

The Christian Right Revisited

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The Christian Right is still very much with us. Having remained loyal to Donald Trump, with many of its supporters even taking part in the 6 January 2021 attempted coup at the Capitol in Washington DC, we can already see likely rivals for the Republican nomination for the 2024 Presidential election trying to enlist the support of this particular constituency. During his 2022 campaign for re-election as Governor of Florida, Ron DeSantis captured the spirit of the times with a campaign ad that announced, in a very Biblical voice, that on the Eighth Day of Creation God made a Fighter and that Fighter is Ron DeSantis! And at the time of writing, with many evangelical preachers already beginning to distance themselves from Trump, DeSantis – Trump with a brain, as he has been described – seems to be the most likely Republican candidate for the Presidency in 2024. Understanding the Christian Right remains of critical importance and the books, memoirs and a number of academic studies, under review here, all contribute in their different ways towards such an understanding.

'a woman of faith'

Kayleigh McEnany's memoir of her time in the White House is drenched in piety.¹ Jesus gets nearly as many mentions as Donald Trump. It is, of course, completely useless as a record of what actually transpired during the Trump Presidency. In her first chapter, 'The Burning Church', which deals with the rioting and protests provoked by the police murder of George Floyd, she hilariously describes Trump as 'a hard worker, generally amicable and typically good at lightening the mood'. One of her proudest moments during his Presidency was when she accompanied Trump on his infamous march to St John's Church in Washington DC and she writes touchingly of how she stood 'alongside President Trump as he proudly held a Bible in one of the most iconic photos of his presidency'. Trump's great concern at this time was apparently 'for peace and justice', while she saw it as an opportunity 'to heal the nation'. (pp. 2, 11) In fact, as

¹ Kayleigh McEnany, *For Such a Time as This: My Faith Journey through the White House and Beyond* (Saint Petersburg [FL]; Liberatio Protocol, 2021),

Jon Sopel, the BBC correspondent, reported this episode, 'innocent protestors exercising their First Amendment rights . . . were tear-gassed and rubber-bulleted out of the way' for a 'photo-op pure and simple'.² All this is enough to disqualify her testimony as far as any concern with the historical record is concerned, although it shows how far Trump loyalists will go to serve their man. What is useful for our purposes, however, is her insistence that it was her Christian faith that brought her to the White House and informed her time there. It was all God's will.

McEnany proudly proclaims that 'I was a Christian. I was a conservative'. This was 'at the central core of my being, firmly sown within me. It is the prism through which I see the world'. She got her Christianity, her embrace of 'Biblical truths', from the Southern Baptist church that her parents attended. It was here that she was instilled with 'a love for Christ'. But where did her conservatism come from? She got her politics when she was a teenager from listening to *The Rush Limbaugh Show* on the radio: 'Rush's passion, conviction, and unwavering confidence lit a fire within me – a spark that would reverberate through my entire professional life'. (pp. 21, 25, 29). Jesus or Rush? It seems clear from her later career which influence was the strongest. Somewhat predictably, after university, including a stint at Oxford, she went to work at Fox News for three years, as a production assistant on the Huckabee talk show. This show was hosted by Mike Huckabee, an ordained preacher and stalwart of the Christian Right who was Republican Governor of Arkansas from 1997 until 2007 and briefly sought the Republican Party's nomination for presidential candidate in 2015. His many publications include *God, Guns, Grits and Gravy* (2015) and *The Kids Guide to Fighting Socialism* (2021). Working at Fox News was useful preparation for her time at Trump's White House.

Her first day as White House press secretary (13 April 2020) was nerve-wracking but she was put at ease by Mark Meadows, Trump's Chief of Staff. He was 'a kindhearted man with a kindred Christian spirit'. He talked to her about 'God's sovereignty'. She goes on: 'As Mike talked about God, mere steps from the entryway to the most powerful office in the world, it became clear to me both then and during my time in the White House that Mark Meadows was the real deal . . . We shared both common roots and a common faith in Christ . . . my faith – like Mark's –

² See the review of Jon Sopel's book *UnPresided* in *Lobster* 82 at <<https://tinyurl.com/3dax2nd8>> or <<https://www.lobster-magazine.co.uk/article/issue/82/gone-but-not-forgotten-donald-trump-book-reviews/>>.

was central'.³ Inspired by 'the book of Esther', she convinced herself that going to work at the White House was all part of God's plan. (pp. 45-46) On her way to her first White House press briefing, she listened to 'Christian music' and remembered the advice she had been given by Mike Huckabee's daughter, Sarah Huckabee Sanders, a previous press secretary: 'Pray! Let God carry you through the tough times, give you strength'. She read one of the devotionals from *Jesus Calling – Devotions for Every Day of the Year* that Sanders had sent her: 'You are on the path of My choosing. There is no randomness about your life . . .'. Reading from this book became a daily practice. She still went into the toilet on her way to this first briefing and got down on her knees to pray ('something that would become a custom when the going got tough in the White House') and was given strength by the knowledge that as well as her family, there were millions of others praying for her: 'Their prayers propped me up that day'. After the briefing, Vice President Mike Pence took her aside and told her 'that he had been praying for her'. (pp. 56-58) Both in her political work and in her personal life she makes absolutely clear that she will always 'proclaim the name of Jesus Christ because that is who I turn to in times of trouble. He always shows up'. (p. 204)

One of the high points of her time at the White House was when she met the Reverend Franklin Graham, 'a spiritual leader during the COVID 19 pandemic', while he was waiting for a meeting with Trump. He 'had rallied Christians into action amid the COVID 19 outbreak', but 'also offered spiritual guidance to a grieving nation'. As far as she was concerned, Graham 'was exactly right. Jesus Christ would guide us through the storm'. Together with her assistant, Lyndee, 'also a woman of faith', she 'took turns taking pictures with him in my office and sharing how much we admired his work'. (pp. 121-122)

Her whole account of the White House response to the pandemic is a travesty. More important is the difficulty that the reader has reconciling her devout Christianity and devotion to Jesus with her serving a lying,

³ A somewhat different view of Mark Meadows is given in the memoir written by Stephanie Grisham, *I'll Take Your Question Now*. She was McEnany's immediate predecessor as press secretary, and she describes him as 'one of the worst people ever to enter the Trump White House'. She calls him 'a phoney', someone who would tell 'people what they want to hear and would kiss the ass of whoever is the boss'. She goes on that if he had been a character in a film then 'you would hear thunderclaps in the sky and menacing organ music whenever he entered a room'. (pp. 260-261) For a review both Grisham's memoir and Mark Meadows' own *The Chief's Chief* (2021) see *Lobster* 83 at <<https://tinyurl.com/yzapa2rh>> or <<https://www.lobster-magazine.co.uk/article/issue/83/inside-the-trump-administration/>>.

