andrew, (who is not named in the film) as emoting shame, “seated on the floor of the stage, slumped, raising his palms and his face up to the sky, other members of the assembly studying him carefully.”⁴⁶¹ As a child, Andrew gets the microphone and says “it’s just really hard to do this... just to believe in God is really hard because you don’t see him... Sometimes I don’t even believe what the Bible says. It makes me *a faker*.”⁴⁶² While Andrew expresses doubt, Schaefer sees the

⁴⁵⁹ Josiah Hesse, “The kids of Jesus Camp, 10 years later: ‘Was it child abuse? Yes and no,’” *The Guardian*, July 6, 2016, Accessed April 7, 2021, <https://www.theguardian.com/film/2016/jul/06/jesus-camp-christian-documentary-kids-10-years-later>.

⁴⁶⁰ Hesse, “The kids,” <https://www.theguardian.com/film/2016/jul/06/jesus-camp-christian-documentary-kids-10-years-later>.

⁴⁶¹ Schaefer, *Religious Affects*, 77.

⁴⁶² Schaefer, *Religious Affects*, 77.

performance of shame as part of the affective network that forms the community. The child's speech takes the verbal shape of a sermon and elicits strong reactions across the group that is intensely praying for him.

Ten years later, Andrew has left the Charismatic-evangelical world, citing his father's experience coming out as gay as the reason for his departure. He is ambivalent about his experience: when asked if the camp was child abuse, he says "yes and no."⁴⁶³ However, Andrew has not left spirituality; he is described as living with a "group of spiritual seekers in Mount Shasta, California."⁴⁶⁴ He now finds "peace in eastern mysticism, quantum mechanics, and psychotropic drugs."⁴⁶⁵ By the end of the interview, Andrew is more positive about his experience, saying, "They showed us what it meant to really feel deep emotions for life, for God"—and despite his doubt, "our belief in it had made it real...it really taught me the power of belief."⁴⁶⁶ While Andrew has rejected the doctrine and seemingly the politics of the community, he still holds fondly to the deep emotions that were part of his experience. In other words, while the specific doctrines have changed, the affective training has proven durable. For adult Andrew, affective intensity remains linked to God and to belief.

Andrew's confession of doubts as a child follows the analysis of individual

⁴⁶³ Hesse, "The kids," <https://www.theguardian.com/film/2016/jul/06/jesus-camp-christian-documentary-kids-10-years-later>.

⁴⁶⁴ Hesse, "The kids," <https://www.theguardian.com/film/2016/jul/06/jesus-camp-christian-documentary-kids-10-years-later>.

⁴⁶⁵ Hesse, "The kids," <https://www.theguardian.com/film/2016/jul/06/jesus-camp-christian-documentary-kids-10-years-later>.

⁴⁶⁶ Hesse, "The kids," <https://www.theguardian.com/film/2016/jul/06/jesus-camp-christian-documentary-kids-10-years-later>.

subjectivity that is put forward by Luhmann in *When God Talks Back*. Remember that Luhmann argues that God “takes shape out of an exquisite awareness of doubt”—“hyperreal;” or “realer than real, so real that it is impossible not to understand that you may be fooling yourself.”⁴⁶⁷ So as a child, Andrew’s sense of a personal god emerged out of those doubts. And as I argued, his belief was verified by intense emotion, in this case shame. When Andrew left behind the doctrine and dogma of the community as an adult, he carried with him the affective shaping that points him toward intense spiritual experiences as a site of the divine (in particular his exploration of psychedelic drugs). I argue that the affective shaping of the charismatic-evangelical community is durable, resistant to change, even when the data—in this case the doctrine—is completely rejected. Andrew obviously cannot serve as an exemplar for all charismatic evangelical-Christians. But, he *does* demonstrate the possibility of affective shaping repeating with differences.

I seek to highlight the role of affect in creating durable elements of subjectivity. For Levi, he remains directly linked to his charismatic-evangelical community which operates with a collective subjectivity; Andrew becomes unmoored from the specific community, but carries the shaping of the community, which encounters new data, new facts, new knowledge, and runs them through his affective shaping. If this shaping is attuned to a particular kind of power—likely Schmittian sovereign power—then it is easy for Schmittian sovereign power to activate the feeling-scape of particular people.

⁴⁶⁷ T.M. Luhmann, *When God Talks Back: Understanding the American Evangelical Relationship with God*, (New York: Alfred A Knopf, 2012), Kindle, 300, 301.

Schmittian sovereignty, which supports authoritarianism and white supremacy is therefore easily activated and repeated. Schmittian sovereignty is a durable and familiar form of power—that feels fresh and exciting because of the forms of Christian practice—like worship, prophecy, and revelation—that have helped to transmit it.

Again, for Luhrmann prayer—and music with its emotional intensity is prayer—is the site of *learning* in charismatic communities. For Luhrmann prayer is the site that teaches charismatic-evangelicals to modify their theory of the mind such that they extend the modern liberal subject—and such that belief as assent to a series of factually impossible propositions is possible. In contrast, Schaefer’s pedagogy of affect unveils the limitations of the modern liberal subject—and the subject’s enmeshment within a community with a collective subjectivity. Charismatic-evangelicals have a political subjectivity—it is not universal, and individual actors make a wide variety of decisions—yet there is a coherent collective subjectivity. Radical theology gets at this by seeking to center its analysis of the Rise of the Religious Right within the historical context that allowed the Religious Right—the New Christian Right—to emerge. However, as previously stated, radical theology’s depiction of the New Christian Right is importantly supplemented by a turn to the practices that form subjectivity both individually and collectively.

In his 2019 book, *The Evolution of Affect Theory*, Schaefer presents a scaffolding to map the movement of facts-feelings-power across individual and collective subjectivities. In the introduction titled, “Music Without Words,” Schaefer tells a story of Donald Trump. Journalist Chuck Todd recounts that when taping television interviews, Trump often requests to watch the playback without the sound. Todd theorizes that

Trump's identity as a politician must be understood, in part, through his sensitivity to the visual. Schaefer's project asks how can political efficacy flow "not from language but from a face"—and in response he quotes Kathleen Stewart, "Power is a thing of the senses."⁴⁶⁸ Schaefer explains that affect theory examines in "*what bodies do*—how they desire, how they move, where they go, "especially how bodies are impelled by forces other than language and reason."⁴⁶⁹ Affect theory is not only an approach to history, culture, politics, religion, and many other fields, that emphasizes the "non-linguistic and non- or para-cognitive forces," it is "also a theory about power."⁴⁷⁰ Feeling, argues Schaefer, is not the antithesis of reason, but rather is part of the production of knowledge. Schaefer directly addresses the secular crypto-fundamentalist version of facts, exemplified by Steven Pinker, which seeks to place reason in opposition to feeling thereby upholding the artificial binary that drives contemporary debates about truth. Affect is part of knowledge production; affect is not opposed to knowledge.

Schaefer locates affect and knowledge within Michel Foucault's "analytics of power." Foucault's writing contrasts his analytics of power to the "*juridico-discursive*" model of power.⁴⁷¹ Juridical power or the power of the law comes from the top down, is maintained by focus, and works by prohibition, by saying no. This model is based upon traditional political power, where a series of written laws govern what can and cannot be done within a society. There are people—judges—given the power to enforce the

⁴⁶⁸ Schaefer, *Evolution*, 1.

⁴⁶⁹ Schaefer, *Evolution*, 1.

⁴⁷⁰ Schaefer, *Evolution*, 1.

⁴⁷¹ Schaefer, *Evolution*, 2.

prohibitions of the law. Schmittian sovereignty starts out within the discourse of traditional power, but Schmitt maps the ways power moves outside of juridical reach—the ways the exception exceeds, transcends the law. At times discourse takes on the language of exception, like for example, after the events of 9/11 in the U.S. However, I argue (with others) that the insidiousness of Schmitt’s sovereignty is that the exception has become sublimated into the workings of the liberal state. And it is the invisibility of Schmittian sovereign power—the normalizing or obfuscating of Schmittian sovereign power—that makes it so durable within U.S. political life.

In contrast to juridical power, an analytics of power tracks power that is “*productive* as well as constraining.”⁴⁷² Schaefer explains that Foucault’s work lays out, a conception of power which replaces the privilege of the law with the viewpoint of the objective, the privilege of prohibition with the viewpoint of tactical efficacy, the privilege of sovereignty with the analysis of a multiple and mobile field of force relations, wherein far-reaching, but never completely stable, effects of domination are produced.⁴⁷³

Affect allows Schaefer to begin conceptualizing power’s “fuzzy relationship with intention, cognition, accident, awareness, and what gets called ‘reason.’”⁴⁷⁴ He asks, with Hélène Cixous, “Why do we like music that is without words?”⁴⁷⁵ What is the force –

⁴⁷² Schaefer, *Evolution*, 3.

⁴⁷³ Schaefer, *Evolution*, 3.

⁴⁷⁴ Schaefer, *Evolution*, 3.

⁴⁷⁵ Schaefer, *Evolution*, 3.

riding airborne vibrations – reverberating deep into our bodies that makes us move?”⁴⁷⁶

In other words, Schaefer seeks to articulate the materiality of power. Like radical theology attempts to press into materiality by engaging the plasticity of the brain, affect theory presses into the material by engaging the forces that move between bodies. Power is the capacity to act and be acted upon that weaves across bodies, collectives, the earth.

Again, Schaefer argues that an account of affect and power must not pull only on the Deuluzian/Spizonian thread of affect theory. Schaefer argues “that a theory of affect *and power* can’t work if affect is defined as *becoming*.”⁴⁷⁷ Schaefer does not deny that change and becoming is part of the shape of power within society. However, his project aims to correct for what he perceives to be an overdependence on becoming, which misses the biology, the animality, of human beings. Remember that neuroscience indicates that human beings have a series of evolutionarily developed affects. He writes, “Affects in their animality need to be understood in terms of concrete dynamics between change and structure, becoming and being, rather than governed by an overarching logic of becoming.”⁴⁷⁸ Again, it is through the phenomenological stream of affect theory that Schaefer is able to offer an account of what he calls, extending Foucault, “power-knowledge-affect” as it emerges entrained and networked through bodies.

Schaefer engages the works of affect theorists, Teresa Bannon and Sarah Ahmed in order to explore the *pedagogy* of affect. By framing affect as pedagogy, it can enfold

⁴⁷⁶ Schaefer, *Evolution*, 3.

⁴⁷⁷ Schaefer, *Evolution*, 2.

⁴⁷⁸ Schaefer, *Evolution*, 3.

the practices of evangelical-Christian communities. Teresa Brennan's work, "is structured around a disruption of what she diagnoses as a delusion at the heart Western thought: the 'foundational fantasy' of the subject's autonomous self-containment."⁴⁷⁹ Schaefer, following Brennan explains, "Rather than individuated subjects, bodies are radically interconnected—global—constituted by a dynamic of transformative flows enfolding us in intimate proximity with other bodies."⁴⁸⁰ Here is an alternative vision of subjectivity—one that presses into an ontology—human beings are not closed, autonomous bodies as the modern liberal subject would suggest. Human beings are, as charismatic-evangelicals perceive in their re-training of the mind, porous. However, rather than a limited porosity which allows a transcendent being to enter in and speak to individuals, human beings are "radically interconnected." Understanding human beings as radically interconnected overcomes the failure in Luhmann's work to address the collective shaping of charismatic-evangelical communities.

Schaefer argues that an ontology of interconnection, therefore, "models global religion."⁴⁸¹ The learning that takes place, "the protocol of globalization...is a dynamic of bodies and worlds, a history formed by the collision of material and embodied histories operating not in the fluid space of discursive plasticity, but a repertoire of intransigent elements."⁴⁸² In other words, durable elements—including durable affects and powers—circulate and form human histories, bodies, and world. In this schema, Schmittian

⁴⁷⁹ Schaefer, *Religious Affects*, 65.

⁴⁸⁰ Schaefer, *Religious Affects*, 65.

⁴⁸¹ Schaefer, *Religious Affects*, 62.

⁴⁸² Schaefer, *Religious Affects*, 62.

sovereignty is a durable form of political power that continues to circulate in the U.S., under different names.

Conclusion: Power Persists?

On the cover of *Time Magazine* in 1966, radical theologians thrust the question “Is God Dead?” into the popular imagination. History since the 1960s has proven that God—especially the transcendent all-powerful God—is not dead if dead means lacking in lively and efficacious public impact. The rise of the New Religious Right thrust the supernatural God (yet again) into competition with science, as Steven Pinker’s work demonstrates. As I argue in Chapter One, Pinker’s conceptual arguments with religion serve to obscure his dependence, his belief, in the modern liberal subject and therefore obscure the operation of power as the modern liberal subject operates as a mediator of citizenship in the U.S. The sovereign subject seeks to except people who are not white, cisgendered, heterosexual, and able bodied from participation in civic life. Inasmuch as Schmittian sovereign powers still circulate through charismatic-evangelical Christian communities and through the modern liberal subject, radical theologians rightly assert that (at least) the worst version of the sovereign Christian God must die.

Alternative models of power and subjectivity have not yet fully accounted for the way human subjects fold their affect-laden experiences into truth-making. A phenomenological account of prophecy demonstrates, via Bialecki’s diagram, that despite holding a traditional notion of God, charismatic-evangelical Christians are more in tune with a notion of subjectivity that holds power as immanent than the popular discourse on the left that attempts to fact-check feeling-only truth into submission.

The next chapter starts from the beginning—however, instead of starting from the

status of truth in U.S. politics, chapter four starts with the theological roots of the doctrine of revelation. I read revelation through poststructuralist and phenomenological theory in order to bring the event of revelation into relief as part of an economy of knowledge that does not repeat Schmittian sovereignty. Instead radical theologians (who tend to be white like me) must listen and be moved by music coming from other communities, can break the re-instantiation of Schmittian sovereignty as authoritarianism and white supremacy. In this economy of truth, power persists—or God insists. The final chapter proposes that God is affected. God appears at the limits of the human subject, where possibility and limit are simultaneously invoked. Human beings therefore come into subjectivity, as both capable of change and shaped by the world around them. More than just the world, human beings are shaped by other humans. I propose listening for resistance and as resistance, which will allow limited subjects to hear and amplify the potential of others. Critical listening takes place, is performed, as an economy of truth that amplifies the sounds of resistance to Schmittian sovereignty. This makes possible a model of collective power and subjectivity that is deeply rooted in the material conditions of human beings.

