A Qualitative Study of Southern Baptist and Pentecostal Discourse on Muslims

Jonas Baadstøe Jensen

A thesis presented to the Department of Literature, Area Studies and European Languages (30 points)

ENG4790 – Master's Thesis in English, Secondary Teacher Training
Supervisor: Hilde Løvdal Stephens

University of Oslo
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Abstract

This study explores differences and similarities in the Southern Baptist and Pentecostal discourse on Islam through a qualitative analysis of the two evangelical news outlets Charisma and the Baptist Press. The first chapter analyzes their discourses on the notion of Sharia law in America, while the second chapter focuses on their coverage of President Trump’s immigration order. Several differences and similarities are found. Most notably, both Charisma and the Baptist Press promote a fearful attitude toward the concept of Sharia law that is based on a misunderstanding of the concept. Both promote the notion that Sharia law is a threat to the American culture and legal system. However, their contrasts are sharper in their coverage of President Trump’s statements during his presidential campaign and the subsequent immigration order. In this chapter, Charisma amplifies their fearful discourse from the previous chapter. Strong ties to the Christian Right and a conflation of Islamophobia and the political Left is revealed. Conversely, the Baptist tradition of defending religious liberty and the separation of church and state, in addition to differing views on the balance of compassion and national security in terms of Muslim immigration, leads to a discourse on the immigration order that is characterized less by fear and more by disagreement.
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1 Introduction

Although the United States has experienced a continuous influx of immigrants since the founding of the nation, the arrival of a significant number of immigrants from the Muslim world is a somewhat recent phenomenon. The apparent foreignness of these immigrants, in addition to the terrorist attacks on September 11th, 2001 and the subsequent War on Terror, has led to Muslims and Islam becoming increasingly controversial elements in American society and culture. One of the ways this fear has manifested itself is in the anti-Sharia scare of recent years. This scare is based on the fear that Muslim immigrants will subvert the American culture and legal system by implementing Sharia law in the United States. The controversy over Muslims in America reached new heights during the presidential election of 2016. Then-candidate Donald Trump made a series of controversial statements about Muslims, including calling for the “total and complete shutdown of Muslims entering the United States.”¹ He followed up with an immigration order that banned the entry of inhabitants of several predominantly Muslim countries shortly after taking office, creating massive controversy.

Evangelical Christians, who are known for their emphasis on the supreme authority of Scripture, a personal relationship with Christ, and a zealous endeavor to convert other individuals to Christianity, are a significant part of American culture. Evangelicals are strongly associated with the Christian Right, a faction in American politics that has gained significant power and influence since the 1970s. Those who belong to the Christian Right are among the most reliable voters for the Republican Party, and they promote socially conservative policies with the aim of a public policy, government, and society that reflects Christian values and principles. The sociologist Christian Smith asserts that American evangelicalism is “embattled and thriving” because it “flourishes on difference, engagement, tension and conflict” between itself and a range of other groups in modern, pluralistic America.² These groups include secularists and, indeed, non-Christian religious groups such as Muslims.

1.1 Southern Baptists and Pentecostals

This thesis focuses on two different groups within the broader evangelical movement: Southern Baptists and Pentecostals. The Southern Baptist Convention (SBC), is the largest Protestant denomination in the United States, with an estimated 15 million members.\(^3\) It was established by pro-slavery Southerners in 1845. Known for its cultural separatism, the SBC long dominated Southern culture. However, as the South gradually industrialized and became less isolated, it experienced an increased influence from the broader American culture. Being inextricably connected to Southern culture, these developments were reflected in equally drastic developments within the SBC. According to the historian Barry Hankins, after the SBC controversy, a struggle that erupted in 1979 between conservative and moderate forces for control of the denomination that the conservatives won, the new leaders of the SBC adopted a “social critique” of the modern American culture. The central cause for this critique was the perception that the South had now become unable to isolate itself from threatening forces such as secularism, pluralism, and diversity.\(^4\)

Pentecostalism is a popular section of evangelicalism that is experiencing rapid growth. Influenced by the earlier Holiness movement, Pentecostals stress the direct experience of God through baptism of the Holy Spirit, a post-conversion experience through “gifts of the spirit” such as tongues speech and divine healing, in addition to focusing strongly on end-times theology. Since its beginnings in the Azusa Street revival in Los Angeles in 1906, Pentecostalism has spread internationally, with estimates of nearly 280 million adherents worldwide.\(^5\) The spread of Pentecostalism has had a significant influence on global Christianity since the 1960s, when the Charismatic movement brought Pentecostal impulses such as the emphasis on the gifts of the spirit to many mainstream Protestants and Catholics.\(^6\) Most American Pentecostals are located in the Southern states,\(^7\) and, like Southern Baptists, their history is closely tied to the South. Historian Randall J. Stephens states that mainstream evangelicals, such as Southern Baptists, and Southern society at large long

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\(^7\) R.G. Robins, Pentecostalism in America (Santa Barbara: Praeger, 2010), “Chapter 2: A New Religion for a New Millennium.” (In accordance with the recommendations of the Chicago Manual of Style, Kindle e-books without page numbers will be referred to by including the name of the chapter where the text has been found.)
excluded Pentecostals due to their unconventional beliefs and practices, and considered them fanatics at the margins of society. Over the course of the 20th century, however, Pentecostals gradually became included in Southern culture and the broader American evangelical community. Although most Pentecostals were long apolitical, many have become affiliated with the Christian Right.

1.2 Research questions

This thesis explores similarities and differences in the ways Pentecostals and Southern Baptists relate to Islam in post-9/11 America. It does so by examining one research question for each of the two main chapters. The research question for the first chapter is: how does the Southern Baptist discourse on Sharia law compare to that of Pentecostals? The research question for the second chapter is: how does the Southern Baptist response to president Donald Trump’s immigration order compare to that of Pentecostals?

1.3 Review of literature

1.3.1 Quantitative studies

Several sociologists have in the recent years conducted a range of quantitative surveys of attitudes toward Muslims among American Christians. These scholarly articles shed light on different aspects of American Christians toward Muslims and Islam, but the general consensus among these scholars is that evangelical Protestants tend to hold negative attitudes toward Muslims.

Some scholars stress social environment and exclusivism as important factors for conservative Protestant antipathy toward Muslims. Although Stephen Johnson also examines the link between Islamophobic attitudes and an authoritarian and social dominance personality orientation, he stresses the strong correlation between Islamophobia and membership in a conservative, fundamentalist church environment. This social environment, he argues, is a more important factor than the aforementioned personality dispositions, as it reinforces the perception of believing in the one true God, resulting in prejudice toward adherents of different beliefs. Stephen Merino expands on this by testing for a correlation

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between what he labels “theological exclusivism,” the perception that one’s religious view is the only one that “leads to a union with God and true salvation,” and negative views of religious diversity. He argues that since evangelicals are more likely to hold theologically exclusivist beliefs, they are also likely to view individuals with non-Christian beliefs as less trustworthy. Consequently, evangelicals are less willing to include non-Christians in their community. He links theological exclusivism to the idea that the United States is a Christian nation, yet finds that this idea is associated with positive attitudes toward religious diversity. Still, his findings reveal that individuals with this belief are still negative to the scenario of a mosque being built in their neighborhood.11

Perceptions of Christianity’s place in America has proven to be an important factor in other scholars’ research on evangelical attitudes toward Muslim immigrants. Contrary to Merino, Eric McDaniel, Irfan Nooruddin, and Allyson Shortle argue that Christian nationalism is the most significant factor in antagonism toward immigrants. They assert that since many conservative evangelicals tend to subscribe to the notion of the United States as a nation built on a Christian fundament, they have a negative attitude toward immigrants that challenge this national identity.12 In a different article, Shortle, together with Ronald Gaddie, expand on this work by exploring the role of Christian nationalism in attitudes toward Muslims. They conducted their study in Oklahoma, an evangelical epicenter that, in this context, is notable for its passing of the controversial Save Our State Amendment, an anti-Sharia bill, in 2011. Shortle and Gaddie add to the preceding study, as they find a connection between Christian nationalism and a “support for policies that limit access by outgroups such as Muslims to the national space or local public spaces.” They also find that a minority of the proponents of Christian nationalism are willing to restrict the religious rights of Muslims. This, they suggest, is due to the need to protect the public space from “alien intrusions.”13

Other quantitative research emphasizes particular images of God. Wesley Hinze, F. Carson Mencken, and Charles Tolbert contend that the image of God as vengeful and angry, as opposed to kind and forgiving, has a significant impact on trust in Muslims. These scholars link the image of God as angry to the belief that God has forsaken mankind. This, they posit,
leads to a lack of trust in other “forsaken” individuals, particularly those with different religious beliefs. Jong Hyun Jung examines the connection between having an image of God as wrathful and judgmental and antipathy toward Muslims. His findings largely echo those of Hinze, Mencken, and Tolbert. He asserts that the image of God is a significant indication of one’s relationship to others, as those who have an image of God as judgmental are generally judgmental of their fellow citizens, while those who see God as loving are usually loving toward their fellow citizens. As a marginal group, Muslims are more easily seen as a “symbolic other” by those who believe that God is judgmental. Moreover, he examines the correlation between negative perceptions of Islam and contact with Muslims. Contrary to other religious groups, evangelical Protestants’ attitude toward Muslims generally do not improve with interfaith contact. He argues that this is due to the fact that Islam and Christianity are both missionary religions, which has led to a perception among many evangelicals that Christianity is competing with Islam over “souls.”

1.3.2 Qualitative studies

Dennis R. Hoover conducted the first notable post-9/11 qualitative study of the evangelical discourse on Islam and Muslims. The theoretical basis for his study is political scientist Samuel P. Huntington’s pioneering “clash of civilizations” thesis, which postulates that religious and cultural differences will cause an increasing number of conflicts, particularly between the Judeo-Christian West and Islamic civilization. Hoover disputes the notion of a monolithic evangelical community that is critical to Muslims and Islam. He argues that the evangelical discourse is more nuanced than the impression given by the frequent anti-Islamic statements of conservative evangelical leaders such as the late Jerry Falwell, Jerry Vines, and Franklin Graham. He illustrates this point by conducting a content analysis of the two evangelical publications Christianity Today and WORLD Magazine, the former typically leaning center-right, while the latter is characterized as “hard-right.” Hoover finds that rather than conveying a unified stance on the issue of Islam and Muslims, the discourses of the two publications differ. Whereas WORLD Magazine is far more critical to Muslims and Islam, focusing on Islam as a security threat and praising the Islamophobic comments of evangelical

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leaders, the latter is more neutral, and emphasizes topics such as missionary work and religious freedom issues.\(^\text{17}\)

A study that investigates the discourse toward Muslims and Islam in evangelical media by using 9/11 as a watershed moment is Eric Gormly’s 2004 study. Gormly conducts an ethnographic content analysis of selected episodes of *The 700 Club*, the flagship program of Christian Broadcasting Network, a major Christian news network led by the notable Pentecostal figure and culture warrior Pat Robertson. Gormly presents several subthemes in the discourse on Islam in the weeks after 9/11. The first is that militant Islam as an evil threat to all things good, particularly Christianity and America. Second, these militant Islamists are supported by all Muslims, including moderates, because they share the same fundamentals of faith. Third, Muslims are deceitful, and all attempts by Muslims to denounce and distance themselves from terrorism are insincere. Based on these subthemes, and through a frame of motifs tied to the evangelical worldview, Gormly concludes that *The 700 Club* portrays Islam as a threat to both America and the evangelical worldview.\(^\text{18}\)