narcissistic, corrupt, ignorant, incompetent authoritarian like Trump. He was surrounded by these Christian hypocrites who covered up as best they could everything he said and did in the attempt to sustain him in power. Her account of how she 'prepped' Trump for the debates with Joe Biden during the 2016 campaign for the Presidency is testimony to her part in all this. But for some reason, she does not end her memoir with a rant about how Trump really won the 2020 Presidential election, and has nothing to say about his attempted coup. Since Trump lost office, she has returned to Fox News.⁴

'Obama was the Anti-Christ'

In the 'Introduction' to his *Race and Religion on the Christian Right*,⁵ Samuel Perry makes the somewhat astonishing observation that 'at the beginning of Obama's second term, roughly 13 per cent of Americans or almost forty million Americans believed Obama was the Anti-Christ'. He goes on: 'calling any president, much less the first black president of the United States the Anti-Christ tells us something . . . '. (pp. xi-xii) It certainly does and he explores what it tells us in this extremely interesting, if sometimes overly 'academic' book.⁶

What Perry goes on to chronicle and discuss is the way in which the Christian Right responded to the election of Obama with an enthusiastic embrace of far right conspiracies, almost invariably informed by racism, and how this had seriously infected the Republican Party even before the appearance of Donald Trump on the scene. As he puts it, identifying Obama as the enemy during the ongoing 'War on Terror' was 'not a tough sell for many Americans', while for the Christian Right it was from the very beginning 'simply a given. Obama was figured as a literal enemy'. To have the evangelical George W Bush, who had made '\$60 billion in federal money available for faith-based initiatives', succeeded by Obama was not

⁴ Rupert Murdoch's relationship with the US Christian Right has yet to be fully explored. It goes back to the late 1980s at least. He had supported Billy Graham and then in 1997, he bought Pat Robertson's Family Channel which became the Fox Family Channel with Murdoch and Robertson as co-chairs. Robertson was the leader of the powerful Christian Coalition.

⁵ Samuel P. Perry, *Rhetorics of Race and Religion on the Christian Right: Barack Obama and the War on Terror*, (Blue Ridge Summit [Penn.], Lexington Books: 2020)

⁶ Two other books that explore the ferocity of the response to Obama in a more accessible fashion are John Amato and David Neiwart, *Over the Cliff: How Obama's Election Drove the American Right Insane* (2010) and Bill Press, *The Obama Hate Machine: The Lies, Distortions and Personal Attacks on the President – And Who Is Behind Them* (2012). Press was to later record his disillusion with Obama in his *Buyer's Remorse: How Obama Let Progressives Down* (2016).

just a lost election, it was an attack on their religion and way of life. Bush was not just a Christian, he was their kind of Christian! As for Obama, he was 'a foreign invader, usurping the presidency from the American people'. Indeed he might well be 'a crypto-Muslim terrorist', someone in league with 'Al-Qaeda, ISIS, Boko Haram, Hezbollah, and Iran'. (p. 21) This was all part of the conspiracy culture that became 'central to the politics of the Christian Right'. Leading the way were the 'birthers'. The allegation that Obama had been born in Kenya was initially propagated online and, although dismissed as 'the flight of fantasy of fringe believers', in the end Obama was forced to acknowledge its potency by releasing his birth certificate. To dismiss 'birtherism' as the work of 'carnival barkers', as Obama himself did, was a mistake. It misunderstood the way that this particular conspiracy theory spoke to millions of Americans, fitted in with their prejudices and preconceptions, and in particular with the 'media ecology of the Christian Right'. (pp. 63-64)

Perry goes on to examine some of the contributors to this 'media ecology' in detail. He introduces his readers to Joseph Farah, the founder of WorldNetDaily (WND) who 'made a small media empire out of the birther conspiracy'. (p. 64) Farah, we are told, 'often trades in eschatological religious rhetoric', with his most recent book, *The Gospel in Every Book of the Old Testament*, being 'warmly endorsed' by the likes of 'Franklin Graham, Mike Huckabee, Jack Van Impe, Greg Laurie, Eric Metaxas, Chuck Norris, Ben Kinchlow and Pat Boone'. This is someone with considerable clout on the Christian Right,

'pushing far right political points of view and policy, specifically homophobic screeds masquerading as religious calls for religious sanctity, Islamophobic caricatures of Muslims as inherent enemies and invaders of the United States, and any attempt at gun control as an attempt to foment the crumbling of Americans' sovereignty over their government in the lead up to the end times'.

The birther allegation was central to his offensive against Obama; indeed, he 'made an industry of the birther conspiracy'. After Obama's election, visits to the WND site apparently dramatically increased by 100 per cent to two million a month. Inevitably, Farah was full of praise for the 'natural-born' Donald Trump when he first came on board the birther conspiracy. (pp 67-68) And, of course, as well as being born in Kenya, Obama was also a Muslim.

Another contributor to this 'media ecology' is best-selling Christian Right author and documentary film maker Dinesh D'Souza, who in 2010

published his *The Roots of Obama's Rage*. Here he argued that it was not Obama who was out to destroy America but the ghost of his anti-colonialist socialist father working through him! Perry quotes the inimitable D'Souza:

'the most powerful country in the world is being governed according to the dreams of a Luo tribesman of the 1950s – a polygamist who abandoned his wives, drank himself into stupors . . . The invisible father provides the inspiration, and the son dutifully gets the job done. America today is being governed by a ghost.' (p. 102)

Even this sort of incredible perverse nonsense resonates powerfully on the Christian Right.⁷ And then in the run-up to the 2012 Presidential election, Christian Right e-mail lists and blogs began pronouncing the end of the world should Obama be elected. Perry looks at yet another inhabitant of the Christian Right media eco-system, Focus Action. According to Focus Action, if Obama was re-elected:

'it would be the end of the Boy Scouts, Christian school teachers would be fired from public schools, Christian schools would be closed, homeschooling outlawed, healthcare would be nationalized and no one over eighty would have access to healthcare, terrorists will have attacked major cities because Obama refuses to use force, Iran will have dropped a nuclear bomb on Israel, Christian radio would be shut down'.

