POLITICAL ENGAGEMENT AMONG RELIGIOUS LEADERS AND THEIR RELATIONSHIPS WITH THE MEDIA

Samuel John Roth

Stacey Woelfel, Chair

ANALYSIS

Introduction

I grew up around religious leadership and political conflict in the church. My grandfather was a pastor at Zion Lutheran Church in Ferguson, MO and president of Evangelical Lutherans in Mission (ELiM), an organization of moderates within the conservative Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod (LCMS). During his tenure as president, ELiM provided significant financial support for Christ Seminary-Seminex ("Samuel," 2002), which was formed when a large contingent of students and faculty walked out of LCMS Concordia Seminary due to theological differences. ELiM and Seminex led to the creation of the Association of Evangelical Lutheran Churches (AELC), which led to a merger with the Lutheran Church in America (LCA) to create the moderate Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) in 1988.

My father was a pastor in Jacksonville, IL before being elected bishop of the Central Southern Illinois Synod in the ELCA in 2011. The role of the bishop requires him to attend to the ceremonial, spiritual and administrative needs of 130 congregations, and situations with the synod can range from peace and unity to infighting, mutinies against council members and pastors, weak understandings of church systems and protocols and politically and theologically divided congregations.

Society's relationship with religious leadership is complicated. With its already complex web of political ideologies, the interdenominational Christian church at-large struggles with a host of issues, including the pandemic of sexual abuse in the Roman Catholic church, scandals among prominent clergy and the glacial transition to LGBTQ acceptance. My objective with this research is to explore the relationships between clergy and the media in relation to political engagement, clerical perception of media influence and clerical participation in image shaping through media. This research was carried out by interviewing religious leaders who have shown strong interest or participation in political engagement, including George Scott, pastor of Trinity Lutheran Church in East Berlin, PA who ran for US Congress in 2018. The first subtopic of interview questions address how these politically active religious leaders see leaders in ministry and politics portrayed in the media. These questions allow each interviewee to identify the most prominent examples of clerics and politicians in different kinds of media, from fictionalized representations of religious and political leaders in film and entertainment to ostensibly truthful representations in news media. The respondents had an opportunity to reflect on these prominent representations and break down their perceptions of how clerical representations manifest, how they are disseminated, and what they perceive to be the intended and actual response to these representations from their congregations and constituents.

I also asked the respondents how they personally use media to project or amplify their own ideologies and motivations. We live in a world with an ever-changing media, as well as evolving mentalities on what purposes the media serve and how the media depict the world around us. This section of the research explores how politically active religious leaders embrace

or reject personal use of the media, as well as how individual clerics see media used by other religious leaders and organizations.

This written report supplements the work conducted through the professional skills component, which is a documentary film about the aforementioned George Scott and his leave of absence from his congregation to run as the Democratic challenger in Pennsylvania's 10th Congressional district in the 2018 midterms. Along the way, Scott experiences personal growth and evolution as he goes through the experience of becoming a political candidate, and the congregation of Trinity Lutheran Church, his parish, goes through change as well with the revolving door of interim pastors sent by the synod to fill the pastoral void left by Scott's absence. Throughout Scott's campaign, the big unanswered question is the obvious one: will he win or lose the congressional race? This question has lasting ramifications: if Scott wins, he begins the process of transitioning to Congressional office, while the church would move on to its third interim pastor before calling a new permanent pastor. If Scott loses, he would go back to Trinity and resume preaching, which would bring a host of other questions to the surface. After filming for months, we watch Scott lose on election night. The big question then changes: will he run again in 2020?

The film, entitled *Holy Fire,* will provide an intimate observational portrait of Scott's transition from minister to political candidate and will analyze the context of those leadership roles, the effect on the people he represents and the perspectives that were shaped about Scott through the media lens. The film will also include interviews from members of the congregation to provide insight into their perspectives during this unique episode in the life of the church.

The finished film is the result of nine trips to central PA over a span of six months, with cumulative time spent in PA totaling about seven weeks. The production journal in this report includes a comprehensive account of the creation of the film.