Richard Cimino conducted a content analysis of a variety of evangelical literature in order to compare evangelical discourse on Muslims and Islam before and after 9/11. Cimino classifies the anti-Islamic polemic found in the literature into three different categories. The first is apologetics that attempt to prove the truth of Christianity as opposed to Islam. The second category of literature is centered around the role of Islam in Christian end-times prophecies. The third category of literature emphasizes the role of what he refers to as “spiritual warfare” in Islam. He contends that post-9/11 to a larger extent than pre-9/11 literature emphasizes the contrasts between Christianity and Islam, in addition to the perceived inherent violence of Islam. Furthermore, he argues that the sharper tone toward Islam serves the purpose of maintaining evangelicals’ social boundaries, which helps them to reassert their own identity in a society that is becoming more diverse.\(^\text{19}\)

The by far most comprehensive work that has been conducted on the relationship between American evangelicals and Muslims is the historian Thomas S. Kidd’s book *American Evangelicals and Islam: Evangelical Culture and Islam from the Colonial Period to the Age of Terrorism*. Kidd traces American Christian attitudes toward Muslims over


several centuries and examines the historical roots of modern-day evangelical antipathy toward Muslims in great detail. He does not spend much time discussing the relationship between the two religious groups in the period after 9/11, leading to a significant gap in his otherwise extensive work. In spite of this, Kidd’s historical investigation is an important contribution to research on the relationship between American evangelicals and Muslims because it provides a suitable framework for understanding both the negative and the more positive aspects of evangelical discourse toward Muslims and Islam. Kidd postulates that there have been certain continuous themes in American evangelical thought about Muslims and Islam from the 18th century and onwards. First, there is the endeavor to convert Muslims to Christianity through missionary work. Second, there is the blending of politics and theology in matters related to the Muslim world. Third, the inclusion of Muslims in eschatological predictions.\textsuperscript{20}

Instead of focusing on the evangelical discourse on Muslims and Islam specifically, David D. Belt places the discourse in the context of the broader Islamophobic discourse of social conservatives. Although Belt’s focus is on the discourse of the conservative movement as a whole, he pays particular attention to evangelical magazines and websites in his investigation of Islamophobic discourse in conservative news outlets. He divides the anti-Islamic discourse of the conservative movement into two different waves. After the terrorist attacks on 9/11, the main focus of this movement was on Islam as an external security threat, connecting Muslims to terrorism. This initial focus on terrorism was eventually replaced by a discourse that emphasized a more discreet and covert internal attack on the United States in the shape of Islamization. Belt labels the latter type of Islamophobic discourse as “the Green Scare,” drawing parallels to the Red Scare and the Yellow Peril, two significant xenophobic phenomena earlier in American history aimed at communists and Asian immigrants respectively. However, Belt also contends that the Green Scare functions as yet another battlefield in the culture war agenda of conservatives. Islamophobia and the fear of Sharia implementation in the United States is not merely an instance of xenophobia, according to Belt, but is also a strategy in the overarching culture war with the Left. This is done by creating a conspiratorial link between the external enemy, radical Muslims, and the internal enemy, the political Left.\textsuperscript{21}


The present study makes a somewhat different contribution to the ongoing academic conversation about American evangelical attitudes toward Muslims. Survey-based statistical studies document the connection between evangelicalism and negative attitudes toward Muslims and Islam, but they do not delve deeply into the underlying causes of this antipathy. With the notable exception of Hoover’s study, past qualitative research on the subject gives the impression of American evangelicals as a relatively monolithic group when it comes to attitudes toward Muslims and Islam. In contrast, this thesis delves into two specific theological traditions within the broader evangelical movement and explains how their different and similar theological and cultural characteristics and circumstances have shaped their take on Islam. Whereas most earlier work has had a wider approach, the analysis of the two specific aspects of discourse on Muslims, the Sharia scare and the response to the immigration order, is a narrower approach that may reveal disparities in the evangelical community.

1.4 Method and primary sources
The thesis is a qualitative study of how Southern Baptist and Pentecostals have debated Islam in America based mostly on articles from the two evangelical news outlets the Baptist Press and Charisma. The Baptist Press is the official news outlet of the SBC. It was founded in 1946 and claims to be the largest religious news service in the United States. In order to supplement the discourse in the Baptist Press, two other primary sources will be analyzed. The first is a blog post written by Russell Moore, the president of the SBC’s Ethics and Religious Liberty Commission (ERLC), the denomination’s political lobbying agency. The second is a news article from Baptist News, a descendant of Associated Baptist Press, which was founded when the left-wing of the Southern Baptist Convention began to create their own organizations as an alternative to the conservative takeover of organizations such as the Baptist Press after the Southern Baptist controversy. It is relevant in this context because it reports the statements of an SBC leader that the Baptist Press does not comment.

Charisma Magazine and Charisma News (merged and referred to as Charisma throughout this thesis) are subdivisions of Charisma Media. By its own admission, Charisma

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23 Nancy Ammerman, Baptist Battles: Social Change and Religious Conflict in the Southern Baptist Convention (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1990), ix-x.
Media is the world’s largest Pentecostal/Charismatic publisher, and renowned Pentecostal minister Jack Hayes has described it as “the foremost uniting voice of the move of God among all Charismatic and Pentecostal people globally.” In contrast to the Baptist Press, Charisma does not operate in an official capacity for any Pentecostal denomination. However, it has historical ties to the largest Pentecostal denomination, Assemblies of God, as it was originally founded by Steve Strang as the official publication of the megachurch Calvary Assembly of God in Winter Park, Florida. The magazine “spun off on its own” and Strang established Charisma Media, with Charisma Magazine as its flagship publication. The Charisma brand has expanded to also include the news service Charisma News, a news outlet “for believers who want the latest news delivered with trusted insight from a Spirit-filled perspective.”

1.5 Theoretical framework

The theories of various scholars will be applied in the analysis in order to illuminate certain aspects of Southern Baptist and Pentecostal discourse. The first is Matthew Avery Sutton’s book American Apocalypse: A History of Modern Evangelicalism. Sutton’s book is an overview of American evangelicals’ preoccupation with eschatological beliefs, particularly premillennial dispensationalism. Sutton posits that end-time beliefs have had a tremendous influence on the evangelical worldview and American culture. He argues that American evangelicals have consistently utilized their apocalyptic worldview in their understanding of major issues that appear with every generation in order to change their culture. In the context of this study, this is relevant because Muslims are one of the groups that have been consistently involved in this worldview.

Second is Jason C. Bivins’ book Religion of Fear: The Politics of Horror in Conservative Evangelicalism, which will be applied in the main analysis to shed light on evangelical concerns and fears that appear in the discourse on Muslims and Islam. “The religion of fear,” Bivins contends, is a discourse tied to the Christian Right that conveys a
“social critique” of the developments of American culture and society since the 1960s through a representational frame found in evangelical popular entertainment. Bivins theory is also useful in describing evangelical discourses outside the realm of popular entertainment, as he describes the role of fear in American evangelicalism on a general basis in his first two chapters and elaborates on several specific evangelical concerns in his main analysis.

Third, Christian Smith’s book *Christian America?: What Evangelicals Really Want* will be used in order to illuminate ideas about pluralism and Christian nationalism among evangelicals. Based on a survey of 200 evangelicals, Smith finds that the majority believe that America was once a Christian nation. However, there is significant diversity in the perceptions of what this Christian nationhood actually entails. Likewise, he finds that there is significant diversity in the opinions of evangelicals regarding pluralism, ranging from opposition to enthusiasm. Smith also outlines several common fallacies for researchers on evangelicalism. One of these, the representative elite fallacy, is particularly relevant to this thesis. This fallacy entails that researchers tend to automatically equate the opinions of elites with the thoughts and feelings of ordinary evangelicals, leading to a faulty image of the evangelical community.

Fourth, James Davison Hunter’s seminal culture war thesis will be used to supplement various aspects of the analysis and to place the findings in a larger political frame. Hunter postulates that America is experiencing an irreconcilable conflict between two polarized forces in the public space over the right to define America. He describes the belligerents in this polarizing cultural conflict as “orthodox” and “progressive.” The former group consists of conservatives from various religious backgrounds, while the latter group consists of secularists and religious modernists.

Lastly, certain parts of the analysis call for a historical context for the discourse of the two specific traditions. Most of this will be drawn from two books. For the parts of the analysis that deal with Southern Baptist discourse, Barry Hankins’ *Uneasy in Babylon: Southern Baptist Conservatives and American Culture* will be consulted. Most of the historical context for the analysis of Pentecostal discourse will be drawn from Randall J. Stephens’ *The Fire Spreads: Holiness and Pentecostalism in the American South.*

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31 Bivins, *Religion of Fear.*
1.6 Limitations of the study

The present study of the Southern Baptist and Pentecostal movement and their take on Muslims and Islam is by no means exhaustive, but it interprets the discourse of two prominent news outlets within each community. The question of whether the discourses found in these two news outlets can be generalized to include the opinions of their respective denominations and movements is a valid one. The discourse found in *Charisma* is not representative of all Pentecostals. However, it should be pointed out that *Charisma*’s status as America’s largest Pentecostal news source indicates that the discourse on Muslims likely reflects the opinions of a large number adherents. The *Baptist Press* is somewhat different. The status of the *Baptist Press* as the official news source of the Southern Baptist Convention makes it a better source in the sense that the discourse conveyed is the official discourse of the denomination. On the other hand, it should be noted that in spite of its official status, many Southern Baptists may not necessarily agree with the opinions conveyed in the articles. This is tied to the fact that the Baptist tradition is congregational. Congregationalism entails that each local congregation within a denomination has a degree of independence in its teaching. This denominational structure contrasts with Lutheran denominations and the Catholic church, where church leadership shapes official teaching.
2 Sharia law

2.1 Introduction

Sharia law is an integral part of Islam. Scholars John L. Esposito and Natana J. Delong-Bas explain that Muslims see it as divine law: “sacred and unchangeable values and principles that are revealed in the Quran and the example (Sunnah) of Muhammad.” Contrary to popular belief, Sharia law is not the same as Islamic law. Islamic law, or “fiqh,” is built on different human interpretations of the basic principles and values of Sharia. These human interpretations dictate proper conduct for Muslims. This has proved to be fertile ground for disagreements, as different groups insist that their interpretation of Sharia law is correct. In extreme cases, it has led to terrorist groups, such as Al-Qaeda and ISIS, using distorted interpretations of Sharia law to justify their violent endeavors.34

Some evangelicals operate with a different understanding of Sharia law than this scholarly definition. They understand Sharia law as the single unifying law of the Islamic faith. Moreover, because of the extremist interpretations frequently mentioned in the media, these evangelicals see Sharia law as a formal judicial system that promotes the suppression of other religious groups, in addition to extraordinarily cruel and unjust punishments. Unless otherwise noted, it is this understanding of Sharia law that will be referred to throughout this chapter, not the scholarly definition. The core of the American Sharia scare is the idea that Muslims that have emigrated to the United States will implement Sharia law in society and culture, and replace the Constitution. The main driving force behind this scare is anti-Muslim grassroots groups. One example is ACT! For America, an organization that strives to disprove the notion that Islam is a peaceful religion. It was established in 2007 by Brigitte Gabriel, a Lebanese Christian who has previously been affiliated with Pat Robertson’s Christian Broadcasting Network.35