For Focus Action and its followers, Obama was very much an 'existential

⁷ Dinesh D'Souza is something of a phenomenon in his own right. His documentary film, *Obama's America* (2016), based on his book *The Roots of Obama's Rage* (2010) was a huge success, showing in cinemas across the USA and grossing more than \$33 million. The only political documentary to have greater success was Michael Moore's *Fahrenheit 9/11*. His most recent documentary is *2,000 Mules*, 'proving' that the 2020 Presidential election was stolen which is based on his book, *2,000 Mules: They Thought We'd Never Find Out. They Were Wrong* (2022). His other books include such classics as the *Enemy at Home: The Cultural Left and Its Responsibility for 9/11* (2007), *Life After Death: The Evidence* (2009), *Stealing America: What My Experience with Criminal Gangs Taught Me about Obama, Hillary and the Democratic Party* (2015), *The Big Lie: Exposing the Nazi Roots of the American Left* (2017), *United States of Socialism: Who's Behind It. Why It's Evil. How To Stop It* (2020). My personal favourite is *Death of a Nation: Plantation Politics and the Making of the Democratic Party* (2018). Here he conceptualises slavery as a form of welfarism and welfarism as a form of slavery. The old Democratic Party supported slavery in the 19th century, the modern Democratic Party created 'inner city plantations' where African Americans were kept enslaved by welfare payments and did not even have to work for them! His books are dazzling displays of intellectual acrobatics that never actually touch the ground, that is engage with reality.

threat' to Christian America and his failure to actually do any of the things that he was supposedly intent on doing because of his deep hatred of the United States was neither here nor there. (p. 95) What mattered was the fear, not the reality.

Perry really brings out the full extent of the fear and fury that was unleashed against Obama in both the 2008 and 2012 Presidential elections. In 2008, the strength and influence of the Christian Right was reflected in John McCain's choice of running mate, Sarah Palin. While McCain occasionally disassociated himself from 'the attacks on Obama on the basis of his race, religion, and place of birth, the attacks increased in frequency and virulence during the 2008 campaign'. At Republican rallies, people 'were yelling "Terrorist", "Kill Him", and "Treason"' and all the while, 'McCain did little to rein in Sarah Palin . . . as her rhetoric became more and more vitriolic and more and more overtly racist'. (p. 94) This assault continued throughout Obama's time in office with him being referred to as 'Ayatollah Obama' and even condemned as the architect of Islamist terrorism both in the United States and internationally.

Incredibly, the percentage of Americans who believed that Obama was a Muslim stayed at around 20 per cent throughout his two terms in office. This was more than those who believed he was the Anti-Christ and the two beliefs were perfectly compatible. The holders of the belief that Obama was a Muslim were overwhelmingly Republicans and supporters of the Christian Right. Another 2015 poll found that 54 per cent of those voting in the Republican primaries believed he was a Muslim, rising to 66 per cent of those who supported Trump. Clearly, this was not some sort of fringe conspiracy theory, but had gone mainstream. It was informed by a potent coming together of racism and Islamophobia on the Christian Right. The 'near sainthood' these same people accorded to Donald Trump was very much 'a symptom of this' and not, Perry rather ominously observes, 'the culmination'. (p 121) There is very likely worse to come!

'the juncture of money and religion'

For Katherine Stewart in her very useful book,⁸ the Christian Right is best described as a 'Christian nationalist movement'. She is concerned to show how it has been sustained and manipulated in order to further the political objectives of a small group of very rich people. Their objective was and is 'to harness the passions, resentments and insecurities of a large and diverse population in their own quest for power'. The current political

⁸ Katherine Stewart, *The Power Worshipper: Inside the Dangerous Rise of Religious Nationalism* (London: Bloomsbury, 2019)

crisis and divisions within US politics has its roots 'at the juncture of money and religion'. The Christian Right has come to depend 'critically on the wealth of a growing subset of America's plutocratic class'.

'Without the DeVos/Prince clan, the Bradley Foundation, Howard Ahmanson Jr, the foundations of the late Richard Scaife, the John M Olin Foundation, the Lynn and Foster Friess Family Foundation, the Maclellan Foundation, Dan and Farris Wilks, the Green family, and a number of other major funders . . . the movement would not be what it is today'.

And on top of that, the Christian Right has also developed an extensive apparatus 'for raising funds from millions of small donors. Indeed, 'much of its daily activity can be understood as part of an effort to milk its base of supporters'. (p. 8)

Clearly, the 'fusion of hyper-capitalist ideology with hyper-Calvinist theology . . . secured the financial future of Christian nationalism' and 'America's plutocrats understood that they had a friend on the Christian right'. (p. 121) Stewart goes on to single out the DeVos/Prince connection as crucial in all this, going so far as to assert that a good case can be made that financially 'the Christian Right today is to a substantial extent the creation of the Michigan wing of the American plutocracy'. Since the late 1970s the DeVos family 'have been major funders of leading national groups on the religious right'. They have effortlessly combined their evangelical Christianity with support for the free market, for a small state and a strong hostility towards trade unions. They certainly 'live large', having owned 'a dozen-odd leisure boats, the flagship of which is a 163 foot, \$40 million yacht called Seaquest'. They also 'reportedly own four airplanes and two helicopters'. It is just as well that global warming is a secularist fairy tale. As for the Prince family, in 1983 'they substantially contributed to the creation of the Family Research Council' and their Foundation is 'a key backer of . . . Focus on the Family and other like-minded organizations'. (pp. 187-188) The two families were united when Betsy Prince married Richard DeVos Jr. and Betsy's brother is Erik Prince, the founder of the mercenary outfit, Blackwater, a sometime adviser to Donald Trump.

These Michigan Christian plutocrats have taken a particular interest in education and schooling. They were 'fundamentally hostile to public education' which was brainwashing American children with Godless secularism. By the 1990s, the DeVoses in particular had embraced school vouchers as the way forward, as the best way 'to mount a devastating

assault on the nation's system of public schools'. School vouchers were not just championed by the Christian Right as a way of replacing public schools with Christian schools, but were also advocated by free market ideologues like Milton Friedman. For the DeVoses, however, vouchers were part of their 'theocratic vision' and Betsy DeVos made clear that as far as she was concerned education reform was 'a way to "advance God's Kingdom" . . . school choice would lead to "greater Kingdom gain"'. Stewart references a 2003 report from the Christian Reformed Church synod that accused the public schools of engaging in 'a deliberate program of de-Christianization' and of smuggling in 'pagan and New Age spiritualities such as the deification of Mother Earth (Gaia)', and even promoting 'social causes such as environmentalism'. (p. 193)