Literature Review

There is a prevalent history of religion intersecting with politics in the last few centuries (Jevtic, 2009; King, 1997). Political science began as a formal method of study in the late 19th century, and shortly after this time period, religion became a subject of political research (Jevtic, 2009). Jevtic also notes that the United States was not the only place to experience a growth in religiosity in the 20th century: European political scientists note an awakening of the political role of Islam in world politics, as well as Buddhist influences in Tibet, South Vietnam, Japan, and Sri Lanka, and the success of the Hindu party Baratiya Janata in India. At the same time, Roman Catholicism was gaining political significance in eastern Europe (pg. 411). This massive politicization of religion has resulted in a dramatic influence on democratic election; the 1980s saw the rise of the Moral Majority (founded by Jerry Falwell), which designated itself as a purveyor of firm moral standards desired by a majority of Americans and had strong ties to conservative leaders like Ronald Reagan and Pat Robertson, and Revtic provides the example of George W. Bush's re-election in 2004, when evangelical Christian voters came out for a man who sold himself as an evangelical (pg. 410). The prominence of evangelical Christianity in today's political arena was not always the case, however; evangelical Christians largely stayed away from political participation until the 1970s, when major developments in evangelical Christian movement began to unfold (Diamond, 1989).

Religion, Technology, and Media

Before long, religious organizations started using new forms of technology to spread their messages. In *Spiritual Warfare: The Politics of the Christian Right*, Sara Diamond explains how Christian radio broadcasts began in the 1920s with the first Christian signal being transmitted from Calvary Episcopal Church in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania (pg. 2). Other stations started springing up, including KFUO, a station created by the Lutheran Church Missouri Synod, and WMBI from the Moody Bible Institute in Chicago. These technological developments coincided with a period of ongoing tension between fundamentalists, or biblical literalists, and more liberal Christian denominations. These tensions resulted in the rise of prominent Christian voices to help guide listeners in what was thought to be a correct course: Father Charles Coughlin, a prominent Catholic priest who founded the National Shrine of the Little Flower, gained significant political influence in the 1930s and 1940s when he began projecting anticommunist radio broadcasts. His messages were sometimes overtly anti-Semitic and pro-Nazi, and he was able to gain millions of listeners (pg. 3).

Missionary radio networks, such as HCJB ("Heralding Christ Jesus' Blessings") began setting up long range towers and broadcasting into Latin America and Europe. HCJB was the first radio station to broadcast Russian language gospel programs into the Soviet Union (pg. 5). After World War II, the FEBC (Far East Broadcasting Company) began broadcasting into countries that were denying access for US missionaries to physically enter the country. The FEBC mainly focused on spreading Gospel messages to communist countries, placing an emphasis on China, the Philippines, territories of Southeast Asia, and the Soviet Union. The FEBC also has two stations in South Korea that broadcast into North Korea (pg. 7). In the 1950s,

Paul Freed, through connections in the Youth for Christ organization, set up TWR (Trans World Radio), which was established in order to commit to global missionary work. TWR uses Mount Angel in Monte Carlo, Monaco, the same site for transmitting where Adolf Hitler once constructed a transmitter to spread Nazi propaganda (pg. 9). In 1985, TWR announced a plan to collaborate with HCJB's Ron Cline and FEBC's Bob Bowman to share their resources and increase their Gospel footprint.

Because of the post-World War II "Communist Menace" phenomenon, in conjunction with the rise of the Youth for Christ organization, William Randolph Hearst and Henry Luce, of *Time* magazine, decided to provide a platform for Billy Graham and his conservative Christian message. Graham's message was stark and clear; by the mid-1950s, he was preaching: "Either Communism must die, or Christianity must die" (pg. 10). This simple message, in addition to celebrity guest appearances, brought about a million young people into the evangelical Christian fold by 1946.

This kind of messaging crossed over to the television format with the Christian Broadcasting Network, which Pat Robertson established in the early 1960s (pg. 12). Robertson created a television program called *The 700 Club*, which was based on the idea that if 700 people donated $10 a month, the network would be able to stay afloat (pg. 13). The network very quickly gained many more donors than that; *The 700 Club* had a minimum monthly intake of $1.4 million by 1978. Programming on *The 700 Club* would consist of covering nightly news stories through a biblical lens, often with politically conservative interpretations. Through his TV presence, Pat Robertson became an iconic figure of Christian conservatism, injecting himself (and his money) into political issues, culminating in a run for the presidency in 1988.