2.2 The threat of Sharia

Charisma has strong ties to the anti-Sharia movement. For example, in 2018, Charisma Media’s publishing house, Charisma House, signed with Brigitte Gabriel to publish her book,

Rise: In Defense of Judeo-Christian Values and Freedom.\textsuperscript{36} Coincidentally, Charisma initiated its coverage of Sharia law with an op-ed piece by another Islam critic that has emigrated from the Muslim world and taken the name “Gabriel.” Mark Gabriel’s op-ed piece, “Pray for Freedom,” (2004) provides a sensible point of departure for investigating Charisma’s discourse toward Muslim immigration to the United States and Sharia law because it outlines some of the basic thoughts about Islam in the post-9/11 evangelical mind. Gabriel legitimizes his take on Sharia law and Islam by referring to his background as a Muslim and a teacher at a university in Egypt.\textsuperscript{37} This reflects a trend in Islamophobic discourse. Former Muslims that have converted to Christianity often supply evangelicals with “inflammatory insider perspectives.” The problem with these informants is that they are usually angered by the harsh treatment of Muslims after their conversion, in addition to the perceived duplicity of Islam. Consequently, the picture they paint of Islam tends to be highly negative. In his description of these converted Muslims, Kidd singles out Gabriel, and implies that his story of living in Egypt and practicing Islam is not true.\textsuperscript{38}

Gabriel’s main argument is that Islam is incompatible with democracy. This, he asserts, is because Muslims do not see authority as something that is based on the will of the people. Rather, it is based on Sharia law, which, in contrast to the scholarly understanding of the term, he defines as “Islamic law.” On this basis, he differentiates between two types of Muslims: moderate Muslims and radical Muslims. Most Muslims are moderate, according to Gabriel, and “they just want to be safe and to build good lives for their families while practicing the religious aspects of Islam.” He contends that these Muslims do not pose a threat to democracy because they ignore Sharia law and therefore “tolerate” it. By contrast, radical Muslims hold Sharia law in a higher regard and therefore do not tolerate democracy.\textsuperscript{39}

Ostensibly, Gabriel is fairly reasonable and tolerant. There is a clear distinction drawn between moderate and radical Muslims, as well as the emphasis of the notion that moderate Muslims “just want to be safe and build a good life for their families,” which can be considered an attempt to defuse the perceived threat of Muslims. Moreover, Gabriel urges the United States to cooperate with moderate Muslims against radical Muslims.\textsuperscript{40} Thus, Gabriel

\textsuperscript{38} Kidd, American Christians and Islam, 147-149.
\textsuperscript{39} Gabriel, ”Pray for Freedom.”
\textsuperscript{40} Gabriel, ”Pray for Freedom.”
avoids committing to the generalization that often appears in Islamophobic discourse, namely the notion that all Muslims support the violent actions of extremists. This was one of the main motifs that Gormly found in The 700 Club, where Pat Robertson explicitly and repeatedly argued that all Muslims support the extremist cause.\textsuperscript{41} Although Gabriel does not regard moderate Muslims as a threat, he robs them of their status as true believers of their religion. This is because they allegedly choose to “tolerate democracy,” and thereby renounce Sharia law, which, for most Muslims, is non-violent and perfectly compatible with democracy, and an essential part of their religion. As he argues, “the radicals’ understanding of Islam and politics is a much more honest evaluation of the material.”\textsuperscript{42} Thus, this article can be considered the first glimpse of how Charisma portrays their understanding of Sharia law as the core element of the threat posed by radical Islam.

Although the differentiation between radical Muslims and other Muslims persisted, the antipathy toward Sharia law in Charisma became more explicit with the emergence of the anti-Sharia movement in the second decade of the 21\textsuperscript{st} century. In several articles, Charisma demonstrates a clear stance in the Sharia controversy by publishing op-ed pieces that convey a direct anti-Sharia rhetoric. The core of the argument in these op-ed pieces is that America is experiencing a form of “cultural jihad”: the threat that radical Muslims conspire to conquer and overthrow America gradually from within by imposing Sharia law. This is in line with what Bivins asserts is a key theme that resurfaces in moral panics in American history, namely that of “surfaces” and “depths.” This entails a sense that the world as it appears is, in reality, a false surface above the threatening activities of “shadowy villains.”\textsuperscript{43} In this context, radical Muslims are cast as “shadowy villains” that operate beneath the surface, where they work on their plan to overthrow America from within by gradually implementing Sharia law. This frightful perception of America on its way to be subverted by shadowy Muslim villains is also consistent with “the Green Scare,” Belt’s term for the conspiratorial narrative within the broader Islamophobic discourse that parallels the earlier Red Scare.\textsuperscript{44} One example is an op-ed piece titled “Has Immigration Jihad Come to America?” (2017). Here, Dave Williams, a Pentecostal minister, asserts that “most Muslims are not radical killers, but according to intelligence services around the world, radical Muslims (the kind that terrorize, torture and kill) are around us now.” He claims that these radical Muslims are planning to overthrow Western civilization though immigration. The process, he argues, is already well on its way

\textsuperscript{41} Gormly, "Peering Beneath the Veil,” 229-230.
\textsuperscript{42} Gabriel, "Pray for Freedom.”
\textsuperscript{43} Bivins, The Religion of Fear, 27.
\textsuperscript{44} Belt, "Anti-Islam Discourse in the United States in the Decade after 9/11,” 212.
in Europe, and he warns that it has begun in America, bringing these radical Muslims closer to their goal of “global Sharia law.” Williams concludes by presenting a list of actions for Americans that oppose the alleged cultural takeover. Among these actions are to “respond to the Holy Spirit” and “help guide our nation back to the Christian values upon which this country was founded.”

Williams’ rally cry for Christian activism demonstrates another typical characteristic of the religion of fear. According to Bivins, the “architects of fear” emerge as “technicians of social identity” whose methods for engaging the threats can “solidify a particular type of religious identity.” In this case, Williams functions as an “architect of fear,” as he helps to construct an image of an enemy. His list of actions can be considered an attempt to solidify a religious national identity, as he accentuates the concept of America as a nation built on Christian values. The overall aim of Williams appears to be the return of America to the alleged Christian values upon which it was founded. This point of view is consistent with Christian nationalism, as it promotes a specific perception of America as a nation built on Christian values and principles. According to Smith, the concept of Christian values and principles is, in this context, characterized by ambiguity. This is because many of his interviewees do not pinpoint exactly what these values and principles entail, giving the impression that many evangelicals are unable to explain exactly what these values and principles are, aside from being divinely ordained. This ambiguity is also present in Williams’ op-ed piece, as he does not specify exactly what principles and values have been lost. What he is certain of, however, is that radical Muslims plan to transform the United States to something in direct opposition to what it once was through the imposition of Sharia law.

The nexus between Sharia law and radical Muslims also appeared in the first comprehensive coverage of the Sharia scare in the Baptist Press, in a report written by Debbie Thurman from the 2011 conference “The Awakening” held in Lynchburg, Virginia. The conference was organized by Liberty University, a Baptist university and a bastion of conservative Protestant theology founded by the late leading evangelical figure Jerry Falwell. At the conference, a panel discussion was held where a number of prominent members of various parts of the American conservative movement participated, including Pentecostals

46 Bivins, The Religion of Fear, 16.
47 Smith, Christian America?, “Chapter 1: Making Sense of ‘Christian America.’”
48 Williams, “Has Immigration Jihad Come to America?”
and Southern Baptists. The subject of the panel debate was the “incursion of cultural issues/forces that can be viewed as domestic or foreign enemies of America’s constitutional freedoms and Judeo-Christian ethos.” Among the speakers at the panel were representatives from Regent University, a Pentecostal university founded by Pat Robertson, a coalition of conservative leaders working for stricter immigration policies named Conservatives for Comprehensive Immigration Reform, and the Heritage Foundation, a deeply conservative think tank. In addition to these, Barrett Duke spoke on behalf of the ERLC.49

One of the main topics of the panel discussion was Sharia law. Thurman initiates her coverage of this part of the panel discussion by defining Sharia law as a “sobering threat against national security.” Thus, from the outset, the Baptist Press also expresses a fearful tone regarding Sharia law. The article continues by reporting the statements of Frank Gaffney, panel moderator and president of the Center for Security Policy, a far-right think tank. Gaffney is known as one of the leading figures in the anti-Sharia movement, and one of the main instigators behind the accusations that President Obama was a Muslim.50 Similar to Charisma’s Mark Gabriel, Gaffney draws a line between Sharia-adhering Muslims and Muslims in general, arguing that most Muslims do not adhere to Sharia law, while the ones that do are the ones that constitute the threat to the United States. Like Charisma’s Williams, Gaffney connects Sharia law to the term “jihad,” which he defines as “a kind of holy war waged though terrifying violence.” He argues that when it is unfeasible to resort to violence, some Sharia-adherent Muslims engage in what he refers to as “civilization jihad,” which he asserts is a method of destroying Western civilization from within.51

The article does not present any rebuttals to these statements, and this indicates that the Baptist Press is open to other socially conservative organizations’ perceptions of Muslims and Sharia law. It can be argued that there is no room for this in a news article because it is merely supposed to report on a news event. However, Thurman is blurring the line between a purely objective news article and a subjective opinion piece when she labels Sharia law as a “sobering threat.” As for the opinion of Duke, the sole representative of the SBC in the panel, Thurman does not mention if he made any particular statements about Sharia law. What she does mention is that all the panelists agreed that “Shariah-adhering Muslims are not merely practicing a religion but are actively working to take over society,” indicating that this is also

50 Esposito and DeLong-Bas, Shariah: What Everyone Needs to Know, 10.
51 Thurman, ”U.S. facing threats.”
an opinion held by Duke.\textsuperscript{52} The \textit{Baptist Press} conveys this rhetoric in a more indirect manner than \textit{Charisma}, as the format of the article is a news article reporting statements made by individuals. The fact that these sentiments appear to be the consensus of the panel, as well as the \textit{Baptist Press’} decision to convey it, implies that the \textit{Baptist Press’} discourse on Sharia law is also characterized by criticism and fear.