Chapter 4

Toward a Political Theology of Revelation: Listening for the Powers of the People

*You want a revolution? I want a revelation! - Angelica Schuyler, Hamilton: An American Musical*⁴⁸³

*That is why I had to visit Black Lives Matter Plaza in Washington, though I was admitted to the hospital the following day. I just had to see and feel it for myself that, after many years of silent witness, the truth is still marching on. - John Lewis*⁴⁸⁴

On July 3rd 2020, a taping of the original cast of *Hamilton: An American Musical* was released to the public.⁴⁸⁵ The fast-paced, sung-through musical, notable for its eclectic music that makes heavy use of hip-hop and rap, takes American history and turns it on its head—or as the lyrics of “Yorktown,” a song depicting the last battle of the American Revolutionary War proclaim, “the world turned upside down.”⁴⁸⁶ The energy of the Revolutionary period is brought to life and then amplified with a contemporary spin in *Hamilton*. The show tells the founding story—myth—of the United States, but tells it

⁴⁸³ “The Schuyler Sisters” track 5 featuring Renée Elise Goldsberry on Lin-Manuel Miranda, *Hamilton: An American Musical*, Atlantic Records, 2015.

⁴⁸⁴ John Lewis, “Together, You Can Redeem the Soul of Our Nation,” *The New York Times*, July 30, 2020, Accessed April 23, 2021, <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/07/30/opinion/john-lewis-civil-rights-america.html>.

⁴⁸⁵ Through Disney’s streaming service Disney plus. Once the exclusive purview of those with enough money to buy tickets to the wildly popular Broadway show, now everyone with a free week-long trial of the streaming channel can watch the Pulitzer Prize, Grammy, and Tony award winning show about the life of founding father Alexander Hamilton. *Hamilton: An American Musical*, directed by Thomas Kail, aired July 3, 2020, on Disney+, 2:40.

⁴⁸⁶ The lyric is a reference to a British ballad and the likely apocryphal story that a British ballad called “The World Turned Upside Down” was played by the British as they surrendered at the Battle of Yorktown. “A March Allegedly Played by the British at Yorktown, 1781,” Washington Library, Center for Digital History, Colonial Music Institute, George Washington’s Mount Vernon, Accessed April 13, 2021, <https://www.mountvernon.org/library/digitalhistory/colonial-music-institute/essays/a-march-allegedly-played-at-yorktown/>. Lin-Manuel Miranda, “The Battle of Yorktown (the World Turned Upside Down),” track 20 on *Hamilton: An American Musical*, Atlantic Records, 2015.

with fresh excitement, an experience of exceptional intensity that allowed the story to break into popular discourse with a feeling of novelty. Indeed, there is newness in *Hamilton*'s telling of a familiar story: people who are usually left out of the narrative, those who Schmittian sovereignty seeks to except from citizenship, are included in this version.

In what follows I read *Hamilton* as a musical and political narrative event that demonstrates the emergence of political truth as an assemblage of facts, feelings, and power. Listening to *Hamilton* opens into my reading of the doctrine of revelation. Jean-Luc Marion argues that revelation is a science, where reason touches the impossible, as a paradox. Revelation is relational and affective: God acts on the will, causing human beings to desire and to love God. In order to avoid Marion's tendency to completely dethrone the subject in revelation, I turn to Jacques Derrida, who wrestles with *the promise* to avoid speaking about God. In Derrida's avoidance, I encounter the im/possible or the possibility at the limits of subjectivity. God is revealed as limited; and therefore the sovereign God is affected. I argue with Derrida that at the limit of the individual subject, we encounter other people and other creatures in relationship. In relationships we become more than individuals, we become a community—a collective subjectivity. At the conclusion of the chapter, I contend that if we learn to listen, as Jean-Luc Nancy proposes, to listen for sense, with all the senses, and with a sense of direction, we will hear resistance. Critical listening takes place—and in these iterative moments, change is possible. Imagining political truth as revelation makes possible an economy of political truth that encompasses facts, feelings, and power.

Hamilton Decenters Whiteness in the American Origin Story

Lin-Manuel Miranda, a Puerto Rican man and the creator of *Hamilton*, plays the titular role—Alexander Hamilton. Miranda was inspired by Ron Chernow’s 2005 biography of Hamilton that lays out the Founding Father’s immigration story: born in poverty in the Caribbean out of wedlock, of mixed cultural ancestry, coming to New York City, “young scrappy, and hungry.”⁴⁸⁷ Miranda, already a Tony Award winner for his earlier show *In the Heights*, read Chernow’s biography of Hamilton and decided that Hamilton “embodies hiphop:” the young immigrant who becomes George Washington’s “right hand man” and then catches “beef” with every other founding father, but on the strength of his writing, demonstrates “the word’s ability to make a difference.”⁴⁸⁸ The power and persuasiveness of language is key to understanding Miranda’s reading of Hamilton—but the success of the show lies in language, narrative, music, and performances that come together as a whole. *Hamilton* generates a moment that can reshape subjects who experience connections with the performers and other audience members, while allowing a new telling of the founding narrative—a new truth—to come into focus. *Hamilton*’s vibrant movement of feelings and facts is powerful. *Hamilton* is effective because it is affective. Power moves—it dances, projects—from performers to the audience.

⁴⁸⁷ Ron Chernow, *Alexander Hamilton*, (New York: Penguin Books, 2004). “My Shot” track 3 on Lin-Manuel Miranda, *Hamilton: An American Musical*, Atlantic Records, 2015.

⁴⁸⁸ Lin-Manuel Miranda, “Lin-Manuel Miranda Performs at the White House Poetry Jam,” The Obama White House, YouTube, Nov 2, 2009, Accessed April 13, 2021, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WNFf7nMIGnE>.

Remember that music, argues political theorist Jeremy Gilbert, “has physical effects which can be identified, described and discussed but which are not the same thing as it having meanings.”⁴⁸⁹ Music is a part of the human experience that can be expressed in language, but its meaning cannot be reduced to conceptual forms alone. Or as Donovan Schaefer following Helene Cixous and Mireille Calle-Gruber asks, “Why do we love music without words?”⁴⁹⁰ Schaefer sees music as an opening into an alternative theory of power. He asks, “What is the force—riding airborne vibrations—reverberating deep into our bodies that makes us move?”⁴⁹¹ Schaefer presents an analytics of power, following Foucault, that encompasses *power-knowledge-affect*. In my work *revelation* facilitates political truth-making that reveals the bifurcation of truth as “feeling-only” or as a “crypto-fundamentalist” version of the facts as false. The doctrine of revelation, as I read it through Marion and Derrida, presents us with truth that encompasses facts, feelings, and power. Political truth is more than facts: it is the assertion of a starting place for decision making—and the creation of a community who share a starting place.

Indeed, *Hamilton*’s success is intimately entwined with the history of political power in the U.S., not only because of its themes, but also because of the connection between Miranda and the first black man to serve as president of the United States, Barack Hussein Obama. Miranda famously first performed the opening number of the

⁴⁸⁹ Jeremy Gilbert, “Signifying Nothing: ‘Culture,’ ‘Discourse’ and the Sociality of Affect,” *Culture Machine* 6, (2004), <https://culturemachine.net/deconstruction-is-in-cultural-studies/signifying-nothing/>.

⁴⁹⁰ Donovan Schaefer, *The Evolution of Affect Theory*, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2019), 1.

⁴⁹¹ Schaefer, *Evolution*, 3.

show, “Alexander Hamilton,” at the White House, early in the Obama administration during May of 2009, as part of an open mic art and poetry event organized by the first family. Video of the event shows the audience, including the Obamas, move through skepticism (the audience titters while Miranda explains the premise of the song), surprise, and finally excitement covers their faces as they watch Miranda rap. The song’s closing line is Aaron Burr’s admission that he murdered Hamilton—“I’m the damn fool who shot him!” The audience responds enthusiastically, amazed by the feelings, the pathos and simultaneous hope, that are evoked by Miranda’s retelling of familiar history. There is a palpable excitement in the room, as an old story is made to feel fresh, new and relevant.⁴⁹² Set to music, rapped, and retold as an immigrant story, the life of Alexander Hamilton becomes exceptional. Indeed, the power of Miranda’s exceptional musical is demonstrated in its success. *Hamilton* is the most successful musical—by most metrics—in recent history.⁴⁹³

How does the show re-shape American subjectivity? The casting of the show attempts to put “everybody from America” on the stage.⁴⁹⁴ White historical figures from the American founding myth are presented as Black, Latinx, Asian, and from a variety of

⁴⁹² Lin-Manuel Miranda, “Lin-Manuel Miranda Performs at the White House Poetry Jam,” <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WNFf7nMIGnE>.

⁴⁹³ *Hamilton* won 16 Tony awards, a Pulitzer Prize, A Grammy, and more. Jennifer Van Evra, “Hamilton: 15 fascinating facts about the biggest musical of all time,” *CBC*, October 30, 2019, Accessed April 13, 2021, <https://www.cbc.ca/radio/q/blog/hamilton-15-fascinating-facts-about-the-biggest-musical-of-all-time-1.5341556>. In 2020 the show had earned 1 billion dollars. Dawn Chmielewski, “Lin-Manuel Miranda’s ‘Hamilton’ Crashes Broadway’s Billion-Dollar Club,” *Forbes*, Accessed April 13, 2021, <https://www.forbes.com/sites/dawnchmielewski/2020/06/08/lin-manuel-mirandas-hamilton-crashes-broadways-billion-dollar-club/?sh=680c27145b3c>.

⁴⁹⁴ Eric Kohn, “How ‘Hamilton’ Became a Color-Conscious Casting Trailblazer, Before It Was Cool,” *IndieWire*, July 4, 2020, Accessed April 19, 2021, <https://www.indiewire.com/2020/07/hamilton-cast-casting-directors-diversity-1234571127/>.

other races or ethnicities. The power of representation is undeniable. Presenting the American revolution as spearheaded by Alexander Hamilton, a “young, scrappy, and hungry” immigrant from the Caribbean, writes the diverse population of the U.S. into the foundational myth of U.S. life: the defeat of the British sovereign rule of the American colonies. This break from sovereignty is remembered as a movement into freedom, into democracy for the people of the U.S. Placing people of color into the victorious narrative usually reserved for white Founding Fathers confronts the white heterosexual cisgendered abled male identity of the ideal U.S. citizen that defines who is accepted as a citizen and who is excepted from citizenship within the U.S.

In March of 2016 at the end of Obama’s second term, Miranda and the whole cast of *Hamilton* performed at the White House in the glow of their prize-winning show. Chris Jackson, a handsome, statuesque Black man, plays George Washington in the show—his casting is emblematic of show’s choice to place people of color into the roles of white historical figures. At the end of Obama’s term, Jackson singing Washington’s parting question, “Why do I have to say goodbye?” is a powerful interrogation of the first Black presidency.⁴⁹⁵ Washington’s decision to enact the first peaceful transition of power at the end of his presidency is enshrined in history as a moment that set the stage for the U.S.’s enduring democracy. As Obama sits, listening, surely the coming transfer of power—from the Obama presidency to the Trump presidency—is on his mind. Like the song “One Last Time” contemplates the legacy of Washington’s presidency, Obama is on the

⁴⁹⁵ Christopher Jackson and Lin-Manuel Miranda, “‘One Last Time’ - Hamilton at the White House,” *Hamilton*, YouTube, January 10, 2017, Accessed April 14, 2021, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uV4UpCq2azs>.

precipice of his legacy. Obama's face is inscrutable as he listens to Jackson singing as Washington, while standing in front of a portrait of the white George Washington of history. This moment, captured on video and available at any time on YouTube, demonstrates the living construction of history—of political truth—in the U.S. Political truth is made of facts, feeling, and power; political history in this case is composed of the raw material of Hamilton's life, the feelings generated by the music and performance, and the literal loci of power represented by President Obama and the image of President Washington.

I argue that Miranda's *Hamilton* functions like Mike Bickle's constantly evolving prophetic histories—histories that are made and re-made in order to align with the changing norms and values of society. Historian Joanne Freeman, writing about the *Hamilton* phenomenon in 2015, argues, “From the dawning of the republic to the present day, generation after generation has created Founding narrative that served their needs.”⁴⁹⁶ Miranda rewrites the narrative in order to include the black and brown bodies that are usually written out of the narrative. Miranda presents an America that is familiar, but encompasses the (unfortunately) revelatory claim that black, indigenous, and people of color ought to be included in the story. Again, representation is powerful. Allowing people—non-white people—to see themselves as part of the history, the fabric, of the U.S. reveals the possibility of a different United States of America. History is not a fixed narrative, but rather one that can be rethought, reframed in light of new orthodoxies, in light of a need to rethink the ideas, the ideologies, and the doctrines that are established

⁴⁹⁶ Joanne B. Freeman, “Will the Real Alexander Hamilton Please Stand Up?,” *Journal of the Early Republic* 37, no. 2, (July 2017): 258.

as truth in our society. Outwardly, at least, most Americans recognize a need for racial equality and even for equity. When Obama took office, there was a sense that the story of race in the U.S. had entered a new chapter and for many white *Hamilton* fans Obama's presidency suggested that racism had come to an end. (Black people, Indigenous people, and other People of Color did not jump to the same conclusion). The people who could afford the expensive tickets to see *Hamilton* are confronted by an alternate reality: a reality that challenges the supremacy of white people in American history.

In 2020, four years into the presidency of Donald Trump, *Hamilton*'s wide release as a film sparked fresh debate about what it means to be American. The optimism—the hopefulness—that accompanied the show, so intimately linked to the Obama presidency, no longer drove public feelings. In the middle of 2020, the U.S. was overrun by the Covid-19 pandemic, protests against police brutality on behalf of Black lives, and calls to “defund the police.”⁴⁹⁷ Simply writing black, brown, queer, disabled bodies into the founding narrative was no longer adequate—in fact, given the administration's actions, it no longer even seemed possible. The feelings of rage, anger, fear that fueled protests were hedged in by the force of the depression, apathy, and boredom that accompanied the quarantine and social distancing necessary to slow the spread of Covid-19. Donald Trump was (is) openly racist, transphobic, misogynistic, ableist, and flirted with authoritarianism. The moment of possibility that accompanied the 2016 phenomenon of

⁴⁹⁷ Stephanie Zacharek, “2020 Tested Us Beyond Measure. Where Do We Go From Here?” *Time Magazine*, December 5, 2020, Accessed April 15, 2021, <https://time.com/5917394/2020-in-review/>. On *Hamilton* in light of BLM, Ed Morales, “The problem with the ‘Hamilton’ movie,” *CNN*, July 7, 2020, Accessed April 15, 2021, <https://www.cnn.com/2020/07/05/opinions/hamilton-movie-mixed-messages-black-lives-matter-morales/index.html>.