Robertson ushered in an era of televangelists, such as Kenneth Copeland, Jimmy Swaggart, and Jim Bakker, who adhere to a charismatic interpretation of Christianity and preach "prosperity Gospel," promising that donors will "reap the harvest if they sow the seed." However parasitic and egregious televangelism appears, Quentin Schultze points out in *Televangelism and American Culture* that televangelists use the justification and firmly believe that the more resources they acquire, the more people they are able to reach with the Gospel (pg. 17). Even so, televangelism operates as a business, making sales to the impressionable and impoverished while bolstering its own image. Despite the predatory business practices, the televangelist image can remain generally pristine to the common viewer, unless a clearly defined and credible scandal emerges. Scandal, to the socially prominent, ostensibly holy televangelist, is devastating, but not decapitating. Scandals are not uncommon for televangelists either: Swaggart was exposed for an affair with a prostitute in 1988, in retaliation for Swaggart exposing another minister's affairs. This led to Swaggart's loss of ministerial credentials in the Assemblies of God, though Swaggart kept preaching elsewhere. He initially repented for the 1988 immorality, but did not give such repentance for a similar incident in 1991 ("Swaggart," 1991). Bakker had a string of shocking crimes in the 1980s, including a payoff for the silence of Jessica Hahn, a women who Bakker drugged and raped ("Interview," 2005). He resigned from ministry as a result, but he also was found guilty of 23 counts of fraud. After serving some jail time, Bakker now hosts a TV show in which he sells survival packs for the end-times (Mohr, 2015).

In addition to the business side of Christian media, evangelical Christianity has established itself as a brand of fearing God. In *Religion of Fear,* Jason Bivins analyzes the role

that the politics of the *Left Behind* book series has in conservative Christianity. *Left Behind* is a series where the Rapture takes place, causing a mass disappearance of most humans and leaving some behind to deal with the apocalypse. This series of books, which has since taken off as a film series and multi-media phenomenon, reinforces more literal interpretations of the Rapture portion of the bible, and urges its readers and viewers to shape up so that they wouldn't be "left behind" if we arrive at the end-times.

Group Identity

Religion itself is considered a cultural basis for organization (Ross, 1997) that holds tremendous political significance in today's world (Olson, 2011). Religious organizations, like any secular organization, bring together likeminded individuals that are able to formulate and mobilize a singular message on how biblical texts dictate social constructs. These constructs are most clearly seen in law and can be compartmentalized into two main areas: the law of God, or what is sinful, and the law of man, or what is legal (Clark, 1982). Various interpretations of religious authority lead to discrepancies in group understanding of what is right or lawful. Religion ties its constituents to each other in various ways that are completely separate from politics, including beliefs like the existence of heaven and hell, and physical proximity and fellowship through church services and activities (Pew); however, the psychological power of group identification is crucial to religion's effect on politics (Olson). In fact, the prominent motivation for religious groups to maintain solid political participation is the prospect of effectively abstaining from all issues, thus giving silent power to other affiliations who would be willing to fill those roles (Menendez, 1977).

Interpretation of authority

A major factor in the differentiation of religious denominations is how each group interprets authority. Considering the Bible and Scripture prominent sources for the written authority of God, the Pew Research Center has conducted thorough surveys of Americans in an effort to determine the religious landscape of the country. The study asked individuals how they interpret Scripture. Out of 35,071 respondents, 31% said that the Scripture is the word of God and that it should be taken literally, 27% said that the Scripture is the word of God, but not everything should be taken literally, 3% said that the Scripture is the word of God, but they don't know how to interpret it, 33% said that the Scripture is not the word of God, and 7% said other/did not know. This shows a relatively even split between three main groups: those that take Scripture literally, those that allow figurative interpretations of Scripture, and those that disregard Scripture as the word of God.

The breakdown by denomination provides a view of wide disparities in the interpretation of Scripture among American churches (Figure 1). The majority of Catholics don't interpret everything in Scripture literally (36% figurative, 26% literal, 28% not word of God), while evangelical Protestants are much more likely to interpret Scripture literally and reject the notion that Scripture is not the word of God (55% literal, 29% figurative, 8% not word of God). Historically black protestant churches showed similar numbers to evangelical Protestants (59% literal, 23% figurative, 9% not word of God), and they both differ greatly from mainline Protestants (24% literal, 35% figurative, 28% not word of God).

Religious leader role conceptions

Like many vocations, religious leaders take part in professional socialization. Professional socialization is the process by which a vocation produces change in a person through work requirements (Frese, 1982). The pastoral role would first be defined and established in the seminary, and once a clergy was brought into their first parish, they would bring with them casual observation of their older colleagues or a disciplined study of pastoral theology (Sernett, 1973).

Theological textbooks generally provided the image of a minister in three capacities: his "closet," his study, and his parish. The "closet" refers to the pastor in his private life, that he should be deeply impressed by the magnitude of the office to which he has been called. The pastor must demonstrate eminent piety, or the necessity of more than a general sense of piety, which would come as a result of working in the field in addition to having an inner calling into ministry (pg. 5).