Gaffney and his Islamophobic rhetoric proves to be a continuous part of the \textit{Baptist Press’} discourse on Muslim immigration to the United States. In their report from the 2016 National Religious Broadcasters’ International Christian Media Convention, the news outlet once more provides Gaffney with a platform to voice his opinion on the matter of Islam and Muslim immigration. Gaffney reiterates his theory on the conspiracy among radical Muslims to subvert and destroy Western civilization from within by implementing Sharia law. One notable difference from the 2011 article is that Gaffney and his fellow panelists from other conservative organizations provide several specific examples meant to prove that the process of civilization jihad has begun in America. Sandy Rios, a representative of the conservative organization American Family Association, argues that “individuals with ties to Islamist groups” are influencing both public and private institutions in the United States. In this context, the panelists appear highly critical of the political leaders and the mainstream media, as they criticize what they perceive to be a lenient policy and rhetoric from both the Bush and Obama administrations, in addition to inadequate media coverage of crimes and suspicious activities tied to radical Muslims. As evidence for the allegation that civilization jihad is influencing these institutions, the panelists point to President Obama’s visit to a mosque which supposedly had ties to the radical organization Muslim Brotherhood. Additionally, it is suspected that civilization jihad was also the cause of secular media’s lacking coverage of a knifing in Columbus, Ohio, where the perpetrator allegedly shouted “Allahu akbar.”\textsuperscript{53}

The use of the terms “Sharia” and “jihad” found in \textit{Charisma} and the \textit{Baptist Press} reveals certain developments in Islamophobic discourse. Hinze, Mencken, and Tolbert argue that low information rationality is an important factor in shaping attitudes toward Islam. The term entails that many people tend to be prone to influence from an “elite-driven” discourse in the media that aim to shape public opinion through “spinning or framing facts” to suit their political agenda. In this context, this is usually achieved by using “political buzz words.” For example, they argue that the word “Muslim” has become a political buzzword that gives

\textsuperscript{52}Thurman, "U.S. facing threats."

connotations to terrorist attacks.\textsuperscript{54} “Jihad” arguably has an even more powerful effect on readers because it has been frequently associated with the causes for extremist violence and terrorism in the West since 9/11. The exact definition of the word “jihad” depends on its context. It can for example be understood as “a struggle against one’s evil inclinations.” More commonly, it is understood as the only type of warfare that is permitted for Muslims. Contrary to what many Westerners believe, it is strictly regulated, as it is required that it is “called by a duly constituted state authority” and that harm to civilians must be avoided.\textsuperscript{55}

Arguably, the word “Sharia” is also in the process of becoming a buzzword used in these news outlets’ appeal to the low information rationality of their readership. Similar to “jihad,” it is also a term with a complex meaning that is easily misinterpreted by many in the Western world. Additionally, through the definitions of terms such as “civilization jihad” and “immigration jihad,” terms constructed by individuals with an anti-Muslim agenda, it becomes a buzzword by association with the word “jihad.” Since the constructed terms “civilization jihad” and “immigration jihad” are essentially terms for the alleged imposition of Sharia law, it appears that the individuals behind this discourse are attempting to extend the negative connotations of “jihad” to “Sharia.”

2.3 Sharia and end-times convictions

Eschatological beliefs are an essential aspect of American evangelical culture. The most common eschatological conviction among evangelicals is dispensational premillennialism. This is the belief that God has divided history into sections, or “dispensations,” and that the present age will be concluded as several extraordinary events will occur. These events include the mysterious departure of Christians from the world before the seven-year tribulation and the appearance of Antichrist, and eventually the final battle of Armageddon before the beginning of Christ’s “millennial reign.”\textsuperscript{56} Eschatological convictions are an important part of the evangelical worldview, which also makes it an important source of evangelical fear. Bivins emphasizes the significance of the Antichrist in the religion of fear, as he identifies the Antichrist and demons as “the primary strategy through which the religion of fear names its Others.”\textsuperscript{57}

\textsuperscript{54} Hinze, Mencken and Tolbert, “From Obama to Osama,” 21.
\textsuperscript{56} Sutton, \textit{American Apocalypse}, 16-21.
\textsuperscript{57} Bivins, \textit{Religion of Fear}, 33.
Today, Islam plays a central role in the countdown to the second coming of Christ and the end-times. Sharia law is key in several of Charisma’s articles that detail the role of Muslims and Islam in end-times prophecies. This can be observed in the op-ed piece “Is Islam's Prophetic Destiny Found in the Book of Daniel's Leopard Vision?” (2015) written by Steve Magill, a former pastor and the author of several books detailing end-times prophecies. Magill asserts that “Islam's destiny is to create an environment to encourage all nations to submit to a new world order in the name of peace and safety.” He argues that Muslims use two strategies to accomplish this: terrorism and immigration. Allegedly, Muslims will use terrorism to create a sense of “chaos and fear” that will motivate the nations of the world to join together in a new world order. Immigration is, according to Magill, “the Trojan horse giving Islam entrance into the nations.” He asserts that Muslims do not assimilate to the culture of the countries they emigrate to, and that they instead attempt to replace its laws with “Islamic law.” This, he argues, will facilitate the emergence of the Antichrist, who will “usher in a global holocaust against anyone opposed to him.”

Timing the emergence of Antichrist and the return of Jesus has been a central part of millennial beliefs for generations. In another op-ed piece, titled “How Close Are We to the Arrival of the Antichrist?” (2016), Magill expands on his earlier ideas, with more focus on the “Prophetic Timeline.” He places Islam at the center of the current point in the timeline as he considers this point in time the age of Islam. According to Magill, this is the time of the broken Roman Empire, where the three empires the United Kingdom, the United States, and Russia have moved the world into the age of Islam. He asserts that Islam will continue its endeavor to move the world into “a realignment of all nations into ten political/economic regions.” This, he claims, will be done by implementing Sharia law in these countries. Magill argues that:

Islam's prophetic destiny is to assimilate Europe, the United States, and Russia to Islam. Once this is in place, the world will be ready to accept the ten region realignment of all nations. It is out of this new world order that the Antichrist will arrive to enforce his agenda to kill every Jew, Christian, and anyone opposing him, killing one fourth of the world's population.59

As the “Prophetic Timeline” progresses, Magill therefore expects that there will be an increasingly frequent and intense Islamic activism before a “turbo charging of Islamic initiatives to transfer American law to Sharia law” begins. Magill’s link between immigration and the Antichrist echoes the ideas of earlier premillennialists. During the interwar years, American fundamentalists were part of the large group of Americans that were highly skeptical of immigration. They feared that immigrants were aiding Antichrist by weakening the nation, in addition to “contaminating American society” with socialism, communism, and anarchism.

Magill also links the identity of the Antichrist to Islam. Toward the end of his first article, Magill equates the Antichrist to the Islamic prophetic figure Mahdi. Muslims view the Mahdi as the figure that will initiate an era of justice at a point when the world has become depraved, in stark contrast to the purpose of the Antichrist. The pastor Michael Youssef elaborates on Magill’s point of view in an op-ed piece titled “Michael Youssef Breaks Silence to Reveal End Times Secret” (2016). Similar to Magill, Youssef fears that the Antichrist, or the Mahdi, will “turn against the Christians and the Jews and judge the world by establishing the Islamic Sharia.” He argues that the two figures have many similarities, including political, economic, and military power, a connection to the Day of Judgment, and both will attempt to bring the world’s population under one religion.

Placing Sharia law, the Mahdi, and Islam in general at the forefront of doomsday scenarios marks both a break from and a degree of continuity with former premillennial end-time scenarios. Evangelicals have a long history of attributing the role of Antichrist to historical figures. Pentecostals, for instance, have given the role of Antichrist to individuals such as the Pope, Adolf Hitler, Henry Kissinger, Mikhail Gorbachev, and Saddam Hussein at different times during the 20th and 21st centuries. What separates these potential Antichrist figures and the Antichrist figure in the Charisma articles is that these people are actual individuals. More specifically, these individuals, with the exception of the Pope, are tied to

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60 Magill, “How close are we.”
61 Sutton, American Apocalypse, 123.
historical events that have at certain points in time appeared as clear threats to humanity, such as wars and international crises. Similar to the Pope, however, the Mahdi is a religious figure, but he is a religious figure that only exists in prophecies. The notion that the Mahdi is the same figure as the biblical Antichrist might be caused by the fact that the threat of Sharia implementation and the annihilation of Western civilization is not connected to a specific individual. Whereas the threat of Nazism was associated with Hitler and the threat of communism was connected to Gorbachev and other Soviet leaders, there is no single individual that functions as the representative of an Islamic takeover of the West to the same extent. Moreover, these articles display a somewhat recent trend in eschatological convictions. Kidd argues that the prediction that Antichrist himself would be a Muslim that would lead the Muslim nations against Israel in the Battle of Armageddon, as opposed to the more conventional belief that Muslim countries would be mere collaborators to the non-Muslim Antichrist, has become more common since 2001.66

Most SBC conservatives hold similar eschatological convictions as the authors in Charisma in the sense that they are also premillennialists.67 Compared to Charisma, however, the Baptist Press has not published many articles on the end-times. Based on the statements of leading Baptist theologians, one rather extensive article titled “END-TIMES: Scholars differ on what Bible says about subject” (2009) explains that there is significant diversity of views among Southern Baptists when it comes to the end-times. Still, none of these scholars and theologians mention Muslims or Islam, let alone Sharia law or the Mahdi. There is even some disagreement over whether it is important to pay attention to current events in the Middle East for signs of the end-times.68 This indicates that the fear of Muslims is not as rampant among Southern Baptists as they are among Charisma’s authors and readership. It is, however, important to keep Smith’s representative elite fallacy in mind. This article covers the perspectives of typical denominational elites, which are not necessarily identical to those of grassroots members of the SBC. Nevertheless, if Islam was an important part of most Southern Baptists’ eschatological convictions, it is likely that this would have been reflected somehow in the Baptist Press’ discourse, either by mentioning Muslims specifically or through a stronger focus on events in the Middle East.

66 Kidd, American Christians and Islam, 136.
67 Hankins, Uneasy in Babylon, 113.
2.4 Sharia, pluralism, and tolerance

The fact that the United States has become an increasingly culturally and religiously diverse nation is more visible in some areas than others. An example of such an area is the city of Dearborn, Michigan. It has one of the largest proportions of Arab Americans in America, many of whom are Muslim. It is also home to the nation’s largest mosque, the Islamic Center of America. Many evangelicals therefore see Dearborn as fertile ground for efforts to evangelize Muslims. Other evangelicals observe the city with suspicion and consider it the foremost example of a Muslim takeover of American culture. Consequently, there have been accusations that Muslims are in the process of implementing Sharia law in the city.

*Charisma* covered both of these evangelical perspectives on Dearborn in a news article titled “Charismatic Pastor Says Michigan Muslims Open to Gospel” (2010). Here, Adrienne Gaines, news editor of *Charisma News*, reports the views of several Christians with a connection to Dearborn. The backdrop of the article was an incident during the same year’s Arab International Festival, where several evangelical Christians who were preaching at the site of the festival were arrested for disorderly conduct. One of these was David Wood, who was also removed from the festival the year prior due to his direct evangelizing approach, which triggered confrontations with Muslims. Wood explains that he considers Dearborn a place that has been taken over by Muslims and Sharia law, resulting in Christians in the area becoming “second-class citizens.” In addition, Wood alleges that Muslims in Dearborn are prohibiting disagreements with Sharia law and criticism of the Prophet Muhammad.69 Smith postulates that the fact that some people do not want to hear or believe the Christian gospel can create rifts between evangelicals and non-Christians. Furthermore, people of other faiths can perceive evangelicals as “arrogant,” “exclusivist,” and “promoting contempt for other religions.”70 In this case, Wood and his group view the alleged implementation of Sharia law in Dearborn as the main obstacle to their evangelistic efforts, while the Muslims they are attempting to convert view their direct and confrontational approach as contempt for Islam. *Charisma* also provides the chance for two pastors that are less confrontational in their effort to share the gospel to voice their opinion on the matter. Charismatic pastor Barbara Yoder reports that many Muslims in Dearborn have been open to the gospel and that Christian outreach workers must seize the opportunity to evangelize American Muslims and avoid


70 Smith, *Christian America?*, “Chapter 2: The Problem of Pluralism.”
meeting them with fear. Haytham Abi-Haydar of Arabic Fellowship Alliance Church rejects the claims that Muslims have implemented Sharia law in Dearborn, and voices his concerns that individuals such as the ones that were arrested, with their direct and offensive approach to proselytizing, give the impression that evangelicals are “out to get Muslims.”