Hamilton is lost—or at least *Hamilton*'s optimism is in need of revision.

Indeed, the pushback against *Hamilton* in 2020 is evidence of the need to further revisit history. It is a call to continue pressing against the limits of human understanding.⁴⁹⁸ Key to holding power to account—to asserting limits on power—is listening for tones, surges, potentials of resistance. First, critiques rose about *Hamilton*'s relative quiet about slavery: many of the historical figures who are played by people of color in *Hamilton* were slave owners. At the end of the musical, Eliza Schuyler imagines that given more life, Hamilton would have worked to free slaves and both historians and the public have pushed back on that particular flight of imagination.⁴⁹⁹ And even stronger than critiques of Miranda's alternate histories are critiques claiming that *Hamilton* repeats a narrative of American exceptionalism.

Historian Joanne Freeman writes, "*Hamilton* is an ode to a somewhat nebulous American exceptionalism, a powerful message given America's identity crisis."⁵⁰⁰ *Hamilton*'s powerful work toward representation does not eliminate the exceptional, sovereign power that undergirds the U.S. political history and system. Yet, *Hamilton*'s strength is not only in its representation. Freeman explains, "emotion is one of *Hamilton*'s strengths...[i]t captures the founding periods heady feelings: the boastful

⁴⁹⁸ There was pushback before, of course, but it was heightened in 2020. For example Rebecca Onion, "A *Hamilton* Skeptic on Why the Show Isn't As Revolutionary As It Seems," *Slate*, April 05, 2016, Accessed April 15, 2021, <https://slate.com/culture/2016/04/a-hamilton-critic-on-why-the-musical-isnt-so-revolutionary.html>.

⁴⁹⁹ Freeman, "Would the Real," 257. Also see Ismael Reed, "'Hamilton: The Musical:' Black Actors Dress Up like Slave Traders...and It's Not Halloween," *Counterpunch*, August 21, 2015, Accessed April 15, 2021, <https://www.counterpunch.org/2015/08/21/hamilton-the-musical-black-actors-dress-up-like-slave-tradersand-its-not-halloween/>.

⁵⁰⁰ Freeman, "Would the Real," 257.

swagger and rampant insecurities of the experimental young republic; the fear that the dangerous contingencies could bring to ruin; the keen awareness of that risk, which fueled the period's 'crisis mentality.'"⁵⁰¹ *Hamilton* throws viewers into a state of unrest, into a keen awareness of change and the possibility of change that is not so different than the apocalyptic narratives—the prophetic history—of IHOPKC. Viewers of *Hamilton* are presented with the possibility of conceptual change—and are moved, are affected by the music and performance of the show.

Chapter Three of this project expands IHOPKC's negotiation of facts, feeling, and power through the lenses of radical theology and affect theory to begin seeking an alternative to the re-assertion of sovereignty as the dominate form of power. Sovereignty in its Schmittian form creates an exception that channels power into authoritarian leaders and excepts some (most) people from citizenship in society. Radical theology challenges an absolute, transcendent God who shores up Schmittian sovereignty, whether explicitly in a divinely appointed leader or sublimated into the supposedly secular state. The same sovereign God served as an anchor, a first principle for truth; and the Enlightenment displacement of the transcendent God brought truth down to earth into the control of the modern liberal subject. The vestiges of the sovereign subject continue to haunt radical theology's attempts to articulate alternate modes of political freedom. Affect theory, I argued, supplements radical theology by drawing attention to the phenomenological component of subjectivity as it is entrained in knowledge production. An economy of political truth that overcomes the bifurcation of feeling-only truth and a crypto-

⁵⁰¹ Freeman, "Would the Real," 261-262.

fundamentalist version of facts must move beyond the modern sovereign subject, thereby making possible another model of political power.

Now I argue that power—the ability to decide—serves as an anchor, whether explicit, or under the surface, for truth. I propose that an economy of political truth-making that actively names and evaluates its first principles can challenge the economy of political truth that maintains Schmittian sovereignty. Rather than allowing the moment of crisis, excitement, and intensity to stand as a prophetic break, as mere novelty, I propose that we see it as a moment of revelation. Revelation, I argue, takes place in the machine that generates truth—facts, feelings, power—and possibility—at the limits of human subjectivity. At the limit of human subjectivity, human beings encounter the apparently impossible—and at the same time people become entrained in the matrix of discursive-affective powers that make up the world. This paradox is the im/possible, which I argue might chip away at Schmittian sovereignty. At their limits human beings can encounter other human beings seeking to resist this sovereignty. Limited power is amplified and democratized by a collective that centers listening—where white radical political theologians learn from and work with the people who have been excepted from citizenship in the U.S.

This fourth and final chapter returns to a beginning: in the first act of *Hamilton* the song “Helpless,” which depicts Hamilton falling in love with Eliza Schuyler, is followed by “Satisfied,” which rewinds time to retell the same moment, except in the second version, Hamilton falls in love with Eliza’s sister Angelica.⁵⁰² The song rewinds,

⁵⁰² “Helpless” and “Satisfied” tracks 10 and 11 featuring Phillipa Soo and Renée Elise Goldsberry on Lin-Manuel Miranda, *Hamilton: An American Musical*, Atlantic Records, 2015.

the music is remixed, and the whole scene reset with a turntable that moves the actors backwards. This double narrative sets up narrative tension that carries dramatic irony through the rest of the show: Eliza is devoted to Hamilton and unaware of his close, nearly inappropriate, relationship to Angelica. Ultimately Hamilton does cheat on Eliza—though not with Angelica—and Hamilton’s weakness of character destabilizes his triumphant immigrant narrative.⁵⁰³

Truth Redux: The Doctrine of Revelation

This chapter rewinds the story I have told so far of political truth in order to seek a place to de-stabilize existing narrative of political truth: the bifurcation of feeling-only truth and fundamentalist versions of the facts. Instead of starting with the status of truth in contemporary political discourse this chapter begins with the doctrine of revelation. Not the New Testament book of Revelation, but *the theologies* at play in the doctrine of revelation, which attempt to argue *if* and *how* it is possible to have direct knowledge of God. This rewind is meant to start again with the problem of a divide, but instead of the bifurcation of “feeling-only truth” and “crypto-fundamentalist” facts, this chapter examines the divide between human beings and God as it is explored in the doctrine of revelation. The chasm between human beings and God is emblematic simultaneously of the limit of human knowledge and of an anchor or a first principle for human knowledge. And as I have argued throughout this project first principles remain key to contemporary political truth making.

Rewinding to follow a different set of responses to the knotty questions that

⁵⁰³ Not that non-monogamy is in itself a weakness of character, rather non-monogamy within a covenant to be monogamous.

weave together knowledge, human beings, and God presses further into an exploration of human subjectivity. Revelation, as I articulate it through Marion (who is reading Thomas Aquinas) and Derrida, takes place as individuals negotiate their subjectivity. Revelation allows reason to touch the impossible, albeit paradoxically. Or put another way, revelation offers a bridge between Steven Pinker's claim that only an Enlightenment form of reason can save humankind and IHOPKC's ever-changing prophetic histories. Revelation, I propose, facilitates political truth that encompasses feelings, facts, and is aware of the decision-making power of first principles.

According to Catholic scholar Avery Dulles, who wrote *Revelation Theology: A History*, a review of doctrinal positions on revelation in 1969, "revelation means a free manifestation by God of that which lies beyond the normal reach of human inquiry."⁵⁰⁴ His definition of revelation already demonstrates the power dynamics at play within a traditional economy of revelation: God poses an exception; God has the ability to extend what human beings can know. The parallel between what God makes it possible to know and what the power to decide offers an earth-bound sovereign leader has been the ongoing subject of this dissertation. Carl Schmitt feared that the modern liberal state lacked the ability to make decisions because of its dependence on a generalized system of laws. I argue the modern liberal state has sublimated Schmitt's sovereign power into the white men who govern the state as congressmen, senators, president, judges, and more. Chapter Three argues that in order to address the repetition of Schmittian sovereignty, it is necessary to rethink power as it is manifest through the subject's coming-into-being. I

⁵⁰⁴ Avery Dulles, *Revelation Theology*, (New York: Herder & Herder, 1969), 9.

turn to radical theology for this reason, hoping to root out the sovereign tendencies of traditional theology. Yet Clayton Crockett's radical theology, as it turns to the "plastic" subject, continues to be haunted by the modern liberal subject who is free to act and therefore does not give a full-throated response to the systems of power that limit subjects who are not white cisgendered heterosexual abled men.

The dramatic irony revealed here in Chapter Four, surprising no reader except me perhaps, is that God persists—or in the language of postmodern theologian Jack Caputo, "insists."⁵⁰⁵ The power to decide insists in political structures; sovereign power insists in American life. This chapter follows a different group of thinkers into an economy of political truth via the doctrine of revelation, albeit revelation with a postmodern and affective twist. In his book, *Givenness and Revelation*, Marion traces an origin story of the doctrine of revelation. There is no systematic explanation of the doctrine in the bible: revelation appears through the prophets in the Hebrew bible; and through Jesus Christ in the New Testament. Revelation is a word derived from the Latin *revelare* and corresponding to the Greek *apokalyptein*, and both root words carry the meaning "to unveil" or "disclose."⁵⁰⁶ In popular parlance, according to Dulles, "revelation usually implies a sudden or unexpected receipt of knowledge of a profoundly significant character."⁵⁰⁷ Note how this definition easily slips into a claim of novelty—but stops short of the claim to have a *new* word from God that defines the prophetic histories of

⁵⁰⁵ John Caputo, *The Insistence of God: A Theology of Perhaps*, (Bloomington, IN: The University of Indiana Press, 2013).

⁵⁰⁶ Dulles, *Revelation*, 9.

⁵⁰⁷ Dulles, *Revelation*, 9.

IHOPKC. Surprise, excitement, exception, are easily interpreted—asserted—as novelty by the community. Yet the exceptional quality of these experiences obfuscates the repetition of durable powers like Schmittian sovereignty manifest as white supremacy.

Marion's Account of the Doctrine of Revelation

According to Marion the traditional definition of revelation is the certain, even at times, absolute knowledge that is held by religions. He writes, “no term seems to designate so clearly the specific claim of a religion having received communication of what God [god]self wanted (or would have wanted) to make known of [god's] presence amongst [humankind].”⁵⁰⁸ Revelation, he explains for Islam, comes in the form of the Qur'an, spoken to the Prophet Muhammed. For Christianity, Marion explains, at least traditionally, revelation appears in the form of the person of Jesus Christ. Modern fundamentalist biblical interpretation holds that the text is a literal revelation of the word God—though any literal reading always reading emerges through its contemporary context, whether or not the exegete acknowledges the work of locating a reading in the present. The Creation Museum's work to claim the appearance, the feeling of scientific authority, and also the literal truth of the biblical text demonstrates the interpretative work that goes into fundamentalism. When the Creation Museum's fundamentalism is placed side-by-side with Steven Pinker's work to reclaim *Enlightenment Now*, it reveals that dogmatism is upholding both rightwing science and a crypto-fundamentalist version of the facts on the left, obfuscating the left's dependence on the modern liberal subject, which seeks to except everyone who is not a white cisgendered heterosexual abled man

⁵⁰⁸ Jean Luc Marion, *Givenness and Revelation*, trans by Stephen E. Lewis, (New York: Fordham University Press, 2016), 5.

from full citizenship.

Marion locates a starting place for the doctrine of revelation in Thomas Aquinas' *Summa Theologica*. Aquinas, in Question One, Article One of his *Summa* asks whether it is necessary to have a Sacred Doctrine— and argues, for humankind's salvation “there should be a knowledge revealed by God besides philosophical science built up by human reason.”⁵⁰⁹ For Aquinas, there is knowledge of God that is available to the human senses: God can be known through God's effects in the natural world. The existence of a creator God, according to Aquinas, is available by observation of the world. However, certain truths, which “exceed human reason should be made known to [humankind] by divine revelation.”⁵¹⁰ Human beings are able to know the effects of God; but how are they to know God in Godself? The possibility of knowing Godself is linked to salvation or the possibility of escaping human limits.

Paradoxically, Marion argues that the possibility of sacred doctrine, or *revelation*, emerges because of the limits of human knowledge—even more, I argue, the limits of human subjectivity; or revelation emerges at the limits of the human subject. The challenge for Aquinas, and for Marion, is to determine whether sacred doctrine coming from scripture can be a science, “a proper” science. Aquinas seeks to argue that revelation is a proper science—not a science in the modern sense, but a science alongside metaphysics, a “discourse” or “discipline” in English. Marion's analysis of Aquinas

⁵⁰⁹ Thomas Aquinas, “Question One, Article One,” First Part, *Summa Theologiae*, Trans. the Fathers of the English Dominican Province, Accessed April 18, New Advent, 2017, <https://www.newadvent.org/summa/1001.htm>.

⁵¹⁰ Aquinas, “Question One, Article One,” <https://www.newadvent.org/summa/1001.htm>.

highlights the modern tension between revelation and reason—or the tension between feelings and facts.

Marion argues that this tension allows Enlightenment critics to exert reason over revelation through a reading of Aquinas's work. Because modern definitions of reason, like that put forward by Steven Pinker, are so deeply rooted in modern secularity, they tend to reject any first principles in truth in an effort to allow science to shine. While allowing science to put its best theories to work—to the test—is often to the advantage of society (thank science for the Covid-19 vaccine), this is not an absolute good. Science, if it can be abstracted from human beings at all, is unpredictable in its ends. When human beings scaffold data onto theories in order to try and make sense what is being presented by testing, there is always a risk of bringing in an unintended first principle. As I argue in Chapter One the popular version of reason advocated by Steven Pinker tends to reinscribe white heterosexual cisgendered abled men as the ideal form of subjectivity in the U.S. and therefore works to exclude from full citizenship the many people who do not fit into that mold. What results is a crypto-fundamentalist version of the facts that is unable to recognize its imbrication within and dependance upon systems of power in U.S. society—systems of power like white supremacy and authoritarianism.

According to Marion, Aquinas needs sacred doctrine because in its *mystery* revelation facilitates grace and therefore the possibility of salvation for all people. In other words, knowledge alone cannot be the measure of who gets access to God, of who can know God in Godself. Recognizing revelation as grace—as possibility within an otherwise closed system of knowledge that privileges certain forms intelligence—presents a possibility for a radical theologian seeking a model of truth that escapes the

repetition of Schmittian sovereignty. An economy of political truth that seeks to revise, rework, rethink, replace Schmittian sovereignty with its attendant manifestations as authoritarianism and White Supremacy must press against first principles that openly restrict the people who can make decisions within society—first principles that limit who has access to power.