The pastor operating within the study conveys the need for clergy to continue studies of Scripture, the Bible, and other religious texts to not become complacent or out of touch with their calling (pg. 7). This call to always maintain the identity of a student was an attempt to counteract the gap between the pulpit and the pew; pastors need sound theology to be able to convey Scripture accurately and in an understandable fashion for their congregation. Otherwise, a complacent cleric could potentially draw the ire of the community, becoming "a mere desultory man, a gossip from house to house, skimming the surface of popular thinking," and in turn, rejecting the virtue of self-regimentation (pg. 9). Pastors who procrastinated on their sermons until Saturday night, or those who would trust that they could deliver in the

moment, would draw lasting criticism. Much of the pastor's time was undefined, but productivity was still critical for credibility among a community.

The pastor among his people is the culmination of time within the closet and the study. All three components work in conjunction, with the private time proving the validity of the public presentation. Pastors have a great deal of control of their own conduct, which can affect their image, but they have very little control over their ultimate reception. Sernett notes that in post-Appomattox America, some critics wrote ministerial profession off as a life of ease unequal to the demands of an age of active energy (pg. 11). Others stress the dispersion of power within a congregation; while a pastor can maintain a strong appearance of authority, the ultimate decisions for a church body will be written and voted upon by a congregation and its council (Ingram, 1980). It should be considered that in certain circumstances, in which all or most relationships within a congregation are positive, the pastor can end up being the most powerful member of the congregation.

Research Questions

RQ1: How do religious leaders who choose to be politically active see the religious leader role depicted in media?

RQ2: How do religious leaders who choose to be politically active use the media to share their own beliefs and stances with their constituents?

Methodology

To complete the written component of the project, an interview was conducted with Scott, as he was able to provide a politically active, clerical perspective.

To supplement Scott's experience of being a religious leader entering a political arena, interviews were conducted with current pastors who have shown political participation in some form. Political participation of a religious leader could mean direct involvement with public office, including previously held public office, attempts at running for office, appointment to advisor of public office, or direct involvement with the public, including leaders who have spoken at events with political topics or marched with demonstrators/advocated for a specific political stance. The inclusion of clerics who operate outside of government provided a perspective that is more indicative of voluntary activism; these respondents will be participating politically out of will, rather than necessity. These respondents were sought in Columbia, Missouri and the surrounding area, and these interviews were conducted in person.

The semi-structured, qualitative interview approach allowed for a natural dialogue to occur, rather than an interviewer having to work from a set of established questions, even if the conversation goes in a different direction. The interviews began with relatively simple questions that allow for a wide range of interpretation, before narrowing in on specific questions about intersections of religion and politics, public perception of clergy, and media influence on public perception. This qualitative approach allowed the participants to provide the most comprehensive version of their perspective (Leech, 1992). With each of these interviews, each participant were able to provide at least two perspectives: a personal perspective, as well as the general sentiment from the denomination or affiliation that they belong to. This allowed them to speak both as an individual and a representative.

Sample

The sample began with reaching out to Dave Cover, Keith Simon, and Shay Roush. These three individuals are co-lead pastors at The Crossing, a non-denominational church in Columbia, MO. Under direct supervision by its co-lead pastors, The Crossing has been involved with implementing screenings of films from the True/False Film Fest, an annual documentary film festival in Columbia, Missouri. These screenings have included films such as *After Tiller*, by Lana Wilson, in which late-term abortion doctors help patients through their difficult situations. Screenings like these encourage discussion of contentious political topics in a religious setting and context. This initial batch of respondents will be able to provide a perspective of voluntary political activity, and with their network, will be able to suggest other pastors who would be interested in participating in this research. In my correspondence with The Crossing, all three pastors were relatively busy during my window to conduct interviews, but Keith Simon was able to make room in his schedule for me.

In addition to the pastors at the Crossing, I reached out to roughly 20 pastors in the Columbia from various Christian denominations, including Catholics, Lutherans, Methodists, Presbyterians, Baptists, and other non-denominational churches. Of these inquiries, I was able to sit down with three other pastors. Marvin Lindsay is the senior pastor at First Presbyterian Church in Columbia, Missouri, and is also a volunteer member of the city spirit house and task force in order to be a church liaison for housing issues in the community. Chris Cordes is a Catholic priest at Our Lady of Lourdes Church in Columbia, Missouri. Tim Morris is the senior pastor at Alive in Christ, Lutheran Church – Missouri Synod in Columbia, Missouri. Our Lady of

Lourdes, Alive in Christ, and The Crossing all participate in multi-church coordinated community service event day called For Columbia.