It should be noted, however, that the views of pastors Abi-Haydar and Yoder do not necessarily solely represent a wish for peaceful coexistence and interfaith dialogue. Although their statements do not contain a confrontational tone by any means, Abi-Haydar and Yoder do represent a desire for the Muslims in Dearborn to accept Christ in their lives and, in that sense, assimilate to the American majority culture to a larger extent. Smith asserts that many evangelical have a romantic view of America’s past, where Americans of earlier generations “were sincere Christians who put their beliefs and morals into practice more faithfully than Americans do today.” A widely-held belief among these evangelicals is that the only way to revive the past era where America more closely resembled a Christian nation is through convincing more people to personally decide to begin following Jesus. Although they do not express this explicitly, the pastors’ comments can be considered a more implicit rejection of pluralism, as they attempt to make Dearborn a more religiously homogenous society through their evangelistic efforts.

Charisma contains numerous examples of explicit attacks on pluralism, diversity, and tolerance that are rooted in the notion that America’s identity as a Christian nation is fading, and connect this in one way or another to Sharia law. An example is Eddie Hyatt, a minister and author of several books on Pentecostalism and the Charismatic movement, and his op-ed piece “Why America’s Future Is Now at Stake in Her Past” (2015). Hyatt laments the fact that it is not socially acceptable to criticize and reject Sharia law because American culture has undergone a development where it has turned into a “Judeo-Islamic-Christian” culture. He emphasizes that America has a special place in God’s will, as he states that, “I know it is not too late for America! At critical times in our nation's history, God has intervened with divine awakenings in response to the cries of His people. I am confident that He will do it again if we will pray and recover the truth about this nation's unique Christian origins.”

Michael Youssef also tackles the issues of pluralism, interfaith dialogue, and tolerance among the various faiths in the United States in the op-ed piece “Is Religious Tolerance America’s New God?” (2011). Youssef indictes the attempts to organize services with multi-

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71 Gaines, "Charismatic Pastor Says."
72 Smith, Christian America?, “Chapter 1: Making Sense of Christian America.”
faith liturgies in Christian churches across America. This is an example of what he refers to as “syncretism,” the reconciliation and blending of different religious beliefs and practices. He labels the proponents of syncretism as naive and criticizes the notion that Islam can coexist with other religions in the United States, as he claims that Sharia law dictates that religion and government should be intertwined. Sharia law therefore renders syncretism and a general sense of unity between adherents of Islam and the other major religions in America impossible. Youssef claims that since syncretism is incompatible with Sharia law, Muslims have to behave like they are in favor of a religious unity in order to achieve the upper hand and subjugate the infidels by exploiting their naivety. He attributes this to a principle in Islam called “taqiah.” He alleges that this principle allows Muslims to go along with infidel activities that would normally not be allowed, in this case the “mixing and mingling of religions” in the name of tolerance, before they can gradually get the upper hand.74 However, this reveals another fundamental misconception of Islamic terms, as “taqiyyah” is, in reality, defined as “the precautionary denial of religious beliefs in the face of persecution.” This term has been used largely by Shi’i Muslims, who, in the face of persecution from Sunni Muslims, have resorted to “taqiyyah” to avoid death.75 Youssef’s rhetoric is in line with Cimino’s findings, as he argues that fear and criticism of syncretism and religious pluralism in American society has become a more prominent part of evangelical discourse on Muslims after 9/11.76

Sharia law is also a prominent topic in the Baptist Press’ coverage of Southern Baptist missionary work in Dearborn. In a news article titled “Mich. Pastors dispel Sharia law reports” (2015), the Baptist Press’ general assignment editor Diana Chandler presents similar viewpoints to pastors Abi-Haydar and Yoder from Charisma’s article. Chandler interviews several Southern Baptist pastors in the area who emphatically dispel the claims about Sharia law taking over the area. Despite this, Chandler still operates with a fearful conception of Sharia law, as she defines it as “a strict, and sometimes tortuous, theocratic form of civil and criminal law.” The Southern Baptist pastors’ statements regarding Muslims, however, do not convey an explicitly intolerant attitude.77 Although exclusivism is fairly common among many evangelicals, they can also be kindhearted and open toward adherents of other faiths,

76 Cimino, "No God in Common,” 169.
and they can often find certain similarities with them. Like the two pastors in the Charisma article, the Southern Baptist pastors seem positive and friendly toward the Muslim inhabitants of Dearborn, although their main focus is to recruit them to their own religion.

The dichotomy of Muslims who adhere to Sharia law and Muslims who do not proves to be a prominent part of these Southern Baptist pastors’ perception of Muslims as well. One of the pastors interviewed by Baptist Press explains that the Muslims living in Dearborn are the type that do not adhere to Sharia law: “Dearborn is a community that likes to go to Walmart to shop, loves to eat, wants to educate their kids in their values, and a lot of their values are good. It’s not full of a bunch of jihadis who want Sharia law.” This statement makes it clear that although they do not think that there is any wish to implement Sharia law in Dearborn, the pastors still consider Sharia law a negative element that should be feared. The Southern Baptist pastor’s comment equates the Dearborn Muslims with other Americans whose values and way of life are acceptable to these pastors. This comment is positive because it does not convey the fear toward Muslims that is so rampant among many evangelicals. But it can be considered negative because the pastor implies that it is not possible to be a regular, acceptable member of American society while simultaneously adhering to Sharia law. The latter interpretation of the statement reflects a pattern that has been prevalent in American society for the past two centuries. As Hunter postulates, there has traditionally been two sides to cultural confrontations in American history. One side of the conflict has been minority groups that attempt to “carve out a space in American life” in order to become their own “distinct moral community.” The other side of the conflict, however, includes many conservative Protestants, who seek to preserve their hegemony when it comes to “defining the habits and meaning of American culture.” The pastor proves to have a positive and welcoming attitude toward Muslims, but with his comment, he also implies that the Muslims living in Dearborn are of the “good” type, as they adhere to what he defines as typical American values, such as shopping at Walmart.

Charisma and the Baptist Press’ reports from Dearborn can be assessed in light of developments in global evangelicalism since the 1970s. Kidd asserts that the 1974 Lausanne Conference and the 1978 Glen Eyrie Conference spearheaded an intensification of proselytizing to Muslims. These conferences led to an agreement that evangelicals should utilize “more personal and accommodating witnessing techniques” specifically aimed at

78 Smith, Christian America?, “Chapter 2: The Problem of Pluralism.”
80 Chandler, “Mich. pastors dispel.”
81 Hunter, Culture Wars, 39.
Muslims. For example, Muslim converts should be allowed to continue their five daily prayers and their weekly Friday worship. This came to be known as the “contextualized approach” to missionary work. It stressed the importance of communicating the gospel in a “culturally appropriate” way that borrowed as many concepts and manners from Islam as possible, while emphasizing the essential parts of Christian teachings and jettisoning expectations considered unnecessary for new Christians.\(^\text{82}\) The highly negative attitude toward Sharia law displayed in the news articles from both Charisma and Baptist Press departs from this contextualized approach to evangelization. Sharia law is highly important to Muslims, as their interpretation will dictate many aspects of how they live their lives, and these pastors’ misconception and criticism of it might be seen as a blatant rejection of a significant part of many Dearborn Muslims’ cultural background.

### 2.5 Sharia tribunals and anti-Sharia legislation

Muslims only make up roughly 1.1% of the total United States population.\(^\text{83}\) But there has been calls for legislation that prevents “foreign law” from infiltrating American law, so-called “anti-Sharia laws.” According to Esposito and DeLong-Bas, “anti-Sharia law bills have been proposed in 42 different states between 2010 and 2017. Two of these states, Texas and Arkansas, have enacted this legislation.” This is in spite of the fact that, contrary to what the individuals behind the anti-Sharia movement believe, no Muslims or Islamic organizations have attempted to substitute the American judicial system with Sharia or Islamic law.\(^\text{84}\) The anti-Sharia movement has taken the attempt by some American Muslims to establish religious tribunals as evidence that the implementation of Sharia law has begun. However, it ignores the fact that these tribunals operate on a voluntary basis alongside American law to resolve civil disputes.

When a group of Muslims living in Northern Texas created such a tribunal, many evangelicals and other social conservatives were enraged. This anger was reflected in a news article in Charisma titled “Islamic Shariah Law Launches Tribunal in America” (2015) written by Benjamin Gill, a writer for Pat Robertson’s Christian Broadcasting Network. The statements of Frank Gaffney, the aforementioned leader of the Center for Security Policy, is given much weight. He paints a picture of Sharia law as a legal system that promotes cruel

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punishments and the oppression of women. Gill presents Gaffney as a legitimate expert, as he introduces him as someone who “has studied what happens when Shariah law enters into state court decisions.” The article also presents a statement from one of the tribunal judges, who emphatically denies the use of cruel punishments such as beheadings and that the tribunal is the first step toward an Islamization of American law. This statement is, however, downplayed in favor of Gaffney’s criticism and fearmongering. Gill concludes the article by referring to a report by Gaffney’s Center for Security Policy, which argues that many immigrants from Muslim countries are actually fleeing from societies dominated by Sharia law. Thus, the think-tank argues that an implementation of Sharia law in America would not only be detrimental to America, but also a betrayal of the immigrants who are allegedly fleeing from Sharia law in their homelands.85

Charisma continued their coverage of the Sharia tribunal in Texas with the more extensive news article “Is Sharia Tribunal in Texas an Islamic Trojan Horse?” (2015). Contrary to the previous article, one of the tribunal judges is given a larger platform to voice his opinion. He uses it to guarantee that the decisions of the tribunal will not conflict with American federal or state law, and that the tribunal will only deal with civil disputes like divorces and business disagreements.86 However, a less neutral view on the matter appears once more in the news article “With Tempers Flaring, Texas Mayor Stands Up to Muslims Pushing Shariah Law” (2015) written by Jessilyn Justice, the director of online news for Charisma. The title of the news article has clear negative connotations, as it implies that Muslims are aggressively pushing Sharia law onto the American people. Justice begins the article by stating that, “The application of foreign law, particularly Shariah law, will not stand in this Texas city if the mayor has anything to say about it.” This is followed up by a statement from the mayor where she welcomes the diversity contributed by other cultures in American society. Yet, she argues that “the fundamental principles that formed our nation, protect our rights and guarantee liberties unmatched anywhere must not be sacrificed as our nation embraces other cultures.”87

What these articles about Sharia law in American courts have in common is that they do not take the nature of the American legal system into account. As explained by John