When the voucher cause seemed to have stalled, the DeVoses embraced the charter school as the way forward, as the way to liberate education from the secular state.⁹ Stewart writes: 'With DeVos money flooding the arteries of the state's political system, Michigan soon became a paradise for for-profit charter operators, most of them concentrated in urban areas. More than half of Detroit's children now attend charters . . . and 80 percent of these are for profit'. Across the country, this wave of school deregulation appears 'to have ushered in an epidemic of corruption'. And there is not only money to be made because 'the charter boom' was taken full advantage of by 'theologically motivated charter operators'. (pp. 196, 201) To be fair, corruption and religiosity are certainly not mutually exclusive. And then in February 2016, Betsy DeVos, someone completely opposed to public schooling, became Trump's Secretary of Education. In the Senate, no less than 22 of the Senators considering her appointment were the beneficiaries of DeVos financial contributions, including four members of the actual Senate education committee.¹⁰

There is much more to Stewart's outstanding volume than has been dealt with here and it is essential reading for anyone concerned about the Christian Right. But let us end with a look at her last chapter, 'The Global Holy War Comes of Age'. Here she makes the point that under Trump, the USA became 'a flashing red beacon of hope for a new global, religious, right-wing populist movement' that was all about 'taking down modern

⁹ The US charter schools provided the model for the break-up of the British school system initiated by New Labour with local authority-controlled schools being turned into 'academies'.

¹⁰ DeVos resigned from her position on 8 January 2021, condemning Trump for his part in inciting the 6 January attempted coup.

democracy and replacing it with authoritarian, faith-based ethno-states . . . a kind of global holy war'. She provides a useful introduction to the international activities of the World Congress of Families and the Child Evangelism Fellowship, but of particular interest is her visit to the Euston Church in Bloomsbury in May 2018. The Euston Church, despite being Church of England, is part of the Gospel Coalition, 'a powerful global alliance with nearly 8,000 affiliated churches in the US alone'. It represents a foothold for the Christian Right, teaching that 'same-sex relationships are sinful' and insisting 'on "male headship" at home and in church'. Secularism and atheism are the enemies. She observes of a talk that Andrew Sach gave at the church, that he refused to state an opinion on creationism, but was quite clear 'that physical disabilities, disease and earthquakes are all a consequence of the sin of disbelief'. (pp. 259-261) She goes on to look at international activities of the Alliance Defending Freedom, the Christian Right legal operation which has offices in many cities, including London.

And then there is the Christian Right's admiration for Vladimir Putin. Franklin Graham (see below) actually had a 45 minute meeting with the man who had bought Russia back to Christianity in December 2015; while during the 2016 Presidential campaign, Mike Pence had praised Putin as a strong leader, stronger 'than Barack Obama has been in this country'. (p. 272) This prompts the interesting notion that one of the reasons many Republicans were apparently unconcerned about Russian intervention in the 2016 Presidential election was because they admired Putin and saw this interference as him actually helping install God's chosen candidate, Donald Trump, in office in the United States!

'a Christian crusade against Big Government'

'Republican Jesus' is, according to Tony Keddie, 'the most powerful man in America', even though he died nearly two thousand years ago.¹¹ He was the man who won the 2016 Presidential election for Donald Trump. Keddie provides us with a brief biography:

'Republican Jesus is a Christian, white, working-class carpenter who was born in Israel . . . His mom wasn't ready to have a baby, but she was pro-life and had a good hard-working man by her side, so it turned out just fine . . . By his early thirties Republican Jesus had become an aspiring religious reformer with a clear set of positions: the poor are already blessed, weapons protect people

¹¹ Tony Keddie, *Republican Jesus: How the Right has Rewritten the Gospels* (Oakland [CA]; University of California Press, 2020)

from weapons, free health care comes only in the form of miracles, and there's no point in saving the earth, since God will destroy it soon anyway. Most of all, Republican Jesus opposed Big Government with all its taxes and regulations. This struggle against Big Government ended in his crucifixion.'

But this was just the beginning of 'a Christian crusade against Big Government' that has been waged ever since. This, he insists, is the Jesus that millions of white Americans believe in, duped by among others 'politicians, media pundits and corporate lobbyists'. (pp. 1-2) He sets out both to explain how this state of affairs came about, to explore the character of this Republican Jesus in greater detail and to expose the extent of the Christian Right's support for Trump and the ways in which they profit from this. The book is a powerful and informative indictment.

For Keddie, the crusade against Big Government always takes priority over other concerns as far as the Christian Right is concerned. In 1980, for example, they 'backed a scarcely religious Hollywood Republican over a deeply religious Evangelical Democrat . . . they proved that their faith in the fear-mongering politics of Small Government outweighed their solidarity with those washed in the blood of Christ'. Backing Ronald Reagan against Jimmy Carter, he goes on, 'set the stage for the Christian Right's shocking sacrifice of Christianity on the altar of free enterprise in 2016'. (p. 103)

What prepared the way for Trump, however, was the Tea Party movement. This powerful insurgency inside the Republican Party was funded by 'billionaires like the Coors beer family, the Walmart Waltons, and the Koch oil dynasty' and championed by the likes of Sean Hannity, Glen Beck and Bill O'Reilly on Fox News. The Christian Right enthusiastically rallied to the Tea Party. A poll based on data from 2010 and early 2011 revealed 'that white Evangelicals were five times more likely than other Americans to agree with the Tea Party'. (p. 109) These were the so-called Teavangelicals. The decline of the Tea Party movement did not extinguish its politics. They provided the basis for both Trump's campaign for the Republican nomination and for his becoming President. Trump validated the Teavangelicals' anger and anxiety by doubling down on the Tea Party's ethno-nationalist rhetoric and by appealing to 'the Prosperity Gospel'. (p. 114) A crucial figure in all this was Paula White-Cain who managed Trump's early dealings with the Christian Right and thereby 'did so much to make Trump palatable to Christians'. (p. 119)

Another influential evangelical preacher who rallied to Trump was

Franklin Graham, the son of Billy Graham. Indeed, once elected Trump was to publicly state that it was Graham's support that had enabled him to win 'so big with Evangelical Christians'. And Graham continued to support Trump throughout his Presidency. He spoke at the inauguration and was

'one of Trump and Pence's most trusted religious advisers. He has defended Trump on even the most controversial of his comments and decisions, such as his victim-blaming response to the 2017 white supremacist riots in Charlottesville, the Stormy Daniels affair, and his immigration policies'.