Findings

Pastor portrayals in media

Interviewees were first asked about portrayals of clergy they have seen in media. The answers to this question varied in specificity; some gave examples of specific events that have unfolded in the media involving pastors, while others commented on general character traits that are often associated with pastors. Pastor George Scott noted that in the TV shows and movies with which he is familiar, “pastors are portrayed as judgmental, narrow-minded and sometimes hypocritical”, and he saw this as an unfortunate misrepresentation of reality. For Scott, the vast majority of clergy are highly dedicated men and women who work to share God’s word in the best way they can, and these clergy are aware of the negative perceptions and labels placed on the vocation and are working on a step-by-step basis to carry out their call faithfully. Pastor Keith Simon showed this awareness of the negative perceptions of clergy by wanting to separate himself from the term “evangelical” entirely. He commented that Christians come off as rude or bigoted in religious liberty cases such as the baker denying a wedding cake to a same-sex couple, or any other case of denying goods or services based on identity.

Pastor Marvin Lindsay gave more specific examples of portrayals of clergy in the media. He mentioned two events that came to mind: the continuing sex abuse crisis in the Catholic church and the decision on the prohibition on same-sex marriage at the United Methodist

Convention. Lindsay sees this crisis and decision as contributions to the erosion of credibility in religious institutions, and especially a black eye for Christianity. Father Chris Cordes expanded on the Catholic sex abuse crisis, saying that the first scandal that shook everything up occurred in 2002, and there's utmost importance for the scandals to be covered journalistically and exposed. Cordes appreciates when these situations are portrayed in a balanced way, and understands that the plight of the victims must not be overlooked or minimized, but worries when all pastors, priests, and religious leaders are lumped into one group as potential perpetrators.

Relationship with media

Scott feels that pastors are "prone to misunderstanding", not only by the media but also people within the overall culture. Scott observes that if an individual does not have a personal experience or connection with a pastor, that person will often resort to the generalizations found in the media portrayals of pastors. Scott admits that pastors are human beings and prone to error, but one of the mistakes that a pastor may routinely make is to become increasingly absent in society or community by focusing all resources within the walls of the church. The alternative is the desire to be open and inviting; pastors should be outside of the church doors, as Christ was, meeting people in their daily lives and providing care for those in the congregation and beyond.

Cordes notes that the release of sex abuse stories from the media has had lasting impacts on the Catholic church. The big exposure of the crisis in 2002 resulted in shock and dismay, but the overwhelming volume of reports showing how widespread and invasive the

problem is causes the church to enter an almost cyclical, collective hurt. He started by saying that the church feels a collective disappointment, but disappointment was not a strong enough word, and that it requires close attention.

Relationships with parishioners and the public

The common perceptions of pastors made prominent through media affect the daily lives of pastors in their correspondence with their parishioners. Lindsay has full knowledge that many in his congregation consider his sermons to be more political and challenging than his predecessor's sermons, which tended to give the congregation a more comforting message. Lindsay emphasized the importance of grounding oneself in the word of God in order to deliver consistent messaging in sermons that don't pander to a specific audience. This is a difficult concept to put into practice, since there is no way to control the perceptions of a message or the takeaways that people gather from sermons. Sometimes, what people hear and what Lindsay preaches are two different things. Lindsay says that "I have been praised for things I've never said in a sermon and I've also been condemned for things I've never said in a sermon, but they usually hear the sermon they want to hear, for good or for ill."

Lindsay offered the story of Jesus feeding 5000 people with five loaves of bread and two fish as an example of potentially politicized content. Lindsay points out that the sermon payoff, that you give those who are hungry something to eat, can be then politicized and shaped into certain narratives. The conservative Republican solution to feeding the hungry could potentially include contributions made through private acts of charity, and the more liberal approach would be to move towards implementing governmental programs to assist the downtrodden.

Cordes expressed that he has felt nothing but support from his congregation during times that cause trouble or concern within the Catholic church. He has been told by other Catholic priests that they have received dirty looks or avoidance from others when in public acting in the capacity of a priest, but this isn't Cordes' experience. This contrasts with Keith Simon, who said that he prefers that his friends do not refer to him as pastor or clergy when he is outside of the church in a casual setting. He said that he doesn't want any of the baggage that comes with the term "pastor" or "evangelical" and prefers to conduct conversations while avoiding self-labeling. Simon says that "when I'm out I never introduce myself as a pastor… It kills a conversation if you're not a churchgoer, so I like to break stereotypes in what a pastor is like." Simon goes as far to say that certain parishioners will watch what he wears, where he eats/shops or where he lives to see how he spends his money and whether or not they can accuse him of hypocrisy.