Esposito and Natana DeLong-Bas, the First Amendment and its Establishment Clause prevents any religious law from becoming the official law of the United States, in the same way that it prevents Jewish or Roman Catholic canon law from becoming official law. Moreover, the American Bar Association has declared that new legislation that prevents the application of foreign law is “unnecessary,” on the grounds that there are already safeguards in place that prevent foreign law from taking the place of American law. These safeguards also prevent discrimination based on gender and religious affiliation.88

Charisma’s editorial staff were even less neutral in their tone. Jennifer LeClaire, a Pentecostal minister and former editor of Charisma Magazine, reports the dismissal of an anti-Sharia bill in Florida in the news article “Anti-Shariah Bill Dies in Florida Senate” (2012). LeClaire’s attitude toward the legislation is clearly visible throughout the article, as she laments the Senate’s dismissal of the bill and attributes it to the lobbying efforts of the Anti-Defamation League, a Jewish organization that fights for civil liberties. Toward the end, she asks a series of rhetorical questions:

“But should shariah law be allowed in America? Should the punishment for crime be public caning and flogging—and even beheading? How about stoning or amputation of a head or foot for stealing? Crucifying and hanging for blasphemy? Killing in the name of family honor?”89

These questions demonstrate that LeClaire’s tone is characterized by a strong sense of fear and a fundamental misunderstanding of most Muslim’s perception of Sharia law. Draconian punishments, such as stoning and amputation for stealing, are disallowed in 52 out of the 57 countries that comprise the Organization of Islamic Cooperation, one of the largest Islamic organizations in the world.90

In contrast to Charisma, the Baptist Press’ coverage of another event in the anti-Sharia controversy is more balanced. The news article “Mo. Governor vetoes ‘anti-Sharia’ bill” (2013) written by assistant editor Erin Roach is a report of the controversy over Missouri governor Jay Nixon’s decision to veto an anti-Sharia bill. Nixon, a Democrat, defends his decision by arguing that the bill “seeks to introduce a solution to a problem that does not exist and, in so doing, puts in jeopardy some of the very liberties that the bill

90 Esposito and DeLong-Bas, Shariah: What Everyone Needs to Know, 186.
purports to protect.” This is likely in reference to the safeguards in place that hinders foreign law from taking precedence over American law. Nixon’s decision met criticism from the Republican State Senator Brian Nieves, who states that “this is truly a big issue for people of faith and those who believe in our Constitution.” Contrary to Charisma’s coverage, no side of the argument is given particular emphasis, as Roach reports both Nixon’s explanation for his decision and the ensuing criticism from Republican senator Brian Nieves in a neutral manner.\(^{91}\)

The Baptist Press’ neutral approach to the coverage of anti-Sharia legislation appears to not reflect the attitude of either the SBC leadership or its members completely. SBC’s stance regarding the anti-Sharia controversy was stated in the summer of 2011, when the denomination adopted several new resolutions at its annual meeting. The resolution, titled “On Religious Liberty in a Global Society,” contained the following statement:

“RESOLVED, That we oppose the imposition of any system of jurisprudence by which people of different faiths do not enjoy the same legal rights.”\(^{92}\) The similar tone to the anti-Sharia legislation implies that the SBC’s attitude is similar to those of Charisma’s authors.

The progressive Baptist News, established to counter the conservative Baptist Press, published a news article that shed more light on the SBC’s stance on the Sharia controversy. Baptist News reports that the president of the ERLC, Richard Land, confirms that the resolution is a response to the controversy over Sharia law in light of the recent controversy over the proposed Save Our State Amendment in Oklahoma. In addition to explicitly mentioning Sharia law as the motivating factor for the resolution, Land argues that using Sharia law would be a violation of the Constitution. This is because he considers the implementation of Sharia law as an establishment of religion, in violation of the First Amendment. Also, he asserts that using Sharia law in courts would violate the 14\(^{th}\) Amendment because it would allegedly not give women equal legal protection. Baptist News also presents the other side of the argument, represented by groups such as the Baptist Joint Committee, an organization that advocates religious liberty which the SBC cut its ties to following the moderate-conservative controversy. This side also uses the Constitution in their argument against the proposed ban on Sharia law, as they argue that it should be deemed


unconstitutional due to the fact that it would single out a specific religion for official
government disapproval, in violation of the Establishment Clause.\(^{93}\)

In the same article, Baptist News also presents a different incident related to Richard
Land’s attitude toward Muslims and Islam in America, creating a backdrop for Land’s anti-Sharia statements. In the same year, Land withdrew from a coalition of various faiths that were opposed to “mosque discrimination” after he received complaints from constituents. Many Southern Baptists had regarded his participation in the coalition as “crossing the line from defense of religious freedom to advocacy of, or promotion of, Islam itself.” The statement indicates that there is a high level of antipathy toward Muslims in America and their establishment of mosques among lay Southern Baptists. According to Baptist News, Land stated that “Southern Baptists believe in religious freedom for everyone, but ‘draw the line’ at denominational leaders filing suit to protect those rights in court when the aggrieved party are Muslims.”\(^ {94}\)

Seemingly, Land’s critique of Islam in America is limited to the perceived implementation of Sharia law, while the grassroots of the denomination appears to amplify the antipathy, to the extent that they do not want their leaders to help protect Muslims’ right to build a mosque. This is a fitting example of Smith’s representative elite fallacy, as it reveals a disparity between the attitudes of SBC leadership and lay members. These differences between ordinary Southern Baptists and the elites of the denomination is in line with Hunter’s description of the differences between the two. He asserts that the members of the denominational leadership are often the ones that convey more progressive interests while the laity tends to convey a more culturally conservative stance.\(^ {95}\) Although one can hardly consider Land progressive when he argues in favor of anti-Sharia legislation, his willingness to participate in the interfaith coalition indicates that he is less Islamophobic than many ordinary SBC members. What is more, it also indicates that the grassroots of the SBC have a high level of influence over the denomination’s leadership. This, on the other hand, is in stark contrast to another pattern described by Hunter. He ascribes “elites,” a group that includes “religious administrators of all denominations,” a tremendous amount of power in the shaping of public discourse, as he asserts that they are generally the ones that develop and

\(^{93}\) Bob Allen, ”SBC resolution targets Sharia law,” Baptist News, June 20, 2011, https://baptistnews.com/article/sbc-resolution-targets-sharia-law/#.Wwk_y9OFPBK.
\(^{94}\) Allen, ”SBC Resolution Targets.”
\(^{95}\) Hunter, Culture Wars, 91.
articulate public culture and discussion. With this case, however, it appears that grassroots Southern Baptist are able to dictate the denominational leader’s actions.

When it comes to the lack of coverage of Land’s comments about the resolution in the Baptist Press, it remains unclear. However, it can be considered reason to speculate whether the Baptist Press has any reasons not to publish this. The inclusion of new resolutions is a significant event for a religious denomination, as it indicates that there are pressing concerns in society that need an official statement from the denomination. A possible explanation might be that there is such a wide consensus among Southern Baptist laity on the matter of Sharia law in American courts. Thus, there was no need to publish an article where Land explained and defended the decision to include an anti-Sharia stance in an official denominational resolution.

2.6 Summary

There are both differences and similarities in the Southern Baptist and Pentecostal discourse on Sharia law. Both Charisma and the Baptist Press convey a clear sense of fear that Muslim immigrants are planning to subvert American culture through the imposition of Sharia law. A notable difference is the role ascribed to Sharia law in relation to eschatological convictions. Whereas Charisma’s authors give a prominent role to Sharia law and Islam in general in their end-time scenarios, the Baptist Press does not mention Sharia or Islam in any articles on the end-times. Both Charisma and the Baptist Press demonstrate implicitly negative attitudes toward the notion of a religiously pluralistic society, although the negative sentiments found in several op-eds in Charisma are far more explicit. Finally, Charisma’s news articles on anti-Sharia legislation demonstrate a clear lack of neutrality and fearful attitude toward Sharia law. While the Baptist Press has a more balanced approach in their coverage, a news article by the more progressive Baptist News reveals that there are different attitudes toward Muslims within the SBC. These differences will be examined further in the following chapter, which analyzes the discourse on President Trump’s immigration order.

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96 Hunter, Culture Wars, 59-60.
3 The response to President Trump’s immigration order

3.1 Introduction

The victory of Donald Trump in the 2016 presidential election marked a turning point in the official attitude of the American government toward Muslims. His rhetoric toward Muslims during the campaign, which included a call for a “total and complete shutdown” of Muslim immigration to the United States, sparked both massive protests and support domestically and internationally. The controversy escalated shortly after President Trump took office, when he signed Executive Order 13769. The immigration order temporarily prohibited the entry of immigrants from seven predominantly Muslim countries. The immigration order has since been halted and revised as a result of various legal challenges. One of the issues in these legal challenges have been that it violates the First Amendment to the Constitution, which famously states that “Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof.”

Evangelicals are among the staunchest supporters of President Trump and his policies. The exit polls after the 2016 election showed that roughly 80 percent of evangelical voters gave him their vote. Initially, it appeared that many evangelicals were negative to the immigration order, as numerous prominent evangelical leaders signed a newspaper ad that denounced it on the basis of Christianity’s call to aid the suffering. Overall, however, research shows that evangelicals have largely supported it. At the height of the controversy over the immigration order in February, 2017, the Public Religious Research Institute found that white evangelicals were the only religious group in which a majority supported it and that 79 percent of evangelicals agreed that President Trump did not violate the United States Constitution.

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97 U.S. Const. amend. I.
3.2 Southern Baptists: disagreements

One of the main distinctions of the broader Baptist tradition is the emphasis on religious liberty and the separation of church and state. An important event in this context is the correspondence between the Danbury Baptists and President Thomas Jefferson in 1801, where the former expressed their concern for the establishment of religion. In his response, President Jefferson concurred and coined the term “wall of separation” to describe the relationship between government and religion. This metaphor has become deeply embedded in American culture, and it has remained a controversial element in society, as various groups debate whether it “informs or distorts constitutional doctrines regarding the non-establishment and free exercise of religion.”

Although both moderates and conservatives promote religious liberty and the separation of church and state, there is significant diversity in their understanding of the tradition. Hankins argues that an important difference between the two groups is that moderates have a strict separationist stance regarding the separation of church and state, while conservatives have an accommodationist stance. The former stance entails that government and religion should remain completely separate and the latter stance entails that government should accommodate religion as much as possible, provided that it does not discriminate between different religions. Paradoxically, many conservatives have been influenced by the views of the Revolutionary Era Baptist preacher Isaac Backus. He argued for a church-state relationship where the church influenced the state and society as a whole reflected Protestant Christianity. Moderates, on the other hand, usually look to John Leland to support their stance. Leland was an individualist in the sense that he held that there should not be anything between the individual and God, including the state. He therefore argued for a strict separation between church and state, or, in other words, a high wall of separation prohibiting all types of government interference with religion. Consequently, he was a strong supporter of religious liberty for all individuals, regardless what faith they adhered to. Thus, both camps within the SBC have accused each other of misinterpreting the Baptist tradition of defending religious liberty and church and state.