Jerry Falwell Jr. was another strong supporter, making clear that what mattered were not Trump's character flaws and moral indiscretions, but 'his commitment to key political issues for Evangelicals: "support for the state of Israel; strong national defense; traditional family values; and pro-life"'. Falwell Jr. is particularly important because, succeeding his equally appalling father, he is president of Liberty University, 'the world's largest Christian university . . . This private university's total enrollment, including residential and online students, is over one hundred thousand, and its endowment is in billions. Its students receive over \$445 million each year in federal student loans, the eighth highest in the country'. According to Keddie, Falwell Jr was very concerned that the Democrats might cut the federal funding going to Liberty University because of the way it discriminates against LGBTQ+ students. Trump would prevent any such action. He sums up all the so-called 'court evangelicals' who rallied around Trump: 'it is vital to recognize that they are motivated consistently, if not exclusively, by profits and self-interest . . . turning to the Bible to justify their money-making political schemes'. (pp. 121-125)

The extent of Christian Right influence within the Trump White House is unprecedented. While Reagan, George H.W. Bush and George W. Bush certainly went out of their way to cultivate their support, they were not actually welcomed into their administrations in the way they were under Trump. The key figure here was Vice President Mike Pence. An important demonstration of this is the White House Bible Study group, overseen by evangelical preacher by Ralph Drollinger, head of Capitol Ministeries, an organisation committed to 'making biblical faith the basis of American government policies'. It operates in forty three state capitals as well as in Washington DC and abroad. Keddie discusses Drollinger's beliefs: his opposition to women becoming ministers; his belief that abortion is infanticide; that homosexuality is an abomination; that Catholicism is a

false faith; and that God does not hear the prayers of Catholics, Jews or liberal Protestants. He also insists that 'the Bible unequivocally promotes Small Government, the free market, and the development of business and commerce for personal gain. One of his Bible studies advances this claim in clear language: "Free Market Capitalism is God's blueprint for growing a nation's economy"'. (p 128) Keddie writes with some incredulity:

To be clear then, the people who currently decide US policy on issues ranging from international relations and climate change to urban development and education are attending weekly classes in which they learn how to apply biblical values from a politically conservative fundamentalist with questionable ministerial credentials. (p. 127)

Trump, of course, did not attend the classes.

There is much more of interest in Keddie's book. Some minor points inevitably stick in the mind. For example, preacher John Hagee's belief that the Harry Potter books are 'a roadmap to witchcraft' and that Potter's forehead is marked 'with the lightning bolt of the Hitler SS' – something which convinced him that the arrival of the Anti-Christ was imminent. (p. 256) Keddie's revelation that a 2014 poll showed that only 28 per cent of white evangelicals believed that climate change was caused by human activity is, to say the least, disturbing. This is accompanied by an account of the various environmental organisations they have formed, most notably, the Cornwall Alliance for the Stewardship of Creation, which is a 'beneficiary of corporate oil money'. (p. 249) For these people climate change science is comparable to evolution and environmentalism is a new pagan religion. Altogether Keddie has written a very useful book that is essential reading for anyone concerned about the Christian Right.

'a vengeful warrior Christ'

In her *Jesus and John Wayne*,¹² Kristin Kobes Du Mez identifies evangelical support for Donald Trump as 'the culmination of evangelicals' embrace of militant masculinity'. Over a period they had 'replaced the Jesus of the Gospels with a vengeful warrior Christ' and this particular version was a perfect fit for Donald Trump. Some of her material plumbing the depths of white evangelical belief still manages to startle:

'More than any other religious demographic in America, white evangelical Protestants support preemptive war, condone the use

¹² Kristin Kobes Du Mez, *Jesus and John Wayne: How the White Evangelicals Corrupted a Faith and Fractured a Nation* (London: Liveright [W.W. Norton], 2020)

of torture, and favour the death penalty. They are more likely than members of other faiths to own a gun . . . White evangelicals are significantly more authoritarian than other religious groups' (pp. 3-4)

Once this is acknowledged everything falls into place.

A key moment was the embrace of Ronald Reagan, 'the moment the Christian Right came into its own'. In 1980, 'evangelical voters bypassed the candidate [Jimmy Carter] who shared their faith tradition in favor of the one whose image and rhetoric more closely aligned with their values and aspirations'. (p. 106) Reagan won 67 per cent of the votes of white evangelicals. In fact, once installed, Reagan certainly delivered on economic policy, redistributing wealth in favour of the rich, but as far as driving back 'secularism' was concerned, the Christian Right had to be content with rhetoric rather than action. And, Reagan's successes actually weakened the Christian Right because the Republicans seemed to be successfully reshaping the United States thereby undermining the culture of fear that they fostered and thrived on. One area where Reagan went out of his way to enlist their active backing was US support for the Contras in Nicaragua. Leading figures from the Christian Right such as Jerry Falwell, Tim LaHaye and Pat Robertson, were invited to the White House to be briefed by Colonel Oliver North, himself an evangelical convert. They threw their considerable political weight behind Reagan's Contra policy. As for North, he was to become a hero of the Christian Right following his indictment during the Iran-Contra affair. They 'defined the greater good in terms of Christian nationalism. It was this conflation of God and country that heroic Christian men would advance zealously and by any means necessary'. (p. 117) Trump was to be a beneficiary of this stance.

The 9/11 attack further strengthened this Christian macho masculinity, with the Christian Right supporting not just the subsequent intervention in Afghanistan, but also the unprovoked invasion of Iraq. In 2002, '69 percent of conservative Christians favoured military action, a full 10 percentage points higher than the general population'. As Jerry Falwell proclaimed in a 2004 sermon: 'God is Pro-War'. (p. 185) What this inspired was a great increase in 'expressions of militant masculinity . . . across American evangelicalism'. Du Mez looks at the GodMen revivals and the Christianity they espoused: 'Forget the Jesus who avoids confrontation, who "turns the other cheek" – that "Bearded Lady" Jesus was a bore'. GodMen participants 'offered prayers of thanks to God for their testosterone and raised their voices in "manly" anthems like "Grow a

Pair”, a song lamenting the feminization of men by the “culture crowd””. This period also saw the emergence of Christian Mixed Martial Arts (MMA) and by 2010 ‘an estimated 700 predominantly white evangelical churches had taken up MMA as a means of outreach’. (pp. 187-188) One last example is irresistible: the ministry of Mark Driscoll whose religious empire grew from one church in Seattle, founded in 1996, to fifteen churches in five states. His Jesus was no ‘drag-queen Jesus . . . with long, flowing, feathered hair, perfect teeth, soft skin, draped in a comfortable dress accessorized by matching open-toed sandals and handbag’. His Jesus ‘was a hero, not a loser’. He pushed the celebration of macho masculinity further than most, advocating not just the angry vengeful Warrior Jesus, but also heterosexual eroticism. For Driscoll, the Song of Solomon was all about erotic love and in 2008 he put out an e-book entitled *Porn-again Christian*. On one occasion, he even advised one woman to ‘perform oral sex on her husband in Jesus’s name to get him to come to church’. (p. 195) While Driscoll was an extremist as far as the sexual projection of Christian masculinity was concerned, even mainstream evangelicals such as Tim LaHaye and his wife Beverley, could make clear in one of their Christian sex manuals that Christian women are much more likely to have orgasms during intercourse than non-believers. Some people will believe anything! And there is much, much more in Du Mez’s superb account.