Aquinas argues that revelation must, in some way, “extend itself as a communication of sciences.”⁵¹¹ Revelation is a kind of knowledge, even if it is differentiated from truths known by pure reason—or purely conceptual knowledge. It is at this point that Aquinas makes what, according to Marion, is a weak argument. Because revelation cannot be examined by reason, Aquinas solves this problem by subordinating human reason to revelation as part of the hierarchy of sciences. In this way, God can be known by two sciences at once, by revelation and by human reason; because revelation makes humankind know better and more than reason, revelation is given an epistemological function, despite not Aquinas not making clear what kind of knowing happens in revelation. What results is for Aquinas an uneasy relationship: he argues the habits of faith are similar to the habits of principles, faith therefore offers “quasi” first principles.⁵¹²

Marion explains that according to Aquinas, philosophers address divine things, in that they are the “the principles of all things.”⁵¹³ So, divine things do not enter directly

⁵¹¹ Marion, *Givenness*, 15.

⁵¹² Marion, *Givenness*, 16.

⁵¹³ Marion, *Givenness*, 11.

into metaphysical theology; instead they indirectly touch it as its principles, but not “as these things as such.”⁵¹⁴ This touching, this grounding in a first principle, that allows the divine to indirectly touch human knowledge is what allows Aquinas to hold sacred doctrine, or revelation, as a science.⁵¹⁵ I propose that this connection, this touching, is where the work of generating new political truth can take place. Human beings negotiate im/possibility at the limits of their subjectivity—and revelation takes place as human beings encounter their limits.

Remember that discussions of truth in the renegotiations of modern epistemology are framed as a question of what it is possible to believe in now that truth—as well as the first principles of religion—have been brought down to earth and placed into the hands of the liberal modern, sovereign subject. The “quasi” relationship between faith and knowledge is the space into which the wedge that breaks apart feeling-only truth and the crypto-fundamentalist version of the facts is thrust. Marion’s concern, arguably, is parallel to the first chapter’s argument that Pinker’s definition of reason—reason that believes in nothing, that has no first principles—is naïve and risks reasserting Schmittian sovereign power as the decision maker in a system of knowledge, affect, power.

Indeed, according to Marion, Enlightenment philosophers like Locke and Kant turn to “moral God” in order to establish ethics; they thereby extend reason into the supposedly infinite or into the realm of first principles in order to make ethical

⁵¹⁴ Marion, *Givenness*, 11.

⁵¹⁵ And, at the same time, the theology of sacred scripture addresses the things of God directly.

decisions.⁵¹⁶ Similarly the need to make ethical decisions presses Steven Pinker into the realm of belief—the modern liberal subject. If the shared first principle is hidden, as in the affective transmission of white supremacy at IHOPKC, then people lose sight of to what they are assenting or worse, people are manipulated into believing something without acknowledging the leap from reason into faith.

Marion acknowledges that there are first principles in the production of knowledge. For Marion, God *touches* knowledge production via revelation.⁵¹⁷ I follow Marion’s line of thinking because I seek to articulate an economy of political truth-making that encompasses facts, feelings, and power as they circulate within *and form* a community. Marion, as a Catholic theologian, re-asserts something like the traditional doctrine of God within the contemporary system of knowledge production. Because my work is informed by radical theology and seeks power that challenges and subverts Schmittian sovereignty, I do not follow Marion’s move to reinstate God—at least not a traditional notion of God. I am less interested in whether God exists, than in the power that *persists*. Power persists to make decisions at the limits of human laws—and power persists at the limits of individual human subjects. How might theology, which tends to underpin Schmittian sovereignty in the formation of the modern state and the structure of political truth-making, be used to think differently about power?

Revelation, as Marion explains, is as much about the relationship between a giver

⁵¹⁶ Marion, *Givenness*, 32.

⁵¹⁷ Mayra Rivera describes transcendence as a “touch” in her *The Touch of Transcendence: A Postcolonial Theology of God*, (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2007). For Rivera the touch allows differences to be brought into relationships—transcendence does not necessarily mean separation and touching does not necessitate oneness.

and a receiver—or a giver and a receiving community—as it is about an individual knower. He writes, “revealed religions do not suppose devotees who are already convinced.” Rather revealed religions confront individuals who are not “prepared” and might even be “hostile” to the claims of the tradition.⁵¹⁸ Like prophecy implies a community of receivers, so does revelation. What distinguishes revelation as Marion describes it, from prophecy, especially prophecy at IHOPKC, is that revelation itself expects reason to work; revelation expects to be engaged when it encounters something that seems impossible.

Indeed, Marion claims that revelation presents concepts that are difficult to accept, that require faith—in the impossible. This is the same challenge posed by modernity that T.M. Luhrmann claims is the cause of charismatic-evangelical Christians’ learned mental porosity. Remember that she argues charismatic-evangelicals learn to understand their mind as open, porous to the voice of God, in a limited sense. Luhrmann claims evangelicals cannot rationally believe in the supernatural, because of the limits that modern epistemology places on knowledge. Luhrmann’s argument assumes the modern liberal subject as the definitive model of subjectivity and so the changes to subjectivity she maps remain at the level of the individual. I argue in Chapter Two that charismatic-evangelicals learn to associate intense affect with hearing a word from God. Intense experiences of feeling—which manifest as joy, sadness, and most notably excitement—teach Christians that they can hear God for themselves. At the same time, I argue affect is a locus of power, that does not only shape individuals, but rather circulates

⁵¹⁸ Marion, *Givenness*, 5.

in a community, knitting them together through a matrix of feelings, power, and knowledge. I therefore challenge Luhmann's assumption that charismatic-evangelical Christian's individual minds are merely changed and argue that what her ethnography demonstrates is the limits of the modern liberal subject. The limits of the modern liberal subject paradoxically entail both the limits of what human beings can know and the limiting factors—power structures like race or gender—that shape how subjects are free to emerge within the world. In other words, from Luhmann I take the insight that the modern liberal description of the mind is inadequate to describe how human beings come into subjectivity and argue that subjectivity must be re-imagined as a collective process.

Marion, as he attempts to articulate a fresh—postmodern—take on revelation, expands further the relationality of revelation, making revelation into a project of phenomenology where the subject receives something, someone, some love as given. Rather than returning to biblical revelation with Marion, I seek to assert a kind of *low revelation*, one that listens for limits. Limitations reveal the possibilities beyond the human, while also putting the im/possible into stark relief. I propose that change does not in occur single moment of revelation; but rather change takes place through the amplification of multiple limited subjectivities. I want to listen for resistance to sovereignty and work to amplify that movement—that music that resists white supremacy and authoritarianism.

Marion's Phenomenological Re-Appropriation of Revelation

In response to Enlightenment critiques of revelation, Marion seeks to assert a fresh explanation of revelation as a science, albeit as a science that allows an experience of the impossible, the divine, to touch humankind's capacity for knowledge. Marion's

phenomenal re-appropriation of revelation starts with a rereading of Romans 1, via the Vatican II's interpretation of the text. Romans 1 is traditionally used to support the claim that natural knowledge of God is possible. In contrast, Marion argues that revelation *precedes* natural knowledge of God. Specifically, he argues that “Ever since the creation of the world the invisible things of God are seen” in verse 20, which suggests that God can be known through creation, is preceded by two mentions of *apokalypsis*—or revelation.⁵¹⁹ Paul writes in Romans 1:16-18, “I am not ashamed of the Gospel...for in it the righteousness of God is revealed” and “the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness.”⁵²⁰ Marion seizes on the ordering of this sentence to claim with the support of Vatican II that knowledge of God on the basis of creation, “does not precede revelation (which is thus called supernatural); instead it finds itself preceded by and comprised by it.”⁵²¹ First revelation manifests as faith; and then revelation is manifest as wrath. He argues that natural knowledge of God is woven through both parts of revelation: faith's action on the will allows God to be known; then God's wrath emerges as people choose to not glorify or give thanks to God. Human knowledge—conceptual knowledge—is not at the heart of revelation. Rather, human knowledge is one piece of an economy of knowledge. It is precisely because God undercuts—or undergirds as a quasi-first principle—that salvation is possible.

In order to overcome the modern impulse to subordinate revelation to

⁵¹⁹ Marion, *Givenness*, 27.

⁵²⁰ Marion, *Givenness*, 28.

⁵²¹ Marion, *Givenness*, 28.

reason—while allowing revelation to touch reason as a quasi-first principle— Marion turns to an Augustinian formulation of revelation, that he finds surprising: “*Ista attractio, ipsa est revelatio* —This revelation itself is what draws.”⁵²² Typically, in a modern economy of knowledge the will is subject to reason. The dominance of the mind is assumed by the modern articulation of the sovereign subject, which is the model subject, defining citizenship in the U.S. Here, Marion claims that revelation acts on the will, making possible faith in a claim that seems impossible. In contrast to the modern norm, Marion writes, “Revelation assumes a plot, in which the attraction acts first on the will, which then makes the reason choose to see what it would otherwise not will to see.”⁵²³ The decision is made by the human, but revelation comes “*from elsewhere*.”⁵²⁴ Marion sees this action on the will and/or action of the will as the movement that frees revelation from being only predicated on intelligence. It is the action of revelation on the will—generating desire—that allows revelation to be a movement of grace rather than knowledge. By acting on the will, revelation is, in my words, democratized. At the same time the democratization of revelation makes human beings subject to God. Human beings are “drawn” by God, and there is a moment of decision where some refuse and enter the wrath of God. Human beings are empowered through a limiting of their power—or through an encounter with a power that comes from outside.

If God is unknowable, in Godself, through philosophy, then how can humankind

⁵²² Marion, *Givenness*, 39.

⁵²³ Marion, *Givenness*, 40.

⁵²⁴ Marion, *Givenness*, 40.

be certain they know God? Aquinas articulates the principle “*nullus potest amare aliquid incognitum*,” “none can love what he does not know.”⁵²⁵ According to Marion, who follows Augustine, revelation is an exception to this principle. Marion claims that in the case of revelation willing happens because humans are drawn by God’s love. The will is attracted by God and therefore desires, loves Christ, “who is God revealing [Godself] as loving.”⁵²⁶ For Marion, again, “no one can believe if they do not will it, and no one can will unless they love what they believe and wills to will.”⁵²⁷ Marion differentiates a situation of revelation, *apokalypsis* or unveiling, from a situation of truth, explaining that in revelation “*knowing is the same as loving*, which is the contrary of the situation of truth (alētheia, unconcealment), where knowing means seeing and knowing directly.”⁵²⁸ Love, Marion argues, “knows and makes itself known” on the condition of “its freedom to set the conditions of its knowledge be recognized.”⁵²⁹ Love works on the will, converting the will and facilitating the conversion of the mind. Marion takes revelation into the space of feeling, where the action, on the will is the movement of love. Love is the movement, the gift from outside of the human being—the exception. Marion writes, “Does God reveal [Godself] in order to make [Godself] known and take a place within our rationality? Or does he instead reveal [Godself] in order to allow [Godself] to be

⁵²⁵ Marion, *Givenness*, 29.

⁵²⁶ Marion, *Givenness*, 40.

⁵²⁷ Marion, *Givenness*, 44.

⁵²⁸ Marion, *Givenness*, 45.

⁵²⁹ Marion, *Givenness*, 45.

loved, and to love us?”⁵³⁰ Revelation, for Marion, is as much about a loving relationship as it is about knowledge. For me, revelation as it is argued by Marion, reveals the imbrication of humanity within an economy of relationships.

It is at this point in his description of revelation Marion moves to an explicit project of phenomenology. Marion writes, “Revelation manifests God insofar as he *gives [Godself]*. But, in giving [Godself] God thus manifests [Godself], [God] takes on the flesh of a phenomenon and requires that we receive it.”⁵³¹ Metaphysics traditionally understands the subject as perceiving an object, which appears according to the conditions of experience—according to the environment in which the object is found. So if there is not much light where an object is found then it will appear dark, perhaps in black and white. Or, an object might appear according to intuition, a pre-existing understanding of an object, the intuition conceives the object before it is encountered and then synthesized through the cognition of the recipient.

However, Marion argues that a phenomenon may appear based *on itself—or as given*. For Marion, this is the most radical ambition of phenomenology, to allow “the phenomenon to broaden itself out in itself, and show itself from itself.”⁵³² In this case, a constituted object “*transforms* itself into an event.”⁵³³ In other words, there is a moment of giving where the other gives itself or themselves. In an event, one “must take note, with incontestable empirical evidence, of that which imposes itself without letting itself

⁵³⁰ Marion, *Givenness*, 29.

⁵³¹ Marion, *Givenness*, 117.

⁵³² Marion, *Givenness*, 47.

⁵³³ Marion, *Givenness*, 48.

be understood.”⁵³⁴ The response to such an event is “That’s impossible!”⁵³⁵ The event is a *saturated phenomenon* when it evokes this cry, when it leaves human beings without speech and without concepts. The event is supposed to be a moment that facilitates the renegotiation of the subject—it is the site that radical theology claims the subject can be re-constituted with freedom that moves beyond the constraints of Schmittian sovereignty.

Remember that ethnographer Jon Bialecki describes the Vineyard Worship as a moment of possibility, where the subject can be re-constituted. Or it is possible the subject might not experience an “*évènementiel*” moment, and might merely be formed in the image of the community in which they participate. In the example of the demon possession, Bialecki describes the event as one of willing/unwilling, where the young man, Justin, is caught up in the charismatic diagram that momentarily reveals the artificial boundaries around individual subjects—the porosity of the subject. The conditions made possible by the presence of a prophet and prophetic words allowed for the stochastic experience of the supernatural, which in this case the demonic. Bialecki’s description of Justin’s encounter is similar to how Marion describes revelation, a moment that is more than conceptual knowledge; it is a moment that involves action of the will or action on the will. For Justin there is an explosion of unwillingness in relationship to the miraculous—surprising—possibilities made open by the moment. Justin experienced a temporary loss of self that challenges the modern autonomous subject.

I, like Bialecki, am not interested in evaluating whether or not God or something

⁵³⁴ Marion, *Givenness*, 49.