Religious liberty once more became a heated issue for the SBC in the aftermath of Trump’s call for “the total and complete shutdown of Muslim immigration.” After Richard Land stepped down from his position as president of the ERLC in 2013, Russell Moore

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succeeded him. Moore has proved to be very different from his predecessor. Many regard his tenure as president of the ERLC as a sign that the denomination is experiencing a realignment, as he has proven to be critical toward the Christian Right, and he has garnered support among many young and African-American Southern Baptists. Moore was, from the starting point, negative to several of Donald Trump’s statements and actions, as well as his supporters. What he was probably most critical to was the proposed travel ban, and he frequently criticized Trump’s rhetoric in the media. In a blog post titled “Is Donald Trump Right About Closing the Border to Muslims?” (2015) published on his website, he attacks Trump’s rhetoric in the name of religious liberty by stating that, “anyone that cares an iota about religious liberty should denounce this reckless, demagogic rhetoric.” Moore elaborates by invoking the long Baptist tradition of defending religious liberty in order to argue against Trump’s suggested discriminatory policy. He refers to John Leland in order to support his argument against the suggested immigration order. Moore states that in Leland’s list of the groups that should be granted religious freedom, he referred to “Turks,” a word used for Muslims in the 18th century. Moore argues that Leland did this intentionally in spite of the fact that there were barely any Muslims in America at the time. He asserts that this is because Leland wanted to emphasize the necessity of religious freedom as a God-given natural right for all individuals, even minuscule and unpopular minorities, and not something given to a preferred religious group by the government.

Moore’s blog post expresses a take on religious liberty that is in line with the stance generally held by Southern Baptist moderates. A clear indication of this is his decision to cite John Leland in order to support his argument against the proposed immigration order and emphasize religious liberty for adherents of all faiths. Nowhere to be found are Isaac Backus’ ideas about an American society largely influenced by Protestantism, which have been supported by conservative SBC leaders such as Richard Land. Moore’s inclusive take on religious liberty is an even sharper contrast to many who belong to the Christian Right. They tend to be proponents of Christian nationalism, the notion that the United States is a godly anointed nation founded on Christian values and principles. For example, Merino found a

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105 Hankins, Uneasy in Babylon, 132.
correlation between the belief that the United States is a Christian nation and negative attitudes toward the building of a mosque in one’s neighborhood. Likewise, Shortle and Gaddie found that a high level of agreement with Christian nationalism is associated with a favorable attitude toward policies that prevent Muslims from accessing national and local public space.

Moore’s sentiments regarding Trump and his supporters created disagreements among many Southern Baptists. Both Southern Baptist elites and rank-and-file members were negative to his comments, to the extent that some churches decided to withhold financial support to the Southern Baptist Convention’s umbrella fund and it was speculated if Moore would be forced to resign from his position. However, other Southern Baptists supported Moore, including prominent African American denominational leaders such as former SBC president Fred Luter. The controversy over Trump’s statements against Muslim immigrants during the election coincided with a controversy within the denomination over support for the building of a mosque in New Jersey. The ERLC, along with the SBC’s International Missions Board, filed an amicus brief that supported a Muslim community’s religious liberty when plans to build a mosque were denied. Consequently, a trustee of the latter organization stated that “Islam is not a religion and does not deserve protection” and resigned from his position. This was followed by an official apology from the organization’s president for the participation in the brief.

The fact that elites partook in the backlash against Moore alongside grassroots members highlights a different aspect of Smith’s representative elite fallacy. According to Smith, it is also important to note that evangelical elites do not speak with a unified voice and that their opinions “can be found spread across the political and ideological map.” This also becomes apparent when comparing Moore’s reaction to that of the more conservative Richard Land in the mosque controversy described in the previous chapter. The opinions of ordinary members of the SBC made Land withdraw from an interfaith coalition in support of the building of mosques, whereas Moore withstood the criticism by both ordinary members and the leadership of the SBC. Although he later apologized for his critical statements about evangelical Trump supporters, he remained critical to Trump.

Moore’s criticism of the immigration order and Trump’s supporters can also be seen in light of another aspect of the history of the Baptist tradition, namely the tradition of

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106 Merino, “Religious Diversity in a ‘Christian Nation,’” 244.
108 Bailey, “Could Southern Baptist Russell Moore Lose His Job?”
109 Smith, *Christian America?*, “Introduction: The Big Evangelical Question.”
dissent. Hankins argues that this tradition has developed throughout the denomination’s history. The necessity for this tradition gradually faded, as Southern Baptists began to dominate Southern culture. The South, however, gradually became less isolated and adapted to the broader American culture in the 20th century. One of Hankins’ main arguments is that after conservatives took control of the denomination, they reintroduced the tradition of dissent by participating in the ongoing culture war and opposing the modern, pluralistic, and secular American culture instead of rivals within their own denomination.110 Moore’s statements about Trump can be considered yet another development of this tradition, as he criticizes the opposition to a pluralistic society among many conservative Southern Baptists and the Christian Right instead. Since Moore has support among groups such as the younger generation and African American members within the SBC, it appears that he is not simply a renegade, and that the controversy over his statements about Trump and his supporters might indicate an increased moderate influence on a denomination long dominated by more conservative forces.

This dissent from the Christian Right consensus can be more clearly observed in a news article published in the Baptist Press titled “Christian response to refugees & Muslims discussed” (2015), written by the Baptist Press’ Washington bureau chief, Tom Strode. The article is a report of a panel discussion sponsored by the ERLC on the Christian response to the Syrian refugee crisis. The Southern Baptists that were in attendance were Russell Moore and Afshin Ziafat, a former Muslim and renowned leading pastor for the Southern Baptist Providence Church in Frisco, Texas. The backdrop of the discussion was the evangelist Franklin Graham’s support for Donald Trump’s statements about Muslim immigrants during the presidential campaign.111 Graham is the son of the late legendary evangelist Billy Graham and the heir to his father’s organization. The younger Graham appears to have taken a clearer political stance than his father, as he has sided with the Christian Right on matters such as homosexuality, in addition to previously having referred to Islam as a “wicked and evil religion.”112

Strode reports that there is widespread agreement among the panelists. Ziafat and Moore criticize Trump’s wish to close the borders to Muslim refugees, but they also criticize Graham and other evangelical leaders’ support for Trump’s rhetoric. They problematize the

110 Hankins, Uneasy in Babylon, 274.
rhetoric of Trump and his evangelical supporters by arguing that it is detrimental to the effort of spreading the Gospel. In reference to Trump’s proposed ban against Muslims and Graham’s support of this polemic, Moore asserts that the discourse is “something that ought to cause the hair on the back of the neck of every Christian and every American to stand” and “my response to my Muslim neighbors cannot be one of fear and loathing.” Thus, his attitude toward Muslims is in direct opposition to the fearful discourse demonstrated in the previous chapter. The issue was part of a bigger story, Moore argues, because, “if we don’t stand up for those who are unpopular at the moment, we certainly will see those very same impulses being turned against others in the fullness of time.” Contrary to Moore, Ziafat displays a sense of fear, in spite of his criticism of the proposed immigration order. While he encourages outreach to Muslims, he also maintains that Islam is not a religion of peace. Yet, he states that “the chances are very unlikely that the Muslim neighbor across the street is jihadist.”

The final paragraph of Strode’s news article largely reflects the rest of the Baptist Press’ coverage of the immigration order. Here, Strode concludes by referring to a 2011 SBC resolution titled “On Immigration and the Gospel.” The resolution acknowledges that Southern Baptists disagree on how to achieve an immigration policy that is both humane and just. The rest of the Baptist Press’ coverage largely reflects this disagreement, especially regarding the question of whether to focus on national security or compassion when it comes to the matter of Muslim refugees. Thus, the immigration order appears to have triggered a different perspective regarding Muslim immigration. Whereas the Baptist Press’ discourse on Sharia law was, in several instances, characterized by a clear sense of fear, the discourse on Trump’s immigration order is more hesitant and neutral in its tone. Also, in its coverage of the immigration order, the Baptist Press does not promote any conspiracy theories akin to that of Frank Gaffney.

The disagreement over the response to the immigration order is reflected in the news article “Trump immigration order draws protests, support” (2017). Here, chief national correspondent David Roach first presents the views of Moore and Frank S. Page, president of the Executive Committee of the SBC, as representatives of the denominational leadership. Roach presents Moore’s perspective by outlining the key points from a letter he sent to President Trump shortly after the signing of Executive Order 13769. In the letter, Moore repeated his call for equal treatment of adherents of all religions, as he urged the president to

113 Strode, “Christian response.”
114 Strode, “Christian response.”
“Affirm your administration's commitment to religious freedom and the inalienable human dignity of persecuted people, whether Christian, Jewish, Muslim, Yazidi, or other, and adjust the Executive Order as necessary.” Page’s statement is characterized by a more neutral tone than Moore’s, as he merely stresses the SBC’s history of emphasizing the balance between national security and compassion. In this context, however, he appears to be leaning more toward the stance of Moore, as he also states that “Southern Baptists have always reached out to those who are on our shores and will continue to minister in Jesus’ name to all who are around us.”

Roach also presents the opinion of Robert Jeffress, which contradicts Moore’s. Jeffress is a pastor of the First Baptist Church, a megachurch in Dallas. He is also a prominent member of President Trump’s Evangelical Executive Advisory Board, as he has frequently justified several of the president’s more controversial policies in the media. Moreover, Jeffress has made several offensive statements about Islam, such as referring to it as an “evil religion” and that it “promotes pedophilia.” In this case, Jeffress’ tone is more moderate, without any explicitly derogatory remarks about Islam. He defends the immigration order by arguing that it is directed at immigrants from certain specific countries with connections to terrorism, not adherents of a specific religion. Thus, Jeffress fails to address Trump’s Islamophobic rhetoric that preceded the immigration order, for instance his call for a “total and complete shutdown of Muslims entering the United States.” His final statement is in stark contrast to Moore’s request that religious groups should be treated equally, as he also supports Trump’s call for preferential treatment of Christian refugees due to their status as a persecuted minority in several countries.

The topic of Christian refugees was handled more extensively in the news article “Immigration order serves as reminder to pray” (2017). Here, the Baptist Press’s Diana Chandler emphasizes how President Trump’s temporary ban affects the Christian refugees from the predominantly Muslim countries on Trump’s list. She states that Christians are frequently persecuted in most of the countries mentioned in the revised immigration order. The second part of the article is a rundown of the human rights status of Christians in the countries mentioned in the immigration order written by the Christian non-profit organization Open Doors. The article can be interpreted as an implicit critique of the immigration order, as

117 Roach, “Immigration order draws protests, support.”
it fails to take into account that there are many Christians among the predominantly Muslim countries. In spite of this, the critique is not based on a sense of equality as human beings with certain inalienable rights, as is the case with Russell Moore when he argues for Constitutional and human rights for adherents of all religions.

To label the focus on Christian refugees as a rejection of pluralism would be excessive, but it can definitely be viewed as an indication that compassion for all refugees is not the primary concern of all Southern Baptists. If compassion for the Syrian refugees as a whole was the most pressing concern, the Baptist Press would likely have emphasized the dire need of the Syrian refugees in general, rather than emphasizing solidarity with the refugees that happen to be fellow Christians. However, emphasizing the plight of persecuted Christians is a common phenomenon among American evangelicals. According to the historian Melanie McAlister, the suffering of persecuted Christians in other parts of the world became an increasingly important concern for American evangelicals during the latter half of the 20th century. Initially, this was centered on the “persecuted church” in communist China and the Soviet Union. After the Cold War ended, evangelicals began to see Islam as the main danger in relation to the persecution of Christians. Although there is no explicitly Islamophobic rhetoric in the article, Open Door’s rundown in the second half of the article stresses role of Islam in the persecution in many of the countries, and paints a fearful picture of life in a Muslim majority country.