She looks at a number of leading Christian Right evangelicals, but of particular interest is her account of Eric Metaxas, who took over Charles Colson’s¹³ radio programme, BreakPoint, after his death in 2012. This Christian Right show was ‘broadcast on 1,400 outlets to an audience of eight million’. By 2015, he was well enough established to launch his own show The Eric Metaxas Show. Metaxas wrote hefty biographies of William Wilberforce, Martin Luther and Dietrich Bonhoeffer, in the last showing that Bonhoeffer ‘battled not only the Nazis but the liberal Christians purportedly behind the rise of Nazism’. In his 2013 book *7 Men: And the Secret of Their Greatness*, he discusses what a real man is and comes up with ‘John Wayne’. (p. 243) Initially, Metaxas was hostile to Donald Trump, but once he secured the Republican nomination Metaxas rallied round. Trump was ‘the last best hope of keeping America from sliding into the abyss’. If ‘Hitlery Clinton’ was elected, then he gave America two years. (p. 262) As far as Metaxas was concerned, Trump was all that stood between evangelical Christianity and the new Nazi liberals. Trump

¹³ One of Richard Nixon’s inner circle who was imprisoned for his role in Watergate and became a born again Christian.

was a real man.

Metaxas remained devotedly loyal to Trump in office, even writing a number of embarrassing 'Donald the Caveman' illustrated kids' books offering him up as an unlikely Christian role model for infants. He was a member of Trump's spiritual advisory board along with the likes of Jerry Falwell Jr. and Paula White-Cain. Inevitably he supported Trump's claim to have won the 2020 Presidential election and still considers the question unresolved. And more recently he has published his *Letter to the American Church* (2022) in which he compares the 6 January 2021 attempted coup to the 1933 Reichstag fire: it was a put-up job to help the liberal Nazis of today consolidate their hold on power. Indeed, according to Metaxas, the situation today is even worse today than it was ninety years ago! It is important to remember that Metaxas is not some obscure, isolated individual ranting down the pub or on the bus, but a man with a massive following and considerable respect among evangelical Christians among whom he passes as an intellectual.

Du Mez sums up her discussion of how the Christian Right came to support Trump: 'Evangelicals hadn't betrayed their values. Donald Trump was the culmination of their half-century-long pursuit of militant Christian masculinity. He was the reincarnation of John Wayne'. (p. 271) She ends with the hope that what was done can be undone.

'Pistol Packin' Jesus'

Michael Austin's *God and Guns in America*¹⁴ is a very useful read alongside Du Mez's *Jesus and John Wayne*. As he points out, a 2017 study by the Pew Research Center showed that white evangelicals were more likely to own guns than any other faith group in the United States. Indeed, while 41 percent of white evangelicals possessed a firearm, among the population in general the figure was only just 30 percent. This comes as no surprise given that many evangelical preachers actually support the carrying of firearms even in church! Robert Jeffress of the First Baptist Church in Dallas has proudly estimated 'that from 25 to 50 percent of his congregation is armed on any given Sunday'. (p. 65) And following the December 2015 San Bernardino shooting by two Islamist gunmen that left fourteen people dead, Jerry Falwell Jr told students at Liberty University that they could carry concealed firearms to class: 'If more good people had concealed-carry permits, then we could end those Muslims before they walked in'. He urged his students to 'teach them a

¹⁴ Michael W Austin, *God and Guns in America* (Grand Rapids [MI]; William B Eerdmans Publishing, 2020)

lesson if they ever show up here'. Gary Pass, a church leader in Texas actually told a church conference that 'You can't be a Christian if you don't own a gun'. This gun fetish is not just prompted by fear of Islamist terrorism, 'but also by fear of the government'. (p. 17)¹⁵ If the people are disarmed then they will be unable to resist tyranny, obviously an important question when there are Satanic forces at work desperate to impose their liberal/socialist control over America.

The question of whether or not Jesus would have carried a gun has excited some debate among American Christians. One cannot help feeling that such a debate could only ever take place in the United States. Some have argued that a pacifist Jesus, turning the other cheek and loving his enemies, would never have carried a gun, but most evangelicals disagree. Their Jesus is a John Wayne Jesus. Austin looks at Andrew Sandlin, an evangelical preacher and founder of the Center for Cultural Leadership, who celebrates a 'Pistol Packin' Jesus who did and still does support carrying firearms'. (p. 110)¹⁶ There seems little doubt that it is this Jesus whom most white evangelicals follow. As far as many are concerned, the Second Amendment is 'nearly on par with Scripture'. These people, according to Austin 'make the terrible mistake of associating the light of Christ with the flash of a muzzle'. (p. 15) This 'mistake' is one of the defining characteristics of the Christian Right in America today.

'Jesus was white'

In *The Flag and the Cross*,¹⁷ Gorski and Perry see democracy in the United States being in serious danger of being overthrown and replaced by authoritarian government. They are quite clear about where the threat comes from: 'Demographic change is . . . a key factor. As white Christians approach minority status, white Christian nationalists are starting to turn against American democracy . . . faced with the prospect of minority status, some members of the old white majority are embracing

¹⁵ For more on the politics of US gun culture see Roxanne Dunbar-Ortiz, *Loaded: A Disarming History of the Second Amendment* (2018) and Carol Anderson, *The Second: Race and Guns in a Fatally Unequal America* (2021),

¹⁶ Sandlin is the author of numerous publications including such classics as *Make Christianity Great Again: Truths to Re-Christianize Culture* (2019), *Religionless Christianity: Why the Faith in America is Toothless, Spineless and Harmless* (2020), *Total Revolution: How the West is Being Transformed before our Eyes and What We Can Do About It* (2021), and *Defend the Faith: Christian Warfare for Our Time* (2021).

¹⁷ Philip S Gorski and Samuel L Perry, *The Flag and the Cross: White Christian Nationalism and the Threat to American Democracy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2022)

authoritarian politics as a means of protecting their “freedom”. Indeed, ‘White Christian nationalists sincerely believe that whites and Christians are the most persecuted groups in America’. (p. 8) Gorski and Perry make clear that this white Christian nationalist group extends beyond the ranks of white evangelicals, but they are certainly at its core. For these people, as Eric Metaxas tweeted in July 2020, ‘Jesus was white’. End of story. But not for our authors! They go on to provide a very useful account of how American Christians responded to racism and slavery, debates that continue up to this day.