⁵³⁵ Marion, *Givenness*, 49.

else actually appeared in that moment for Justin. Rather I seek the theological-experiential-affected moment that opens up the modern-liberal model of the subject—and demonstrates its limits in the most heightened way possible. Justin's experience of the demonic does not end with an absolute salvific moment, at least Justin is not now healed from his past experiences; and this project is agnostic about any eternal prospects for healing. However, Justin did experience something that registered as miraculous, as at the limits of possibility, as, what I want to call the im/possible, because it defied the boundaries that are traditionally placed around the self.

Importantly, eventiveness is not necessarily pleasant: the event is not necessarily a happy joyful moment. And, most certainly eventiveness is not guaranteed to be a moment of ethical formation for the good as circumscribed by progressive values. Even more, I hold that the moment of event described by both Marion and Bialecki always holds the risk of reasserting Schmittian sovereignty. If something outside the individual subject is acting on the will, possibly against the will, or worse without the knowledge of the subject, then durable forms of power are free to act. Carl Schmitt holds that the exceptional works by breaking in—by surprising human beings. I argue in chapter two that this surprise, this excitement, allows old patterns of power to repeat themselves while feeling fresh.

Schmittian sovereignty acts to make some subjects into leaders with exceptional decision-making power even as it seeks to except other subjects from citizenship. Schmittian sovereignty feels like a moment that reconstitutes the subject. Exceptional moments, I propose, are moments that hold the possibility of reconstituting the subject. The truth claims made about these moments assert that something new is happening,

some new move of God; or even a new vision of America where a black man is cast as George Washington and a Puerto Rican is cast as Alexander Hamilton. Representation matters; and new possibilities are opened by (im/possibly) seeing the founding fathers presented as people of color. At the same time, exceptional quality of this story has traditionally been welded to a form of power, to the modern liberal subject who is a white, heterosexual, cis-gendered, abled, man. Unchecked, the exception allows old forms of power to repeat themselves, also unchecked. Schmittian sovereignty is an intransigent form of power in U.S. political truth making, one that seems natural, seems normal. Power moves between people in exceptional moments, like religious experiences, and serves as the force that can rewrite narratives, but wants to repeat familiar, durable forms of power.

Marion's phenomenological re-appropriation of revelation attempts to circumvent the "problems" of Aquinas' effort to make revelation a science, while still allowing it to be a science. Marion *does* broaden the horizon—the economy—of knowledge. However, the relationship between revelation which is tied to biblical revelation and saturated phenomena is a little blurry. There are saturated phenomena that are not revelation. These phenomena are sorted into four categories by Marion scholar Shane Mackinlay and are "figured" as "event, painting, flesh, the face."⁵³⁶ But still, the final category of saturated phenomenon is, of course "revelation" which is the "paradox par excellence."⁵³⁷

Arguably, there is a tendency in Marion's work, in challenging subjectivity, to

⁵³⁶ Shane Mackinlay, *Interpreting Excess: Jean-Luc Marion, Saturated Phenomena, and Hermeneutics*, (New York: Fordham University Press, 2010), 11.

⁵³⁷ Mackinley, *Interpreting*, 11.

completely devalue its role. Mackinlay argues, “The richness and validity of saturated phenomena are not secured by dethroning absolute subjectivity, only to replace it with an objectivity or givenness that is equally absolute.”⁵³⁸ In other words, to place absolute authority on the subject *or the object* in an encounter is problematic. Especially because, while seeking to learn from models of biblical revelation, particularly how they are caught up in political discourse, this dissertation does not seek to “prove” revelation—or the existence of God—as a science. In contrast, Marion reinforces biblical claims as foundational truths that serve as highest confirmation of saturated phenomenon.

Instead this project seeks to take seriously—phenomenologically—the encounter with the outside world. For Marion, the world “gives” itself to subjects, and this givenness is the basis for an encounter—the appearance of a phenomenon—rather than a conceptual capture. Revelation, for Marion, is the most acute version of a phenomenon, a “saturated” phenomenon—a phenomenon that causes a subject to cry “That’s impossible!”⁵³⁹ For Marion, the saturated phenomenon, a true revelation from the outside, is a conceptual impossibility—a paradox—which can be conceptualized. Or maybe not: the person who experiences the event is faced with “incontestable empirical evidence” of an event that gives itself without allowing itself to be conceived—without “letting itself be understood”⁵⁴⁰ I am attempting to show that the saturated phenomenon in its indecisiveness—or its im/possible knowledge—can function as a bridge between the

⁵³⁸ Mackinley, *Interpreting*, 68.

⁵³⁹ Marion, *Givenness*, 60.

⁵⁴⁰ Marion, *Givenness*, 50.

model of “feeling-only” truth on the right, and “crypto-fundamentalist” facts that obscure the modern liberal subject on the left.

I contend that revelation does not conceptualize the impossible—especially not the impossibility of biblical revelation. Instead revelation here appears as an encounter with the im/possible. Revelation is an encounter with the limits of the human subject, where the modern liberal subject fails in an encounter with something else, even someone else. For this project, therefore, Marion’s description of revelation requires supplementation. I hold that Marion’s project opens to a conversation with affect theory when he parses the role of the will in revelation. For Marion, God—the Holy Spirit—works to make people willing to accept concepts that seem impossible. Marion does not draw a clear line of causality—though he comes close to saying that the spirit acts on the will and then the mind understands. Nonetheless, Marion makes space for the application of power to revelation and therefore to truth-making. Power moving between subjects is at the heart of truth-making—and I argue that the recognition of power is clarified through the lens of affect, which can account for the multivalent communication between people, moving across the senses and mind. Affect holds together how human beings act and are acted upon. Indeed, while revelation is the limit-case example of saturated phenomenon for Marion, other examples are in moments of birth, death, illness etc. or moments of human life that break through the monotony of day-to-day life, often with intense affective excitement.

It is because revelation—all knowledge production—is part of an experiential system that encompasses more than merely conceptual knowledge that it is possible for change to enter the in-grained, entrained system of knowledge production that upholds

traditional political power, though the change is not immediate or absolute. Revelation is an event that unfolds across an individual and the collective, working on the will and the mind and is manifest as desire, conceptualized as knowledge, albeit, a kind of im/possible knowledge through encounter with something from the outside. I argue that the crack to be pried open in the repetition of sovereignty is located in its iterability, its performance, over and over in new places and times. Because political truth is constantly being remade to fit new locations and new times, intransigent nodes of power are constantly restated, and so might be reasserted with difference. A Black man playing George Washington encounters the first Black man to serve as president; a white woman watching the video on YouTube hears—feels—that this is not enough.

Political truth-making is a project of deciding first principles and negotiating power in order to regulate society that is intimately linked to the collective emergence of U.S. society as a multilayered, multi-person subjectivity. Political truth that emerges at the limits of our multiplying subjectivity both reaches for the im/possible and constrains any individual from taking absolute power. In the next section, I move on to negotiating Marion's givenness in light of Derrida's gift. Moving with the radical theological tradition named in the previous chapter, I name a power, a God, that is limited—a God that is affected. Power that is limited is as strong as the collective, the multitude that wields it. It is the power of the people. And at the conclusion of this chapter, I argue we (white radical theologians, in particular) must listen for—and be moved by—the powers of the people. We must listen for resistance.

Marion and Derrida: Givenness and the Gift

Combining the thought of Jean-Luc Marion and Jacques Derrida presents some

challenges. Marion is a Catholic thinker—called in this text “*hyper*” Catholic—and is committed to his tradition; Derrida comes from a Jewish heritage and is “*a quasi-atheistic, quasi-Jewish deconstructor*”⁵⁴¹ However, the dialogue between the two thinkers is instructive for a radical theology of revelation. Where Marion seeks to hold open a traditional doctrine of God, albeit paradoxically, this my work seeks God at the limits or a limited version of God. If limited power flourishes, it requires collectivity, it requires the working together of different people across their limitations.

Conveniently, the two thinkers have been in dialogue in a chapter called “On the Gift: A Discussion between Jacques Derrida and Jean-Luc Marion.” This chapter was written before Marion’s book on Revelation—and after Derrida’s work on negative theology, which I engage in the next section. In their dialogue, the two thinkers are both deeply engaged in the economy of knowledge: how human beings receive data from the world and process it. Again, this economy traditionally consists of an intuition that is received from some object/person outside of a subject, which is then processed and conceptualized by the subject.

Both Marion and Derrida are interested in the sites of *excess* within this system of exchange. But there is a difference in how the two thinkers describe excess—or rather the impossibility of conceiving this excess. Marion insists that he is “not interested in the gift,” Derrida’s term, which Marion assumes indicates the impossibility of the

⁵⁴¹ Jacques Derrida, Jean-Luc Marion, Richard Kearney (Moderator), “On the Gift,” in *God, the Gift, and Postmodernism*, eds. John Caputo and Michael Scanlon, (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1999), 55.

“outside”—which is the impossible—becoming present to subjects.⁵⁴² That is because givenness is an “event”—rather than an “object” as Kant might assert, or “being” as Heidegger might claim. For Marion a phenomenon “establishes it [givenness] as an event, which definitely happens.”⁵⁴³ As the previous section argues, Marion seeks to allow revelation, as givenness, to be a part of the human meaning-making system. Marion wants human beings to be able to cry “that’s impossible” when they encounter something at their limits. In contrast, as the next section will argue, Derrida claims it is not possible to speak about the gift as such. Once I speak about the gift, then it is gone. This is the economy of revelation—the economy that enfolds the will, God acting on the will to generate a desire, a love for God. In this economy, revelation is given—and this revelation has specific conceptual content, as impossible as it is to pre-conceive. Revelation-knowledge is confirmed not by reason, but rather as the fulfillment of desire, or as love.

Derrida is not convinced there is a semantic continuity between givenness and the gift. Derrida argues, “the gift does not exist and appear as such; it is impossible for the gift to exist and appear as such.”⁵⁴⁴ Yet, he holds, enticingly “I never concluded there is no gift.”⁵⁴⁵ For Derrida the gift cannot be known “as such”—as soon as the gift is known is destroyed. Yet, the gift can be thought, without being known or fully conceived. For Derrida, the meaning of the gift is beyond determination, is *excess*. Or, “It is this

⁵⁴² Derrida, Marion, Kearney, “On The Gift,” 56.

⁵⁴³ Derrida, Marion, Kearney, “On The Gift,” 57.

⁵⁴⁴ Derrida, Marion, Kearney, “On The Gift,” 59.

⁵⁴⁵ Derrida, Marion, Kearney, “On The Gift,” 59.

excess that puts the circle into motion”—the circular economy of knowledge is inaugurated by the gift.⁵⁴⁶ In other words, it is the *possibility* emerging from the gift that makes knowledge possible. The gift is what makes the economy of knowledge possible at all.

Both Marion and Derrida work in the tension between the possibility and the impossibility of knowledge of the gift. Derrida claims that Marion wants to “free the gift and givenness from being,” or from the economy of human knowledge—and indeed, one way to read Marion is as returning a space for transcendence (which often, as I have argued, lends itself to the repetition of Schmittian sovereignty.)⁵⁴⁷ Derrida, in contrast, seeks to “disassociate the gift from the present”—and therefore from any final determination, whether phenomenological, scientific, or something else.⁵⁴⁸ In other words, the gift is not outside of the economy, but is never fully present to it. In Derrida’s description of the tension between possibility and impossibility I feel the same tension that Marion claims can be identified with the cry “That’s impossible!”⁵⁴⁹ Yet at the limits of human subjectivity, there is more than knowledge. I suggest there is affect—power that acts on the will—and is conceptualized as feelings.

Drawing on language from Plato, Derrida calls the never-present, non-giving space that proceeds giving, *khora*. He argues, that “without the indifferent, non-giving structure of the space of the *khora*, of what makes place for taking place, without this

⁵⁴⁶ Derrida, Marion, Kearney, “On The Gift,” 60.

⁵⁴⁷ Derrida, Marion, Kearney, “On The Gift,” 59.

⁵⁴⁸ Derrida, Marion, Kearney, “On The Gift,” 59.

⁵⁴⁹ Marion, *Givenness*, 49.

totally indifferent space which does not *give* place to what takes place, there would not be this extraordinary movement or desire for giving.”⁵⁵⁰ The economy of knowledge and affect, requires a space to take place. Spacing—creating space—is what all human beings do by coming into subjectivity. Coming into subjectivity is what human beings do—regardless of what they know. The gift, made possible by the spacing of the *khora*, presents a distinction between knowing and doing—“a gift is something you do without knowing what you do.”⁵⁵¹ The gift—or *khora*—is singular, but carries the possibility of repetition. The gift, *khora*, is what makes possible the economy of knowledge. The gift in itself—“as such”—however, can never be known.

Despite this foundationless economy of knowledge, that is made possible by doing, Derrida explains that he does not seek to do away with truth. Rather, he is “looking for another possible experience of truth, through the event of the gift, with all these conditions of impossibility.”⁵⁵² For Derrida truth lies in “the experience of the desire for the impossible.”⁵⁵³ He argues that even people who understand that seeking the gift and that giving is impossible—giving “is a process of reappropriation and destruction”—should never give up “the dream of the pure gift” or of “pure hospitality.”⁵⁵⁴ In other words, while truth exists in the economy of knowledge with well-worn grooves, which facilitates the repetition of sovereign truth-claims, there is still

⁵⁵⁰ Derrida, Marion, Kearney, “On The Gift,” 67.

⁵⁵¹ Derrida, Marion, Kearney, “On The Gift,” 59.

⁵⁵² Derrida, Marion, Kearney, “On The Gift,” 72.

⁵⁵³ Derrida, Marion, Kearney, “On The Gift,” 72.

⁵⁵⁴ Derrida, Marion, Kearney, “On The Gift,” 72.

hope, there is still the possibility of returning to the gift or, more concretely, of returning to a posture of *giving*. As I work through Derrida's engagement with negative theology in the next section, I will articulate a posture of listening and learning that is attendant to the limits of human subjectivity. This posture, I propose, allows for encounters with the im/possible, where power is limited, but taking place differently, thereby allowing human beings to do life differently. In order to do life differently, it is necessary to root out and hold accountable the first principles that explicitly and implicitly seek to anchor shared truth.

Marion again summarizes the sublimated first principles that plague truth-making. He writes: "One may sum up modern philosophy by saying it was, and perhaps it still is, a transcendental enterprise by which something is taken for granted a priori, which is the I, ego, subjectivity, in order, starting from it, to establish the limits of the possible, of any kind of possibility."⁵⁵⁵ Again, the crypto-fundamentalist (and also modern) version of the facts that tends to ground fact-checking efforts on the left is rooted in this conception of knowledge—except the fundamentalist version of facts obscures its starting place. By obscuring its foundation in the modern liberal subject, the fundamentalist version of facts obscures the movement of sovereignty that reasserts the white heterosexual, cisgendered, able man as the ideal subject.