Relationships with other clergy

Cordes admits that he hasn't had much interaction with the larger community of clergy in Columbia. He's had positive relationships with fellow clergy in the Catholic church, as well as strong ministerial alliances in smaller communities. He notes that when a new accusation of sexual abuse by a Catholic priest surfaces, there are a number of emotions to work through: there's an anger at the prospect that it happened and a feeling of loss when there was a personal relationship with the accused, knowing that that is someone you would have potentially liked and that they have such a troubling reality happening in their life. There is also the feeling of a need to provide a system of mutual support for clergy, as collective bodies of

religious leaders can experience a drop in morale when a new chapter in a storied crisis emerges.

Church use of media

For Scott, it is important for individual pastors to establish a relationship with their local media in order to give the media a basic knowledge of the church's presence and to have a relationship in place in the event of a crisis that needs to be addressed. This contrasts with an inability to effectively coordinate with the media, a situation in which a pastor would adopt a purely reactionary stance in the event of a crisis.

The role of televangelism is prominent in the discussion of media implementation within churches. The consensus among the respondents was that there are some pastors who use TV and social media to broadcast their message faithfully and bear fruit, but the industry is rife with those who undermine the work of the church as a whole in order to exploit its parishioners and acquire personal wealth.

Political Engagement

Most of the interviewees expressed a relative distance from political engagement due to the nature of their role. Cordes said that there may be engagement through participating in a prayer service, whether it be a pro-life event or other public prayer events that call attention to a certain issue, but something like what Scott did would be unheard of in the Catholic church. If a Catholic priest took a similar "call" to run for office, that priest would most likely be stripped of his credentials and ability to serve in the capacity of a priest. This would also not be likely to happen, as men who are preparing to become priests are taught that they will serve in no other

capacity. All respondents agreed that it would be very difficult to return to preaching at a church that they had previously served after attempting to run for public office.

Discussion

Scott's assessment of the small percentage of clergy who embody the depictions of narrow-mindedness matches recent surveys conducted in the Lutheran church. Recently, a survey on political affiliation found that with a scale of seven positions, with the first and last positions being the extremes of the left and right, fifteen percent of Lutheran Church Missouri Synod identify as committed conservative, or hard right, and eight percent of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America identify as liberal progressive, or hard left. Similar to Lindsay's point on the loudest voices overpowering any other voices in the conversation, this fifteen percent in the LCMS and eight percent in the ELCA account for a large percentage of the points of contention and division concerning political issues.

The diversity of political affiliations in America's churches points to growing divisions both between the political right and left but also within Christian denominations, congregations and families within congregations. A good number of moderate viewpoints within churches tend to avoid conflict by sticking to non-confrontational methods of communication and church representation. Both Miller and Lindsay stressed that the reasonable voices on the left and the right tend to be overshadowed by loud voices with extreme stances, and this is compounded when parishioners look to church as a sanctuary from the political divisiveness in their lives.

The reality of political divisiveness notwithstanding, the respondents noted that media can be used as a benefit to ministry, but it can also be a hindrance or distraction. Media are a

tool in the toolbox of the modern day clergy, where social media and online presence becomes increasingly prominent.

Conclusions

Religious leaders have a keen awareness of the perceptions that are placed on the pastoral role, and they try to find ways to strengthen individual relationships and engage with the community, while not discounting the need to have conversations about issues within the church and the community. Political engagement and communal outreach in relation to these issues and topics varies from denomination to denomination; while some denominations can feel closed off to the outside world, as Scott describes, others take part in organized, cross-denominational service events or try to spread their message with social media outreach. There is a concern among religious leaders that overtly extreme viewpoints will continue to mask the conversations that happen closer to the middle of the political spectrum, and that specific crises and tragedies within the church will continue to be the overarching narrative of the church, rather than attempts to engage with society.

To approach the first research question, respondents were asked about representations of clergy in media and the effects of these representations on their relationships with the media, parishioners, the public and other clergy. Representations of clergy in media ranged from broad characterizations, such as pastors seeming narrow-minded and judgmental, to specific references to pastors in the media, such as the Catholic sex abuse crisis. Respondents shared a sense of disappointment in the prominence of extreme voices dominating the representations of clergy in media; they share that the referenced news stories and

characterizations are seen in the church as a reality for some, but considered fringe or extreme to a majority of churchgoers. Relationships that clergy have with various parties are largely supportive, with pastors and parishioners citing the importance of an individual, personal relationship with a pastor.