Gorski and Perry have much of interest to say, but for our purposes in this review we will focus on their discussion of white Christian nationalism and Donald Trump. The groundwork was laid by the Tea Party movement which was fuelled by ‘big money’, but ‘ethnic and racial anxiety were the spark plugs that really ignited it. The very thought of a black man in the White House was deeply disturbing to many white Americans’. Rush Limbaugh ‘composed and performed a song called “Barack the Magic Negro” sung to the tune of “Puff the Magic Dragon” on his radio show. (p 82) Many others gave a far more brutal voice to their fears. Trump, who awarded Limbaugh the Presidential Medal of Freedom in February 2020, was to ride to power on the back of what had been the Tea Party movement.

Inevitably Gorski and Perry are forced to confront the question of how it was that conservative evangelicals came to ‘support a thrice-married, egomaniacal real-estate mogul who paid off porn stars’. For them, ‘Trump’s MAGA narrative can be understood as a semi-secularized version of white Christian nationalism’s deep story . . . Trump’s rhetoric resonated so strongly with many white devotees of Christian nationalism’. He played the race card to great effect. Not since George Wallace, the segregationist governor of Alabama, ran for the Presidency in 1968 had ‘a presidential candidate spoken in this way. Not since Woodrow Wilson had such an outspoken racist occupied the White House’. (p. 87) And on top of that he appealed to the notion of masculinity that had gripped white evangelical men. Gone was the limp-wristed Sky Fairy Jesus and in his place was the ‘Straight White American Super Jesus’. For his followers, Donald Trump was ‘the new John Wayne’, although as our authors point out, ‘he is more often portrayed as Rambo’. He appealed to white Christian men because his bullying and misogyny approximated to ‘a cruder version of their masculine ideal’. (p. 89) As that ‘conservative provocateur’ Dinesh D’Souza eloquently put it: ‘Trump has made it fun to beat the hell out of leftists and socialists, and even when Trump is gone,

we must continue to enjoy the Trumpian experience of being a butt-kicking Republican, Christian, right-wing American capitalist'. (p. 41) Amen to that! And in 'religious versions of the QAnon theory . . . Trump is often cast in the role of an avenging Christ, who would punish the pederasts on the day of judgement known as "the Storm"'. (p. 113)

Of particular interest is Gorski and Perry's discussion of 'What Might Happen'. They look at the way that Christian nationalists have allied with right-wing authoritarians in Hungary, Poland and Russia and consider the implications for the United States. Gerrymandering and rigged elections is one way forward. Corruption is another. And then there is violence. In fact, all three working together is the most likely recipe. They suggest that the 'Capitol insurrection may well prove to have been a test run for 2024'. Trump's attempted coup 'only failed because enough Republican officials in local and state offices refused to go along with it, and because enough Republican judges dismissed his campaign's various legal appeals'. The Republican right is taking steps to ensure that this does not happen again. As far as Gorski and Perry are concerned, '[a] Trumpist victory that would end democracy is a real possibility', although they also make clear that 'it is by no means a foregone conclusion'. (p. 123) But if Trump or another Republican authoritarian, the likes of Ron DeSantis,¹⁸ with the support of the Christian Right did come to power and reshaped the political system to ensure they could not be removed constitutionally, then this 'Trumpist America would not be Hitler's Germany. But it would not be so far removed from Putin's Russia'. (p. 130) We have been warned.

'He was my President, he was my friend'

The best way to regard Mike Pence's memoir¹⁹ is to envisage him as having been trapped in a pit latrine for over four years but piously claiming that his hands, raised in supplication to the Lord that whole time, were thankfully still clean. Of course, he denies that the Trump administration was a latrine, but this denial is made all the more difficult by the fact that the man he was apparently proud to serve as Vice President was in the end prepared to overthrow the election results in 2020 and actively encouraged his supporters to stage an attempted coup which he hoped that Pence would play a part in. When Pence refused,

¹⁸ It is possible that Trump would tear the Republican Party apart if DeSantis won the 2024 Presidential nomination. But it is more likely is that he would do a deal in return for the promise of a Presidential pardon.

¹⁹ Mike Pence, *So Help Me God* (London: Simon and Schuster, 2022)

those same supporters ransacked the Capitol building shouting 'Hang Mike Pence'. Meeting with Trump after these events, Pence told a somewhat chastened President that he should 'pray: "Jesus can help you through this", I said. "Call on him."' When Trump replied it was with 'genuine sadness in his voice'. (p. 476) It is difficult to know how to respond to this. Instead of calling for Trump to be indicted, he urges this lying, crooked, ignorant, egomaniacal, incompetent authoritarian to pray! And, of course, far from having repented – which was never very likely – Trump is still denying the 2020 election result, planning to stand again in 2024 and very publicly associating with far right anti-Semites.

But what of Mike Pence?²⁰ He was in many ways the physical embodiment of the deal that the Christian Right did with Donald Trump: he was their man in the White House, charged with ensuring that they got the payoff that they expected in return for their support. It was Pence who had to make his way through all the filth in order to fulfil God's wishes. Who was the self-effacing Mike Pence, always careful never to take the spotlight off the great narcissist, working in the background, doing God's will? Pence had been born into a Catholic family, but had been 'born again' while he was at college. He was initially a Democrat and a supporter of Jimmy Carter, but underwent a 'conservative political awakening' courtesy of Ronald Reagan. (p 26) In his own words, he was 'afire with passion for the Reagan Revolution'. (p. 46) Another influence, just as with Kayleigh McEnany, was Rush Limbaugh. Limbaugh was a 'new voice thundering across the heartland . . . causing a sensation'. Pence was 'drawn to the new conservative action on the airwaves' and got his own radio talk show in Indiana. He was helped by his 'growing proficiency in conservative ideas' and his 'Irish gift of the gab'. This is not a Mike Pence that we are familiar with, a man who went to work in a shirt and tie, but the tie 'often featured Looney Tunes characters or the Three Stooges' and who cracked jokes on air. (p. 51) He was so successful that he got his own TV show as well. This arguably launched his political career. He was elected to the House of Representatives in 2001, a staunch fiscal conservative, where he remained until being elected Governor of Indiana in 2013. One of his proudest achievements in Congress was that he 'authored the first legislation to deny federal funding to Planned Parenthood'. (p. 89)

Pence makes clear his wholehearted support for the Tea Party

²⁰ For a review of the earlier Michael D'Antonio and Peter Eisner biography of Mike Pence, *The Shadow President*, see *Lobster* 76 at <<https://www.lobster-magazine.co.uk/article/issue/76/crazytown/>>.