Marion, at least in as much as he returns to biblical theology, returns to a system of first principles. Yet according to Marion, "If there is a real revelation, no concept could

⁵⁵⁵ Derrida, Marion, Kearney, "On The Gift," 69.

achieve to say and to make intelligible in its own way the excess of intuition.”⁵⁵⁶ In the previous section I argued that Marion blurs the line between revelation, which has scripture as first principle, and other saturated phenomena which have no first principle in an effort to claim that revelation touches human reason. Marion’s work is in this project supplemented by Derrida’s because I seek a model of power that does not return to scripture for an authoritative first principle, but is nonetheless aware of its limits: I want to articulate a model of power that *listens for resistance*. In this model of power the possible touches the impossible and human beings feel, know, and become together as a collective subjectivity.

Marion concedes, in dialogue with Derrida, that one way to express the excess of revelation is through negative theology, which is the practice of stating what God *is not* because language cannot adequately capture what God is. In the next section, I follow Derrida’s work with negative theology in order to learn what the spacing—the taking place—of negative theology can offer to an alternative economy of political truth. I argue that Derrida’s reading of Pseudo-Dionysius’s work presents the im/possible, as a site of community formation. Derrida argues khora is a “place of resistance” that is “is also the condition of a universal politics, for the possibility of crossing the borders of our common context—European, Jewish, Christian, Muslim, and philosophical.”⁵⁵⁷ In other words, the possibility at the limit of individual human subjects is an encounter with other people—a place where I assert *listening takes place*. Derrida imagines, “I would like to

⁵⁵⁶ Derrida, Marion, Kearney, “On The Gift,” 69.

⁵⁵⁷ Derrida, Marion, Kearney, “On The Gift,” 76.

translate the experience of this impossibility into what we could call ethics or politics.”⁵⁵⁸

In the next section, I follow Derrida to the assertion that power—the possibility—at the limits of human subjectivity might be named God. And if this possibility is named God, it is an im/possible one—a God that is passible, which is to say, the im/possible God is *affected* by human beings. The im/possible God takes place in the swirl, the assemblage of facts, feelings, and power that move through and form communities. However, the community I imagine listens differently, listens for resistance instead of being swept up in excitement that makes old powers, like white supremacy, feel new.

After I lay out a limited, passible version of God, I conclude this chapter by returning to Marion’s tension between revelation and reason again, because the decision-making of ethics requires a first principle—for which I propose listening. I argue that Nancy’s description of listening, which is attendant to (conceptual) sense, the senses, and a sense of place, can serve as a starting place for political truth making that seeks to amplify our individually limited, but collectively amplified power.

Derrida Im/possibility at the Limits of Subjectivity

Jacques Derrida’s classic work, *Of Grammatology*, inaugurates the “deconstructive” work of poststructuralism. A parody of poststructuralism, as lukewarm, cultural relativism, with no teeth to make claims, appears as Stephen Pinker’s straw figure in *Enlightenment Now*. Indeed, Derrida’s work challenges the stability of knowledge and the possibility of Truth with a capital T. At the same time, Derrida’s work is continually haunted by the generative possibilities that paradoxically emerge from the

⁵⁵⁸ Derrida, Marion, Kearney, “On The Gift,” 77.

instability of language.

Derrida, to repeat, born into a Jewish context, is “*a quasi-atheistic, quasi-Jewish deconstructor*” who finds later in his career that he cannot avoid Christian theology—or perhaps cannot avoid a theologian named Jack Caputo.⁵⁵⁹ In a chapter called, “How to Avoid Speaking: Denials,” Derrida takes up the proposed relationship between his work and negative theology. Again, negative theology, or apophatic theology, proceeds by negation—“God is not”—rather than making positive or cataphatic claims about the divine. Negative theology works at the limits of language; it therefore works at the limits of human subjectivity. In “How to Avoid Speaking” Derrida begins to offer a critique and a complication of revelation, by trying to address what kind of revelation—if any—is available through the action of negative theology. Traditional negative theology speaks of a union with something, a movement to “hyperessentiality, beyond being.”⁵⁶⁰ Theology that returns to a traditional doctrine of God, usually returns to a claim of absolute power that is outside the human sphere, yet is humanly known as such—or to the model of power that fuels sovereignty. And sovereignty works to make exceptions: to place some people or institutions above the law; and to except some people from citizenship. In contrast Derrida explains, “What *differance*, the *trace*, and so on ‘mean’—which hence *does not mean anything*—is ‘before’ the concept, the name, the word, “something” that would be nothing.”⁵⁶¹ Sovereignty is consolidating power; *differance* offers a model of

⁵⁵⁹ Jacques Derrida, Jean-Luc Marion, Richard Kearney, “On the Gift,” 55.

⁵⁶⁰ Jacques Derrida, “How to Avoid Speaking: Denials,” trans. Ken Frieden in *Derrida and Negative Theology*, eds. Harold Coward and Toby Foshay, (New York: SUNY Press, 1992), 79.

⁵⁶¹ Derrida, “How to,” 79.

weak power. Again, this is the difference that Marion identifies between Derrida's work and his own: Marion claims "the gift" cannot ever take place within the human economy of knowledge, which points to his return to a traditional doctrine of God. Derrida finds presence promised and presence encountered in negative theology. Is this theology as an human economy of knowing?

In "How to Avoid Speaking," Derrida reads Pseudo Dionysius's *Mystical Theology*, a classic work of Christian negative theology, dated to the 6th century BCE. According to Derrida, in *Mystical Theology* it is possible to know "unknowing itself in its truth, a truth that is not an adequation but an unveiling."⁵⁶² What results is a "pure intuition of the ineffable, that silent union with that which remains inaccessible to speech."⁵⁶³ Here, Derrida, in his approximation of Pseudo Dionysius's revelation, describes something like Marion's experience of the impossible, where something gives itself and the human subject is faced with evidence of the impossible.

Again, in Marion's work, the tension between established revelation (as scripture) and the experience of the impossible is ever present. For Derrida, if God is the truth of negative theology, then "Not only would God not be the truth of negative theology; rather, God would be the truth of all negativity."⁵⁶⁴ Derrida claims that the economy of negative theology, as portrayed in *Mystical Theology*, is paradoxical. In positive theology the *logos* descends to make itself known. In negative theology, traditionally imagined, the

⁵⁶² Derrida, "How to," 80.

⁵⁶³ Derrida, "How to," 80.

⁵⁶⁴ Derrida, "How to," 76.

human ascends the mountain to encounter a cloud of luminous darkness. At the peak, the *logos* is “wholly without sound and wholly united to the unspeakable.”⁵⁶⁵ At this point, Derrida argues the parallel ascent and descent of these knowledges limits the “quantity of discourse” and while in itself it is interminable, the apophatic “cannot contain within itself the principle of its own interruption.”⁵⁶⁶ Rather, apophatic theology “can only indefinitely defer the encounter with its own limit.”⁵⁶⁷ In other words, apophatic theology that is tied to a cataphatic path, merely re-traverses what has been said and does not press at the limits of subjectivity; therefore it fails to become encounter with the im/possible.

Derrida critiques a self-fulfilling form of negative theology, caught in a cycle of rereading and repeating the hyperessential. Similarly, I argue in Chapter Two that the exceptional experience of charismatic worship facilitates moments that feel novel, but serve to re-assert the nodes of power that are hyperessentially ingrained in U.S. society. In other words, charismatic worship presents human beings with the limits of their subjectivity, but instead of asserting a different form, something other than the modern liberal subject, human beings in a moment of vulnerability become subject to existing forms of power. Power feels good—it is exhilarating to feel swept up in a communal sense of power that is larger than the individual. White people recognize power outside themselves and seek to channel that power into new-seeming claims that reassert the same old power of white supremacy, like the new narratives of the prophetic dominance

⁵⁶⁵ Derrida, “How to,” 81.

⁵⁶⁶ Derrida, “How to,” 81.

⁵⁶⁷ Derrida, “How to,” 81.

of IHOP KC. The representation—writing people of color into the founding narrative of the United states—in *Hamilton* risks repeating Schmittian sovereignty if the narrative becomes fixed, and the power transmitted in the performance is not pressed to continue moving away from familiar forms. The exceptionalism of U.S. origins must be challenged further and listening to the current resistance to *Hamilton* provides a chance to repeat the exceptional with difference.

Is it possible to escape the horizon of known discourse? It is difficult, but each new narrative changes slightly, as a minor iteration, a repetition with slight difference. For Derrida, it is the action, the process, of knowing that might demonstrate a new model of truth—and for this dissertation offers the *process* of revelation a fresh role in truth-making. Indeed, for Derrida, the “act of *unknowing*” is what is at stake. Reflecting on Wittgenstein's claim, “Concerning that about which one cannot speak, one must remain silent.”⁵⁶⁸ Derrida finds here the injunction to silence “inscribed into the order or the promise of a ‘one must speak.’”⁵⁶⁹ In the tension between silence and speaking, I find the injunction to listen—actively listen—in order that I might speak differently. And to speak differently, “it is necessary that there have been a trace.”⁵⁷⁰ This possibility is a movement is simultaneously toward a past and toward “a future that are as yet unrepresentable.”⁵⁷¹

The folding back and forth of time that Derrida describes is a making and

⁵⁶⁸ Derrida, “How to,” 81.

⁵⁶⁹ Derrida, “How to,” 81.

⁵⁷⁰ Derrida, “How to,” 81.

⁵⁷¹ Derrida, “How to,” 81.

remaking claims, where sometimes claims break through with novelty. At other times forgotten claims are returned into the realm of spoken and take on an ossified form. And still other times claims are suppressed and their role in the past is (perhaps temporarily) forgotten. All of these possibilities might inform the shape of political truth. Claims that carry the thrust of novelty, like the presentation of American's founding story where whiteness is challenged by placing people of color into the story, might still enfold the sovereignty inherent in U.S. exceptionalism. The moment of excitement presented, carried by the musical makes an old narrative seem new. Indeed, in the case of *Hamilton* the story is presented with a *difference*—people of color are re-inserted into a story and are given power that they did not have in the past. Yet, there is still rewriting to be done; more sovereignty to root out of the political truth. Political truth is made in moments that cause human beings to experience the edge of their capacity. Human beings are faced with a space of re-negotiation of subjecthood, where it is possible for difference to enter—but at the same time familiar shapes of power easily act on impressionable subjects.

There is a promise—a possibility—like Derrida's deferred promise, to speak about negative theology in exceptional moments, like prophetic claims instantiated with charismatic worship, or like a culture-defining musical's reimagining of American origins. Is the promise "before a discursive event as such" or as the promise is given does it inaugurate the act of speaking?⁵⁷² This knotty question is at the heart of a possible alternative economy of political truth-making—I argued in the previous section that

⁵⁷² Derrida, "How to," 83.

Marion flirts with the urge to allow the promise to be before a discursive event by having God act on the will. I want to lean firmly into the paradox suggested by both Marion and Derrida: both possibilities for the promise co-exist and are manifest in every moment. Any given revelation holds the potential to spin out as a repetition of a past sovereign truth claim—but at the same time, intransigent power is not absolutely fixed, rather it is resistant to change; power is hard to change but not changeless. There is always the possibility of repeating a claim with difference. Yet, it is into this risk that I propose *listening*. Derrida explains, “Discourse on the promise is already a promise: in the promise.”⁵⁷³ Perhaps listening for the promise, in the promise, can repeat power differently.

Derrida, like Marion, turns to the language of the impossible to describe the promise. Speech-act theory demands an “I” or a “we” in the present to issue a promise—it is impossible, then, to speak of an ancient promise. Silence on this promise is “a modality of speech: a memory of promise and a promise of memory.”⁵⁷⁴ In order to avoid speaking, to attempt to be silent, there is an act of denial, which Derrida relates to secret-keeping. The work of denial in the economy of political truth can be denying the past, which works to obscure existing anchors for truth making, whether as the operation of the modern liberal subject, as the reassertion of sovereignty in a prophetic history, or the slave-owning past of a founding father now played by a black man.

In Derrida’s denials and silence, I hear the impulse, the promise to listen—to actively

⁵⁷³ Derrida, “How to,” 84.

⁵⁷⁴ Derrida, “How to,” 85.

listen—as part of a community, an economy of resistant political-truth making. Marion claims that true revelation will always provoke resistance and I propose a political theology of revelation must *listen for resistance*. Claims that re-instantiate sovereignty may feel fresh, but don't generate resistance from the white Christian communities that they benefit. I propose that political truth-makers should listen for resistance—movements against sovereignty; as well as resistance on behalf of sovereignty. True revelation, revelation that enacts some measure of novelty, will invoke resistance. Again, resistance in and of itself is not justice, because as Silvan Tompkins argues, anger can take a variety of objects. Anger can have righteous ends; and anger can have cruel ends. Resistance says the name of George Floyd, of Breonna Taylor; white fragility asserts that “blue lives matter.”

Affect as the capacity to act and be acted upon refuses a tidy narrative of causality—rather, power circulates through a messy network of feelings, affects, that stick to different subjects, differently. Intense excitement, intense interest has been assumed to be a marker of conceptual novelty; and thereby used to make new claims about old power. But resistance might not feel exciting. Theologian Karen Bray asserts “grave attending” as a form of resistance—which she describes as “a caring for the gravity, the pulling down into the material world, the listening and feeling for what all its myriad emotions and attentions have to tell us and where they lead us.”⁵⁷⁵ The injunction to avoid speaking offers a promise to listen differently, in hopes of hearing differently. Listening, as I assert it with Jean-Luc Nancy, is a promise to hear different concepts, feel

⁵⁷⁵ Karen Bray, *Grave Attending: A Political Theology for the Unredeemed*, (New York: Fordham University Press, 2020), 27.

different affects, and to take place differently—in solidarity with the people who sovereignty seeks to except from citizenship. Listening for resistance with oppressed peoples might allow justice to flourish.

Learning to Listen—Power at the Limits: A Passible God?

Derrida reorients his engagement with the secret to ask about *place*. I suggest that place, as emblematic of position in relation to someone, something else, can offer an entry into locating power in an economy of political truth-making. The injunction to be silent—to shut up and listen—folds into a taking-place of relationship. He writes, “It is necessary to stand or step aside, to find the *place* proper to the experience of the secret—to be kept, preserved, shared.”⁵⁷⁶ Derrida turns to read carefully Pseudo-Dionysius’s effort to induct an apprentice named Timothy in *Mystical Theology*. This selection is key for Derrida, first because it attempts to articulate a “beyond that exceeds the opposition between affirmation and negation;” and second because it captures Dionysius’s attempt to teach another mystical prayer—it is a “pedagogy, which is also a mystagogy, a psychagogy.”⁵⁷⁷ The text is a prayer directed to God; but also is a lesson directed to Timothy. It is Dionysius’s ability to address God *and Timothy* that I see as a model for listening at the limits, a listening that teaches us to act differently.