For the second research question, respondents universally pointed out the use of media as a tool for ministerial work and that there is an inherent distance that clergy must take from politics while serving in the pulpit. Pastors see media implementation as a benefit to the church, in that churches are allocating budget and hiring staff to spearhead media and marketing efforts to further the church's image and message.

Limitations

Several factors led to limitations in the study. Methodically reaching out to pastors in the Columbia, Missouri area and conducting interviews only in-person serves as a convenience sample, which could be more indicative of a specific region than other sample methods. The interview sample also lacked diversity in gender and race (all respondents were white and male) and lacked a full breadth of Christian denominations (Baptist, Methodist, and Episcopalian ministers were contacted, but were unable to commit to an interview).

References

Bivins, J. (2012). Religion and Politics. In Harvey P., Blum E., & Stephens R. (Eds.), *The Columbia Guide to Religion in American History* (pp. 136-153). Columbia University Press. Retrieved from http://www.jstor.org.proxy.mul.missouri.edu/stable/10.7312/harv14020.10

Bivins, J. (2008). *Religion of Fear: The Politics of Horror in Conservative Evangelicalism*. Oxford University Press.

Diamond, S. (1989). *Spiritual warfare: The politics of the Christian right*. South End Press.

Frese, M. (1982). Occupational socialization and psychological development: An underemphasized research perspective in industrial psychology. Journal of Occupational and Organizational Psychology, 55(3), 209-224.

Ingram, L. (1980). Notes on Pastoral Power in the Congregational Tradition. *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion, 19*(1), 40-48. doi:10.2307/1386016

Interview with Jessica Hahn. (2005, July 14). Retrieved from http://transcripts.cnn.com/TRANSCRIPTS/0507/14/lkl.01.html

Jevtic, M. (2009). Theoretical Relationship between Politics and Religion. *The Indian Journal of Political Science, 70*(2), 409-418. Retrieved from http://www.jstor.org.proxy.mul.missouri.edu/stable/42743905

King, R. (1997). When Worlds Collide: Politics, Religion, and Media at the 1970 East Tennessee Billy Graham Crusade. *Journal of Church and State, 39*(2), 273-295. Retrieved from http://www.jstor.org/stable/23919865

Leech, B. L. (2002). Asking questions: Techniques for semistructured interviews. PS: Political Science and Politics, 35(4), 665-668. doi: http://dx.doi.org/10.1017/S1049096502001129

Leustean, L. (2005). Towards an Integrative Theory of Religion and Politics. *Method & Theory in the Study of Religion, 17*(4), 364-381. Retrieved from http://www.jstor.org.proxy.mul.missouri.edu/stable/23551746

Menendez, A. J. Evangelicals at the Ballot Box (Amherst. *NY: Prometheus)*. Print.

Mohr, K (2015). Apocalypse Chow: We Tried Televangelist Jim Bakker's 'Survival Food.' (2015, December 3). Retrieved from https://www.npr.org/sections/thesalt/2015/12/03/456677535/apocalypse-chow-we-tried-televangelist-jim-bakkers-survival-food

Olson, L. (2011). The Essentiality of "Culture" in the Study of Religion and Politics. *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion,50*(4), 639-653. Retrieved from http://www.jstor.org.proxy.mul.missouri.edu/stable/41349945

Ravitch, F. (2012). Religion and the Law in American History. In Harvey P., Blum E., & Stephens R. (Eds.), *The Columbia Guide to Religion in American History* (pp. 154-168). Columbia University Press. Retrieved from http://www.jstor.org.proxy.mul.missouri.edu/stable/10.7312/harv14020.11

Ross, M. H. (1997). The relevance of culture for the study of political psychology and ethnic conflict. *Political Psychology*, *18*(2), 299-326.

Samuel J. Roth, ELCA Pastor, Former ELIM President, Dies. (2002, February 22). Retrieved from https://www.elca.org/News-and-Events/4494

Sernett, M. (1973). Behold the American Cleric: The Protestant Minister as "Pattern Man," 1850-1900. *Winterthur Portfolio, 8*, 1-18. Retrieved from http://www.jstor.org.proxy.mul.missouri.edu/stable/1180544

Schultze, Q. J. (2003). *Televangelism and American culture: The business of popular religion*. Wipf and Stock Publishers.