movement which 'was full of concerned patriots' and was an indicator that 'there was discontent across the land . . . Americans distrusted both parties'. (p. 101) What is interesting is that he does not seem to have noticed the racist demonising of Barack Obama that characterised much of the movement – which is convenient because if he did not notice it then he could not be expected to have criticised or repudiated it. Similarly with the 'birther' smear. Not only were many Republicans actively propagating this lie, but so was his hero Rush Limbaugh, with considerable enthusiasm. And so, of course, was a certain Donald Trump. Once again, Pence does not seem to have noticed the controversy. This is just so much pious hypocrisy on his part and he did his best to sustain this pose throughout Trump's Presidency. Indeed, 'He was my president, he was my friend'. (p. 1) He describes when he and his wife Karen met with Trump and his wife Melania, before the 2016 election: 'They spoke to us with gentleness about our faith; Trump told me he was a believer, too. They asked us if we prayed often, and we told them we had just done so. We had prayed for them just before we had come to dinner'. (p. 149) As far as he was concerned, Trump was capable of 'reaching, connecting with, inspiring people who had been left out in the cold'; and as for his 'brashness', well Andrew Jackson had been brash. He certainly seems to have quickly appreciated the psychology of the man. When the Trumps visited him at his governor's residence, there was a copy of Trump's ghost-written *The Art of the Deal* on his desk. He told Trump he 'had enjoyed it, and then I grabbed a pen and asked him to autograph it . . . that book was displayed in my West Wing office during all four years of his presidency'. (p. 152)²¹

What of 'Pussygate'? After the revelation that Trump had boasted of sexually assaulting young women, something that would have ended the candidacy of any previous contender for the Presidency, 'Karen and I talked, prayed, and sought some sort of clarity'. He makes absolutely clear that the stories about how much his wife despised Trump were not true: 'it was Karen who was the more forgiving and sympathetic. She had always liked him personally . . . it was my wife's deep faith and belief in forgiveness that guided our response'. (p. 173) Once Trump had apologised, for what he had said, not for anything he had done, they forgave him, presumably because of his obvious sincerity! (And anyway, it was Karen's fault!) At a rally in North Carolina, Pence told the crowd that

²¹ Pence also makes clear how much he valued Boris Johnson's 'friendship and respect' and refers to 'his brilliant biography of Winston Churchill'. (p. 359) He has obviously not read it.

'my faith teaches me to give second chances. There was too much at stake not to. I said I was impressed with Trump's resilience . . . he had apologized and demonstrated a toughness essential to the presidency. The audience roared'. (p. 174) Trump's election victory reminded him of Frank Capra's film, *Mr Smith Goes To Washington*. (p. 181) Later, he tells his readers that the way Trump sometimes ended meetings on 'a high decibel charge' reminded him of another film, *Patton*. (p. 203) His memoir reminded this reader of a very different film, *Dumb and Dumber*. Pence is either lying or is remarkably stupid.

Pence celebrates Trump's great achievements on behalf of the Christian Right. His was 'the most pro-life administration in history' (p 209) and he moved the US Embassy in Israel to Jerusalem. For Pence speaking at the Knesset 'and formally informing the Israeli government of the relocation of the US Embassy was one of the highest honours of my career'. As far as he was concerned the very creation of Israel was a 'miracle' and 'proof that God's promises are true'. (pp. 274-275) But arguably most important was the three Supreme Court justices appointed by Trump who made possible the 'historic decision to overturn *Roe v Wade*', righting 'a historic wrong'. This

'makes all the hardship we endured from 2016 forward more than worth it. Restoring the sanctity of life to the centre of American law has been the calling of my life . . . to have played some small role in that victory for life will be something I cherish'. (p. 480)

And he devotes a whole chapter, 'Blessed', to Billy Graham's death and funeral, which both he and Trump attended. Apparently, Trump's father, Fred, had been 'a supporter of Graham' and when a young man, Donald himself 'was a great admirer of Graham and had attended his revivals at Madison Square Garden. Graham inspired him'. (p. 291) Does Pence really believe any of this? Or is it just a way of trying to justify the Christian Right's unholy pact with Trump, even if only to himself?

One interesting omission from all this is Pence's failure to mention the White House Bible Study group, his own attendance and the particular character of its convenor, Ralph Drollinger, whom we have already discussed. Presumably he wants to avoid any idea that while the President might be an incompetent authoritarian clown, there were evangelical conservatives at work, taking advantage of this to reshape America. There were, it is worth remembering, some in the Trump administration who warned that if people thought Trump was bad, then Pence would be even worse if he ever became President, that a theocracy

would be established. In fact, in this memoir Pence is comparatively restrained in his trumpeting of his faith, at least compared to many on the Christian Right. It is as if he wants to both celebrate their successes and play down their role in the administration at the same time.

Through all the controversies and infighting that impacted the administration, Pence stood by Trump. He even stood by him over Charlottesville, repudiating any idea that he was a racist or an anti-Semite, or that he sympathised with the far right, the neo-Nazis and the Ku Klux Klan. The President had been smeared by the liberal media. Trump's later call for the Proud Boys to 'stand back and stand by' goes unmentioned. He insists that the way the administration responded to the Covid pandemic was a great success; and as for Trump appearing to suggest that injecting bleach was the way forward, well the President had just made 'an unforced error and his political opponents, including those in the media, never let it go'. (p. 401)²² An unforced error or a display of monumental ignorance and stupidity? Pence stood alongside the President no matter what, all the while quietly advancing the Christian Right agenda. Stood alongside him that is, right up till his attempt to overthrow the 2020 election result. Where Mike Pence goes from here remains to be seen, but we have certainly not heard the last of the Christian Right.

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His latest book is *Chosen by God:*

Donald Trump, the Christian Right and American Capitalism,
published by Bookmarks. <<https://bookmarksbookshop.co.uk/>>

²² Trump actually said:

'And then I see the disinfectant, where it knocks it out in one minute. And is there a way we can do something like that, by injection inside or almost a cleaning, because you see it gets in the lungs and it does a tremendous number on the lungs, so it'd be interesting to check that, so that you're going to have to use medical doctors with, but it sounds interesting to me. So, we'll see, but the whole concept of the light, the way it kills it in one minute. That's pretty powerful.'

<<https://tinyurl.com/yc3crvvt>> or <<https://eu.statesman.com/story/news/politics/elections/2020/07/13/fact-check-did-trump-tell-people-to-drink-bleach-to-kill-coronavirus/113754708/>>

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