At this point in his text, Derrida is taken with Dionysius’s “beyond being,” as it now seems to be readable as something other than the “hyperessentiality” he critiqued earlier. Instead, here, Derrida finds something “that exceeds the opposition between

⁵⁷⁶ Derrida, “How to,” 89.

⁵⁷⁷ Derrida, “How to,” 117.

affirmation and negation.”⁵⁷⁸ (90). It is something that exceeds “*position (thesis)* itself” (90). This is something that “has the double and ambiguous meaning of what is above in a hierarchy, thus both beyond and more” (90). I read this as both power and possibility: this excess is both the affected will of the human subject that encounters their limit and the possibility of that subject therefore acting differently. The possibility of acting differently is limited—intransigent, durable forms of political power are not changed in an instant, but rather change *takes place*.

Derrida argues that the “cause” in this economy of knowledge “*situates* itself.”⁵⁷⁹ It is a place that is “between the place and the place of the secret, between the secret place and the topography of the social link which must protect the nondivulgence.”⁵⁸⁰ There is *some place* that governs a relationship between knowing and non-knowing. And this place, somehow, makes it possible for Timothy, the learner, to speak of mystical theology. Derrida calls it an “initiatory politotopology which at once organizes the mystical community and makes possible the address to the other.”⁵⁸¹ In other words, in the text Derrida sees a movement from individual seeking God in negation to a pedagogical encounter that organizes a community. And the community negotiates politics as relationships that carry power or the capacity to act and be acted on.

Within this community of power relations, where does the speaker stand? Where does the listener stand? This set of coordinates brings “feeling-only” truth and the “crypto-

⁵⁷⁸ Derrida, “How to,” 90.

⁵⁷⁹ Derrida, “How to,” 91.

⁵⁸⁰ Derrida, “How to,” 91.

⁵⁸¹ Derrida, “How to,” 91.

fundamentalist” into facts focus as part of a relational economy, where listening can take place. Claims to truth are made to someone—to some other: some other person, in some place. Avery Dulles’ Catholic reading of revelation is ultimately relational. In an interpersonal revelation, a person reaches out to another, sharing their inner world. In the other, “God emerges from his hiddenness, calls to man, and invites him to a covenant-existence.”⁵⁸² Marion moves to a relationship too, in the final chapter of *Givenness and Revelation*. Faith, for Marion, is a “request” in front of revelation which “opens the non-idolatrous space of alterity”—and “this very space that we experience, within the limits of our finitude and egocentrism, in every other experience of the other.”⁵⁸³

Derrida similarly lifts up the relational encounter in revelation, here within negative theology, as he continues to read Dionysius’s *Mystical Theology* as both a prayer to God and a lesson to Timothy. This doubleness can be seen in prayer; specifically, Derrida turns to prayer as address and the attendant praise that accompanies prayer. Prayer, Derrida argues, is a form of address to the other. It is an experience of address that requires the other hears it. Prayer “in itself, one may say, implies nothing other than supplicating address to the other, perhaps beyond all supplicating and giving.”⁵⁸⁴ The encomium, which attends prayer, “although it’s not simple attributive speech, nevertheless, preserves an irreducible relationship to the attribution.”⁵⁸⁵ Derrida explains that the encomium imperfectly determines the prayer. The encomium, which speaks of

⁵⁸² Dulles, *Revelation*, 9.

⁵⁸³ Marion, *Givenness*, 117.

⁵⁸⁴ Derrida, “How to,” 111.

⁵⁸⁵ Derrida, “How to,” 111.

God, “does not merge with the movement of prayer itself, which does not speak *of*, but *to*.”⁵⁸⁶ As a result, “the apostrophe of prayer and the determination of the encomium form a pair, two different structures.”⁵⁸⁷ Similar to the encomium and the apostrophe, I have argued that the sovereignty and the exceptional in Carl Schmitt’s exception are two paired but different structures. Sovereignty and the exceptional operate at the same time, intertwined, but as separable elements of claims to truth: the exceptional moment that confronts an individual with the limit to their subjectivity—and the assertion of sovereignty. The movement of the prayer and encomium, these two pieces, the prayer or opening into the possibility of speaking and the determination of the praise, are, arguably, two pieces of truth-making, which carry the possibility of repetition with difference. The prayer and encomium offer a space for revelation—albeit not revelation as a break, not as absolute, but as a confrontation with the limits of humanity at which it is possible to touch the im/possible.

Indeed, Derrida, recognizes the political movement of rhetoric. Derrida argues, “In the topolitology of the secret, the figures or *places* of rhetoric are also political stratagems.”⁵⁸⁸ It’s the “divine promises” which also represent an “injunction” that gives power to claims about God.⁵⁸⁹ To transgress the injunction or to doubt the promise would be an opening, but also a closing in on itself of this rhetoric. Derrida argues that “[S]ince the promise is also an order, the allegorical veil becomes a political shield, the solid

⁵⁸⁶ Derrida, “How to,” 111.

⁵⁸⁷ Derrida, “How to,” 111.

⁵⁸⁸ Derrida, “How to,” 93.

⁵⁸⁹ Derrida, “How to,” 93.

barrier of a social division; or if you prefer, a *shibboleth*.”⁵⁹⁰ These political *shibboleths* can be moments of sovereign exception, as in a social barrier that, for example, excepts people of color from full citizenship. Or the injunction to silence might be an opening to listen for resistance, and to take place with difference.

In a video from a conference at the University of Toronto in 2002, Derrida again addressed revelation. Here, Derrida engages Heidegger’s distinction between revealability and revelation. Revealability, in Heidegger’s thinking, precedes, revelation—though not chronologically or logically. For Heidegger, there is therefore a structure that is ontologically prior to revelation. Derrida seeks to trouble this argument, arguing that revelation does not only come to *fulfill* revelation but rather comes as an event, to open up revealability. However, even this reversal does not satisfy Derrida—instead he wants to remove the event from the existing economy of truth. He argues, “if you think of the event as something else than the unveiling of the truth or the revelation of the truth, but as something else which *affects*—*affects* with no reference to light, not to vision, no reference to unveiling, which affects not only human existence, but God’s existence.”⁵⁹¹ In other words, at the limits of the human subject there is possibility—but this possibility depends on the *passibility* of the sovereign God. Therefore the possibility is limited; it is the im/possible. Drawing on Jack Caputo’s language, Derrida continues, “The powerlessness of God is the possibility for God to be affected.” Because, “Nothing

⁵⁹⁰ Derrida, “How to,” 93.

⁵⁹¹ Jacques Derrida, “On ‘Revelation’ and ‘Revealability,’” University of Toronto, YouTube, Jan 26, 2006, Accessed April 18, 2021, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bxpTNO85tu8>. Italics mine.

can happen to absolute power, to the sovereign—for something to happen, God must be exposed, must be limited in some way.” This eventiveness that can affect the sovereign God is what I hope can effect change. I do not seek to reassert a traditional doctrine of God—however, again, at the limit of what it is possible to know, “God” serves as a name for the im/possible that persists. This space, which is one of possibility, is always entrained in the power dynamics that shapes our political landscape and is not available as “pure” event. Power is transmitted at the limits—sovereignty emerges with the excitement of the exception. With the traditional model of knowledge, excitement is conflated with novelty, as a marker of newness. Sovereignty therefore asserts itself with feeling of freshness that suppresses the iteration of old durable powers: white supremacy, authoritarianism are made to feel fresh.

However, the power at the limits of humanity is, well, limited. The articulation of a political economy of truth that resists Schmittian sovereignty—that limits the sovereign God—requires learning to listen and therefore being moved differently in the world; or taking place differently. Revelation is a matrix in which feelings, facts, and power move. Political truth must be made with attention to power—and how power feels. Imagined this way—revelation can bridge the supposed bifurcation between feeling-only truth and a crypto-fundamentalist version of the facts.

Positioned to Listen—Positioned to Learn

Key, then, is positioning. Prayer with its double movement of opening and closing discourse must be positioned in relationship. Derrida claims the address to “God” makes relationships possible. God marks a “transcendence which is nothing other (and wholly

other) than what it transcends—a principle of multiplication of voices and discourses.”⁵⁹² Here I find an opening into an immanent possibility, that is impossible in its purest form; God as the im/possible. The limit that humans encounter, the break in subjectivity is an opening into the “multiplication of voices.”⁵⁹³ God is not the only recipient of the encomium in Dionysius’ prayer: Dionysius’ prayer moves in multiple directions—it is simultaneously an address to God and to Timothy. Addressing God as the principle of multiplication is what allows Dionysius to teach Timothy—to position Timothy. Derrida writes “[i]t is exactly because he does not turn away from God that he can turn towards Timothy and *pass from one address to the other without changing direction*.”⁵⁹⁴ Here, an address to God, as excess, as possibility, is what makes a relationship take place.

Orientation toward the other, who might be called God, enables a relationship with *another person*. Inside the text, the relationship is formed between Dionysius and Timothy, but the relationship expands to include more people—us as the readers. It is a pedagogical moment, in which Derrida includes us: “we believe we are reading” and we become the *ideal* reader of the text.⁵⁹⁵ There is an ethical movement in Dionysius’ relationship with Timothy—and in the text’s relationship with us. The text includes “the best reader...who ought to allow himself to be led to become better.”⁵⁹⁶ Learning is about positioning, reading in “the proper direction,” which can transform the reader from

⁵⁹² Derrida, “How to,” 113.

⁵⁹³ Derrida, “How to,” 113.

⁵⁹⁴ Derrida, “How to,” 117.

⁵⁹⁵ Derrida, “How to,” 117.

⁵⁹⁶ Derrida, “How to,” 117.

“who we are, at present,” hopefully, into who we ought to be “if we read this text as it ought to be read.”⁵⁹⁷ In other words, while Marion tends to press revelation back into communication with a transcendent being, Derrida sees engaging the limit of human subjectivity as a movement into relationship with others. And even more, Derrida sees possibility to be different, even to be better. At the same time, the action upon a reader always risks repeating sovereignty. It is at this point that some shared value—as a starting place that is open to questions—might serve to organize the learning that takes place.

Prayer positions the reader and, at least in Pseudo-Dionysius’ text, prayer generates a pedagogical relationship. Here we find Derrida making a connection between ethics, or instructions on how we should act, and apophysis. The text attempts to fashion the reader into the “best” reader. The problem with “best” is that it is still grounded in some starting place. Prayer imagined this way, might still be an initiation into the Christian tradition, which, at least in Derrida’s mind, implies a definite referent. He claims that there is a *future promise* that draws Pseudo-Dionysius’ apophysis into “motion”—“it is *initiated*, in the sense of initiative and initiation—by the event of a revelation that is also a promise.”⁵⁹⁸

Prayer is an initiation precipitated by the event of a revelation. What is the revelation event, the experience that is encountered in prayer, at least in prayer as Derrida imagines it? Again, is *the event* something different than mystical union with God that is imagined by Pseudo-Dionysius? Derrida writes,

⁵⁹⁷ Derrida, “How to,” 117.

⁵⁹⁸ Derrida, “How to,” 117-118.

This is why God's name always names, before or after other names: the trace of the singular event that will have rendered speech possible even before it turns itself back toward— This is why apophatic discourse must also open with a prayer that recognizes, assigns, or assures its destination: the Other as Referent of a *legein* which is none other than its cause.⁵⁹⁹

The event is somehow prior to God's name, and the event makes speech possible. The prayer, the positioning to the other, points the petitioner toward God, which is not a being, or a person, but rather a "*legein*" —from the Greek, holding both the meaning *to speak* and *together*. Derrida likely leans on Heidegger's claims about *legein*, which suggest *legein* in Greek thought connotes a pre-linguistic ordering of all beings into relationship with each other. Derrida points to the way language both creates and collapses meaning in the same moment. He presses his writing as close to motion as he can—the *legein* that simultaneously gathers and puts forth—in order to avoid landing on any particular name for the event. Language therefore *takes place*; listening moves people to action.

I hold that to avoid speaking of shared values, of anchors for political truth-making, is to allow them to be repeated. If we are to make truth together that honors the facts, while seeking to not re-inscribe sovereign power, then human beings must position themselves in such a way that they are pressed into relationship and into speaking shared values. In the pedagogical encounter between Timothy and Pseudo-Dionysius, Pseudo-Dionysius's prayer to God becomes a turning back and relating to Timothy. Reaching the

⁵⁹⁹ Derrida, "How to," 96.

edge of human capacity presses out in an address to the promise that is often called God; yet the encounter that takes place is with the other people around us.

The encounter with others is always imperfect—even as the encomium imperfectly directs the prayer. So the address to the other might be shaped by intransigent nodes of political power like white supremacy. That is why I hold that encounters with others should be given tentative values to organize them. Listening, as I borrow the concept from the work of Jean-Luc Nancy, is a value that challenges the traditional subject-object divide generated in an economy of knowledge formed around looking. I argue that white people, as are most radical theologians, ought to learn to listen, before we (I) speak. Listening takes seriously the injunction of prayer and is positioned towards the other in an awareness of the operation of power. Listening at the limits is active—revelation may take place. Active listening offers the possibility of moving differently, together.

Listening for the Powers of the People

Since the 1930s, continental philosophers linked metaphors of sight with the Enlightenment's sovereign subject.⁶⁰⁰ Famously, Descartes' thinking, knowing, subject, turns "a steadfast mental gaze" on the world and thereby knows it.⁶⁰¹ The subject who sees and knows the world, knows by categorizing, by generating a subject/object divide. Looking reinforces the division between me and the other in front of me. Looking

⁶⁰⁰ It was a turn ironically inaugurated by another Nazi, Martin Heidegger.

⁶⁰¹ Adrienne Janus, "Jean-Luc Nancy and the 'Anti-Ocular' Turn in Continental Philosophy and Critical Theory" *Comparative Literature*, Vol. 63, No. 2 (Spring 2011): 183.

depends on the ability—the freedom—of the modern liberal subject to comprehend the world around them. Again, this is the modern ideal that Steven Pinker advocates returning to: the sovereign subject who is able to reason while believing in nothing. Pinker assumes the sovereignty of the subject; and, I argue, believes that reason will prove itself. Pinker’s belief in reason is belief in the buffered, sovereign subject.