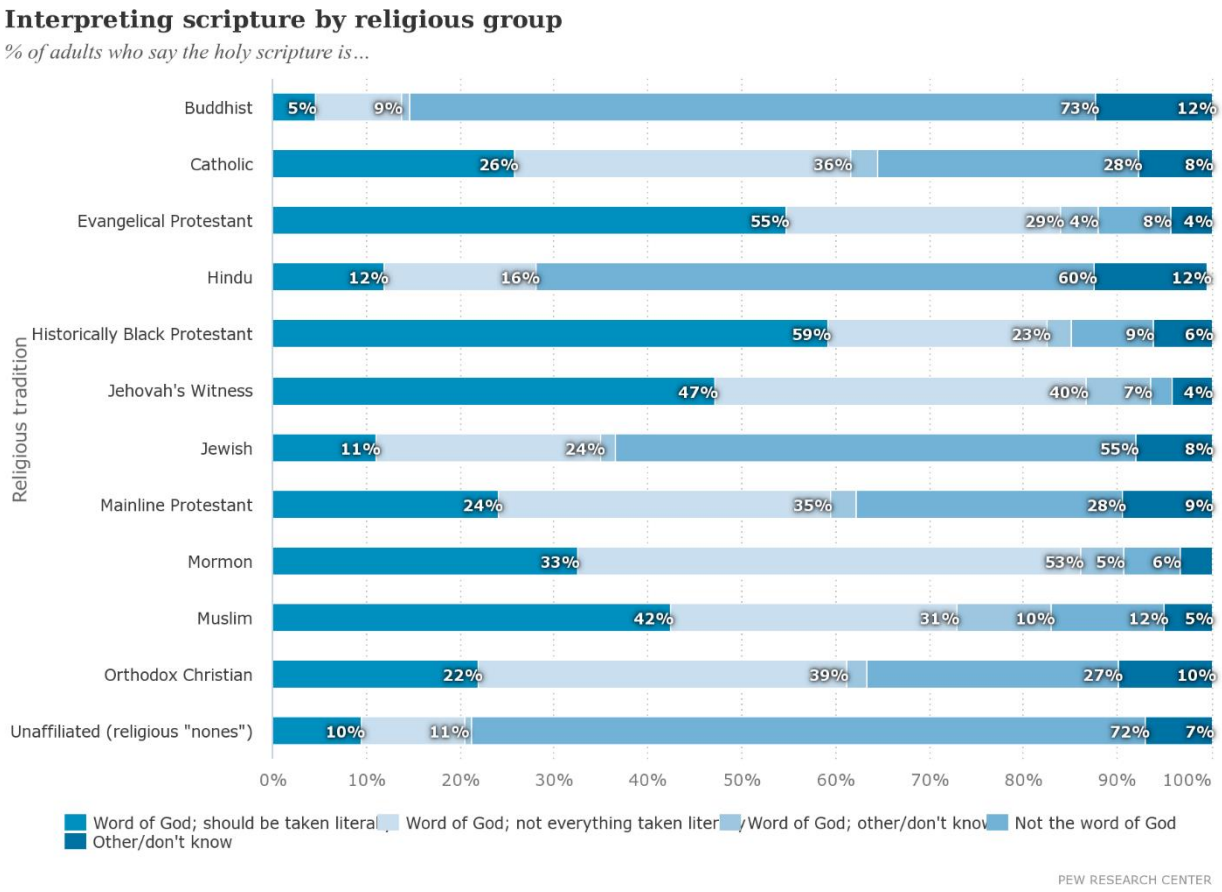
Stephen R. L. Clark. (1982). God's Law and Morality. *The Philosophical Quarterly (1950-), 32*(129), 339-347. doi:10.2307/2218700

Stewart, E. (2018). Gun-burning Army vet George Scott just won his Democratic House primary in Pennsylvania. Vox Policy and Politics. May 16, 2018. https://www.vox.com/policy-and-politics/2018/5/16/17360444/george-scott-pennsylvania-primary-election-gun-fire

Swaggart Plans to Step Down. (1991, October 15). Retrieved from https://www.nytimes.com/1991/10/15/us/swaggart-plans-to-step-down.html

TenHouten, W. (1992). Generalization and Statistical Inference from Snowball Samples. *BMS: Bulletin of Sociological Methodology / Bulletin De Méthodologie Sociologique,* (37), 25-40. Retrieved from http://www.jstor.org.proxy.mul.missouri.edu/stable/24358761

FIGURE 1



Pew Research Forum

http://www.pewforum.org/religious-landscape-study/interpreting-scripture/