Looking, therefore, depends on the same autonomous subject that Kameron Carter argues is the symbolic mediator—the white savior—governing subjectivity in the West. As demonstrated by Mayra Rivera and J. Kameron Carter in chapter one, the ideal subject—the sovereign subject — is a white (cis, het, able) man. Other people—Black people, gender non-conforming people, women, and more—are objects, and therefore seen as unhuman; or not seen at all. The division of the world into subject and object fuels strategies of othering and dehumanization. White men are made exceptional; they are given the power to decide what is truth. And these male truth-makers exercise the power of speech, without ever encountering the injunction to silence in the promise.

Listening, in contrast, presents us with more than the concepts and language offered by looking. Listening opens the space to feel vibrations, powers, and embodiments that are not traditionally included in truth making. Listening, I hold, opens a space for limited revelation, the small incremental changes that come from being positioned together differently in the world. Adrienne Janus listens for the three “resonances of sense” in Jean Luc Nancy’s book *Listening*: first, sense as meaning or conceptual; but also sense as sensual, as touching the senses, touch, taste, smell, and

sight; and sense “as movement, sense of direction, and impulse.”⁶⁰² Listening therefore attends to all parts of the truth-making matrix, without prescribing an order to the pieces or a pattern of causality. At the same time, listening, I argue, opens up forms of encounter that chip away at intransigent nodes of power; thereby allowing power to be repeated with difference.

Listening pries opens the subject/object form of knowing, which reinforces dominance and othering, into a multiplicity of ways to know. Listening is critically attentive to the knowledge, the facts, precisely because listening takes place. Listening is learning—listening is positioning towards the im/possible. Listening is attentive to affect—*not* only to the intense affect traditionally associated with prophecy, with sudden novel claims from God, that re-instantiates old durable powers—instead attentive to other movements, other vibrations, music coming from the people. Listening critically makes it possible to hear the political movements of oppressed peoples and, therefore, to challenge the re-inscription of sovereign power in politics.

Listening, critically, can hear power differently — and therefore teach listeners to move differently in the world. Jeffery Robbins’ *Radical Democracy* attempts to lay out a model of political power that channels the diffuse power of the people in order to challenge the perpetual re-inscription of Schmittian sovereign power. Like Pinker, Robbins seeks to challenge the first principles that have limited progress in society; unlike Pinker, Robbins does not turn to a re-elevation of the sovereign subject and *his* progress as a model for justice. Robbins, engaging the work of Michael Hardt and

⁶⁰² Janus, “Jean-Luc Nancy,” 183.

Antonio Negri, describes “an immanent political theology predicated on the constituent power of the multitude.”⁶⁰³ The power of the multitude is not transcendent and is not absolute—the multitude cannot become the Schmittian sovereign. It is the diffuse, or shared, powers of the people which can move in opposition to the dominating, oppressive power of Schmittian sovereignty. The multitude has recently appeared, for ex, in the Movement for Black Lives, Occupy Wall Street, and at the Women’s March. Robbins argues that the multitude “needs to be formed into a political body,” or needs to be organized in order to be leveraged against existing sovereign power. I suggest that white political theologians must listen for the movements that are already emerging before suggesting new ways to organize the people.⁶⁰⁴

Listening to people traditionally excluded from the conversation requires white political theologians to take seriously the forms of communication that are not traditionally used as theological or philosophical texts, like for example, musical theatre. It is not enough to hear the words of *Hamilton*. The lyrics tell the story; the lyrics are part of its truth. However, it’s not enough to conceptually comprehend the lyrics. It’s not even enough to see the actors—the racially diverse cast—on stage. The listener has to be touched, affected, by the music. The “young, scrappy, and hungry” movement of Hamilton’s theme, “My Shot,” carries the teleological energy of the founding moment in U.S. history.⁶⁰⁵ However, it repeats that moment with difference: the traditional sounds of

⁶⁰³ Jeffery W. Robbins, *Radical Democracy and Political Theology*, (New York: NYU Press, 2011), 84.

⁶⁰⁴ Robbins, *Radical*, 121.

⁶⁰⁵ “My Shot,” Lin-Manuel Miranda, *Hamilton*.

musical theatre and infused with rap, hip-hop, and a variety of sounds not usually allowed into this space. *Hamilton* as an address to an audience communicates conceptually, emotionally, and *takes place*. Revelation, as I articulate it here, is never finished, rather, it takes place—just as *Hamilton*, an event, continues to take place.

The event of *Hamilton*, an experience that took our culture by storm, is not finished. Lin-Manuel Miranda's performance of the opening number to *Hamilton*, a musical that did not yet exist, took place in the White House. Miranda's performance pushed the limits of a genre, reaching for a form that seemed im/possible. Yet, repetition with difference takes place. When *Hamilton* became available to stream in the summer of 2020, it took place in a very different U.S. than the one that made the musical a runaway hit in the summer of 2016. As I stated in the introduction to this chapter, the summer of 2020 confronted *Hamilton* with a global pandemic of Covid 19 and a renewed surge of protests in the movement for Black Lives after the deaths of George Floyd, Ahmaud Aubrey, Breonna Taylor, and tragically others. To those of us listening in 2020 *Hamilton*'s optimism felt different—it felt tragic, desperate, and angry. No longer hopeful about the possibilities presented by seeing people of color in positions of power; *Hamilton* confronted listeners with the injustices being enacted in the U.S. under the Trump regime.

Critical listening to *Hamilton* has to take place, afresh, and must perform fresh iterations. Playwright Ishmael Reed's *The Haunting of Lin-Manuel Miranda* does the work of listening for the sounds of resistance not in but *to Hamilton*. The play, described by the New York Times as “a cross between ‘A Christmas Carol’ and a trial at the Hague’s International Criminal Court,” is a fierce rebuttal of the musical *Hamilton*. Reed

listens for and amplifies the voices who are excluded from *Hamilton*.⁶⁰⁶ While the musical is notable for its representation, allowing Miranda, a brown Puerto-Rican man, to stage a show in which he stars as Founding Father, thereby allowing people of color to see themselves in the foundational narrative of the U.S. in a way they have not before, the show does not give voice to any of the diverse people *who were already present* at the founding of the U.S. In Reed's play, the ghosts of excluded people, of Native Americans, slaves, indentured servants, and Harriet Tubman visit an Ambien-addled Miranda. Reed presents Miranda as the gullible dupe of white historians, unaware of the enormity of the bloody deeds committed by the Founding Fathers lionized in his musical. The play culminates in Miranda confronting the white biographer of Alexander Hamilton, Ron Chernow, who tells Miranda:

You knew the deal. I said in my book that Hamilton and his wife Eliza might have owned slaves. And now you have, all of a sudden, gotten regrets? Didn't you take the hint when the Rockefeller Foundation endorsed your play? *Hamilton*? Do you think that the Rockefellers are for revolution? You think that they would have bought twenty thousand tickets for school children if you'd shown Hamilton as he really was? Do you think American Express hired you because they want a revolution? That they want to turn their company over to their workers? And what about your work for Disney? Do you believe that their board members are a

⁶⁰⁶ My addition of *The Haunting of Lin-Manuel Miranda* is made with gratitude to Max Thornton for his response to this chapter on December 16,th 2020. Elizabeth Vincentelli, "Review: 'The Haunting' Has a Big Problem With 'Hamilton,'" review of "The Haunting of Lin-Manuel Miranda," *New York Times*, June 2, 2019, Accessed April 19, 2021, <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/06/02/theater/the-haunting-of-lin-manuel-miranda-review.html>. Ishmael Reed, *The Haunting of Lin-Manuel Miranda*, (New York: Archway Editions, 2020).

bunch of socialists? Are you that naïve?⁶⁰⁷

Reed confronts Miranda about the same American exceptionalism historian Joanne B. Freeman noted as folded into *Hamilton* in the introduction to this chapter. Except, he extends American exceptionalism, which moves with Schmittian sovereignty, into the imbrication of nationalism and capitalism, which this project has not had space to address. If *Hamilton's* version of inclusion is palatable to the Rockefellers, what does revelation that is distasteful to them sound like? And should the Rockefellers's taste be the measure one way or another?

Perhaps hearing the unpalatable requires other senses. For example, what does it mean to amplify the stench of a person whose alcoholism has caused them to lose control of their bowels? The first impulse is to cover smells; human beings seek to hide from places of decay and breakdown. *Hamilton* is effective because it elevates people of color into the traditional places of power in U.S. society—and does so with slick, catchy, beautiful music. *Hamilton* is aesthetically pleasing. What would it look like to amplify the parts of U.S. life that smell bad? In a sense, Ishmael Reed's rebuttal of Lin-Manuel Miranda is the work of amplifying the unpalatable; yet, at the same time, his play is still art. Effective political truth can amplify difficult material and work affectively against the overwhelming scent of fake roses that corporations might want to spray over U.S. history.

Critical listening must not stop taking place. In the first act of *Hamilton*, Angelica Schuyler, lamenting her position as a woman who must marry well in order to sustain her family, sings, "You want a revolution, I want a revelation."⁶⁰⁸ Revolution agitates against

⁶⁰⁷ Reed, *The Haunting*, 60.

⁶⁰⁸ "The Schuyler Sisters" track 5 featuring Renée Elise Goldsberry on Lin-Manuel Miranda,

the current forces of domination, as did the American revolution depicted in *Hamilton*. Revelation is the im/possible grace that repeats truth differently, that takes place differently by imagining a revolution that includes women, people of color, indigenous people. Pursuing the im/possibility of American democracy requires us to listen, listen for sense, with our senses, and with a sense of our present possibility taking place. Political theology, white political theologians, must listen in order to be moved and shaped by the power of the multitude. The power of individual subjects is limited. But at the limits human beings encounter others, and there collective power can be amplified, multiplied. By making music — affective arguments — political theology becomes able to partner with oppressed communities as they claim their truth. And performed truth, enacted truth, is, hopefully, change.

Appendix 1



Image 1 (Taken August 10, 2018 by Lisa Gasson-Gardner)



Image 2 (Taken August 10, 2018 by Lisa Gasson-Gardner)

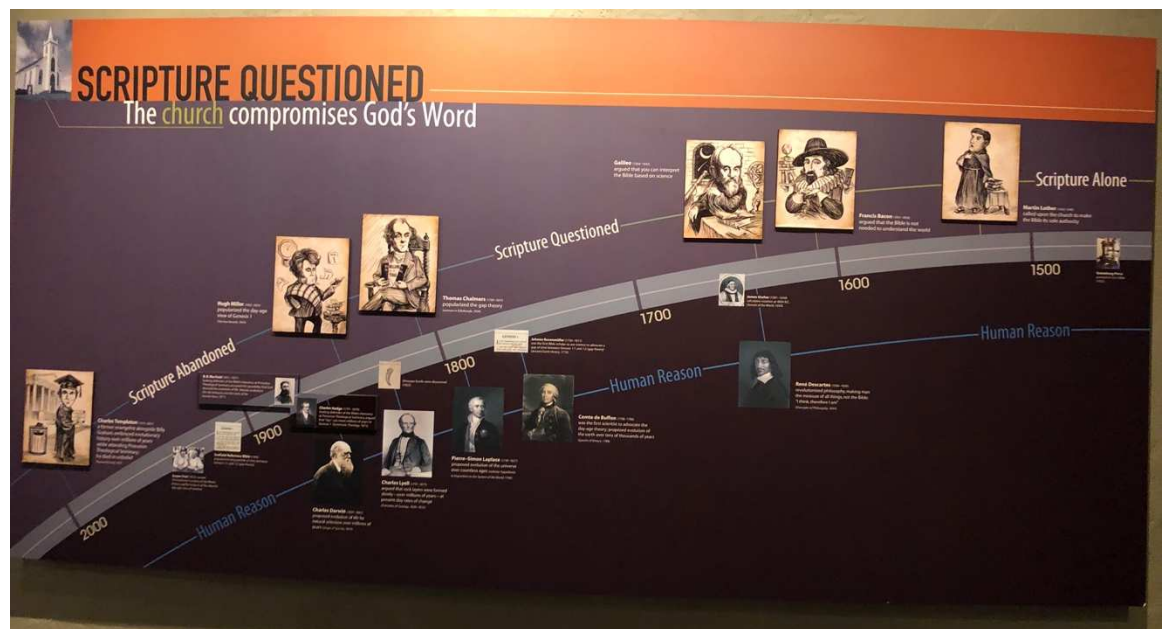


Image 3 (Taken August 10, 2018 by Lisa Gasson-Gardner)

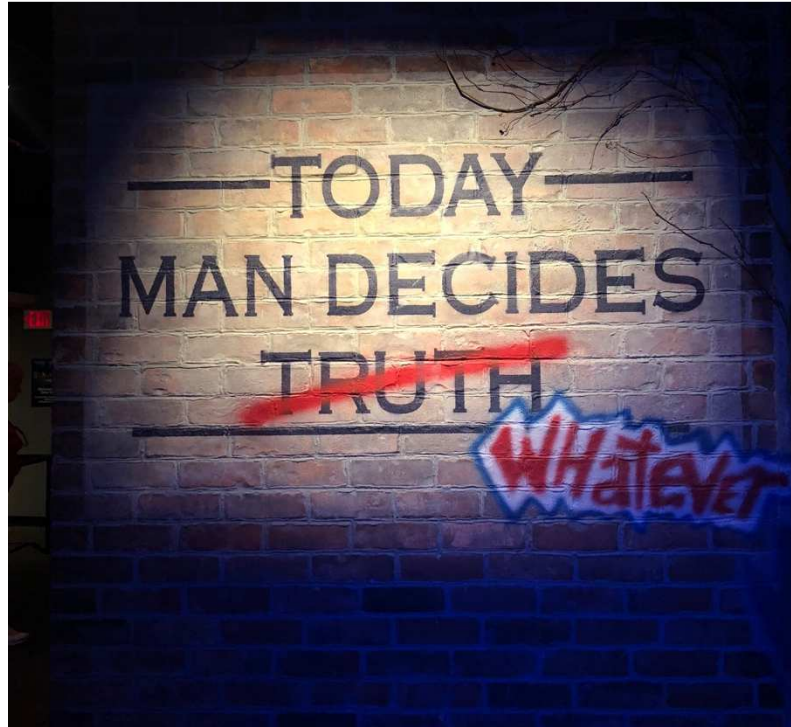


Image 4 (Taken August 10, 2018 by Lisa Gasson-Gardner).

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