David Roach continued to cover the balance between compassion and national security. In a news article, titled “Trump immigration order sparks biblical analysis” (2017), he presents the perspectives of Matthew Soerens and James Hoffmeier. Soerens, a spokesman for World Relief, an evangelical relief agency, represents evangelicals who argue for a more compassionate immigration policy. On the other side of the argument is Hoffmeier, professor of Old Testament and history at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School and author of the book The Immigration Crisis, who stresses the importance of national security. Soerens asserts that the refugee-vetting process is already working well, presumably in reference to President Trump’s call for an extreme vetting process of immigrants in order to assure that no Islamic extremists are granted entry to the United States. He points to the fact that none of the 3 million refugees granted entry into the United States after 1980 through the refugee

120 Chandler, “Immigration order serves.”
resettlement program have become perpetrators of terrorist attacks. Soerens draws biblical parallels, as he states that biblical figures such as Abraham, Joseph, and Jesus were refugees. This is in line with Smith, who posits that evangelicals often express their civility and tolerance through the readily available “ethical instruction” of the Bible. Conversely, Hoffmeier’s statements demonstrate that the Bible can also be used to promote a fearful attitude toward others, as he uses the Bible to support an argument for a thorough vetting process and a strict immigration policy. For example, he cites the Book of Joshua and explains that when the Israelites failed to vet the Gibeonites, who lied about their identities and where they came from, “God’s people violated an order regarding the people of the land which God had commanded.”

Roach concludes his news article with a brief overview of the official stance of the SBC on immigration. He uses the statements of Ronnie Floyd, another member of Trump’s Evangelical Executive Advisory Board and former president of the SBC, to present the official view of the SBC on the matter. Floyd emphasizes the aspect of compassion in immigration policy, but he also refers to a 2016 resolution on “refugee ministry.” This resolution calls for “the strictest security measures possible in the refugee screening and selection process.” In addition, it encourages “Southern Baptist churches and families to welcome and adopt refugees into their churches and homes as a means to demonstrate to the nations that our God longs for every tribe, tongue, and nation to be welcomed at His throne.” Identifying America as God’s “throne” suggests that the SBC resolution is influenced by Christian nationalism. However, the sense of Christian nationalism conveyed in this resolution is in contrast to Merino, who finds a correlation between Christian nationalism and being less willing to include Muslims in society. The resolution is more inclusive in its tone, as it suggests that people of all national, ethnic, and religious backgrounds are welcome at “His throne.”

This welcoming attitude toward refugees highlights another major theme in Southern Baptist discourse on the refugee crisis and President Trump’s immigration order: the conversion of Muslim refugees. According to Kidd, American evangelicals have been particularly fascinated by Muslim converts to Christianity throughout their history. One of Kidd’s key examples is the popularity of conversion narratives in missionary tracts and

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122 Smith, Christian America?, “Explaining evangelical civility and tolerance.”
123 Roach, “Immigration order sparks.”
124 Roach, “Immigration order sparks.”
125 Merino, “Religious Diversity in a ‘Christian Nation,’” 244.
memoirs that were widely distributed when missionary efforts in the Middle East increased drastically in the 19th century. These conversion narratives gave American evangelicals the impression that Muslims were “spiritually hungry” and therefore easily converted to Christianity. A pervasive concern in most of the Baptist Press’ coverage of Trump’s rhetoric during the election and the subsequent immigration order is how it will affect missionary efforts directed at Muslims. Several Southern Baptists see the immigration order as an obstacle. For example, Ziafat laments that “when the mission field is coming to us, then all of a sudden we’re saying, ‘No. Get out. We want protection.’” Likewise, in his blog post, Russell Moore states that “[…] we should seek to persuade our Muslim neighbors of the goodness and truth of the gospel.”

Southern Baptist missionaries in particular have a history of reacting negatively to crude statements and actions aimed at Muslims. In the aftermath of 9/11, former president of the denomination, Jerry Vines, claimed that the Prophet Muhammad was a “demon-possessed pedophile,” a comment that caused significant controversy. Consequently, a group of Southern Baptist missionaries working in Muslim countries wrote a letter to Vines and other evangelical leaders, where they asked for more focus on sharing the message of Christ and criticized his degrading comments about Muhammad. Diana Chandler uncovers that there are similar sentiments among Southern Baptist missionaries in Dearborn, Michigan. She presents the views of several pastors doing outreach and missionary work in the news article “Travel ban doesn’t slow outreach to Muslims in Mich.” (2017). She reports that many Muslims in the area are concerned that they will be sent back to their countries of origin, regardless of their immigration status. The pastors do not explicitly condemn the immigration order, but their statements reflect a sense of worry over the effect the immigration order will have on their work in the area. One pastor advises missionary workers to avoid mentioning the immigration order, especially if they support it. Another pastor explains that “we just seek to let them know that we love them regardless of their immigration status. There's certainly some fear that's there, so we just try to dispel that by imbibing the truth and showing the Christian love.”

126 Kidd, American Christians and Islam, xv.
127 Strode, “Christian response.”
128 Moore, “Is Donald Trump Right.”
129 Kidd, American Christians and Islam, 147.
3.3 Charisma: staunch support

In contrast to the Baptist Press, Charisma News’ coverage of the 2016 election and the first year of Donald Trump’s tenure as president of the United States was overwhelmingly favorable. The coverage of the election was characterized by editorials, op-ed, and news reports from rallies with titles such as “Solid Evidence That the Media Is Biased Against Donald Trump” (2016) and “Is Hillary Clinton the Antichrist or an Illuminati Witch?” (2016). This discourse continued into the coverage of the first year of his tenure as president of the United States, with titles of articles such as “The Left Finds New Way to Bash Trump: His Connection With Pentecostals” (2017) and “Promises Kept: Looking Back on Trump’s 2017 Accomplishments” (2018). In addition, Steve Strang, the founder and CEO of Charisma Media, published a book titled God and Donald Trump where he argued that there was a supernatural element involved in the outcome of the 2016 election.

Charisma’s coverage of President Trump’s rhetoric and the immigration order is driven far more by fear than the Baptist Press’ coverage. The strong display of the emotion of fear in both this discourse and the discourse on Sharia law can be tied to the Pentecostal worldview, which the sociologists Andrew Greeley and Michael Hout characterize as “grim.” They further explain that Pentecostals tend to believe that people, and the world in general, are evil.131 This might be explained by Pentecostals’ emphasis on emotional expression. As opposed to the more doctrine-oriented Calvinist tradition that the SBC is a part of, Pentecostalism is known for its expressive worship style, a facet of its emotional and experience-oriented nature.132

In 2016, Charisma published a series of three op-ed pieces titled “The Case for Donald Trump.” These were all written by Larry Craig, a pastor and author of the book The Importance of Healing. Craig highlights various aspects of Trump’s suggested policies that he considers positive. Muslim immigration appears to be the most important topic to Craig, as the third and final op-ed piece is entirely dedicated to attacking Muslims and the political attitudes that have facilitated Muslim immigration in light of Trump’s call to stop Muslim immigration to America.133 This op-ed piece is a sensible point of departure for the present

analysis because the main themes also appear in many of Charisma’s other articles on Trump’s rhetoric against Muslims and his subsequent immigration order.

The first part of the third op-ed piece is an indictment of Islam itself, and it contains many of the arguments generally found among the Christian Right. One of the key aspects of “hard right” evangelical discourse on Islam is that Muslims are a security threat and that Islam is an “inherently violent” religion. Craig’s take on Islam does acknowledge that violent and radical Muslims are different from the vast majority of Muslims. Yet, he downplays this fact by asserting that the acceptance and encouragement of violence in certain situations is an integral part of Islam. Thus, he argues that the violence committed by radical Muslims is merely an exacerbation of what is already present in the religion. This is rooted in his understanding of radicalization as a process that “takes something that is already there and overdoes it.” He argues that when Protestants become radical, they give up all their possessions and dedicate their lives to helping those in need, Catholics take a vow of celibacy, and Jews begin to dress in black and take extreme measures to uphold the Sabbath. When Muslims become radical, he claims, they become murderers.

Although Craig demonstrates a fear of Muslim terrorism and violence, his main issue with Muslims is that he perceives them as a covert threat to American culture. This, he contends, is due to the promotion of the values of multiculturalism, diversity, and pluralism. He argues that these values are changing and gradually destroying America. These sentiments reflect one of Smith’s categories of evangelical attitudes toward pluralism, namely opposition, which is motivated by the belief that the increasing cultural and religious diversity of the United States is detrimental to the country. Craig also contends that Muslim immigrants do not assimilate to American society and culture because there are too many fundamental differences between Western civilization and Islam. He criticizes the accommodation of Muslim immigrants in favor of preserving the Christian values of America. This can be compared to anti-Catholicism in the 19th century. The large number of Catholic immigrants to the United States resulted in the emergence of the Anglo-Saxon Protestant nativist movement, which asserted that Catholic immigrants were unassimilable to what the nativists believed to be a naturalized Protestant American culture.

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135 Craig, “Case for Donald Trump, III.”
136 Craig, “Case for Donald Trump, III.”
137 Smith, Christian America?, “Chapter 2: The Problem of Pluralism.”
138 Craig, “Case for Donald Trump, III.”
The fear of Muslims as a threat to both American culture and national security continued in Charisma’s discourse after Trump took office. This can, for example, be observed in the op-ed piece “President Trump’s Most Important Message to NATO Wasn’t About Money” (2017) written by George Rasley. This op-ed was originally published on the online news outlet Conservative HQ, which identifies itself as “the online news source for conservatives and Tea Partiers committed to bringing limited-government constitutional conservatives to power.” Rasley reports Trump’s tough tone toward NATO, and his demand that they meet agreed budget spending on the alliance, which was frequently covered in the secular media at the time. In contrast to the secular media, Rasley emphasizes the part of Trump’s message where he urges NATO to apply stricter immigration policies. According to Trump, these lenient immigration policies have led to terrorists entering the country by posing as refugees. Thus, the president argues that multiple terrorist attacks have occurred that could have been prevented with a stricter immigration policy.

Similar to Craig, however, Rasley also focuses on Muslim immigrants as a more covert cultural threat to America and the West. Rasley extends Trump’s warning against terrorists entering Western countries as a result of lenient immigration policies by also asserting the threat narrative of “cultural jihad.” Whereas President Trump’s main concern is Muslims as a security threat, Rasley emphasizes the covert cultural takeover of America as the real threat. In fact, Rasley maintains that the threat of “an export of Sharia law through cultural jihad” is a more effective threat to America than Islamic terrorism. Thus, the article is an example of how Charisma’s writers amplify the rhetoric of Trump with a rhetoric of their own that is even more conspiratorial and fearful.

The misconception of Islamic terms also occurs in Charisma’s coverage of President Trump’s immigration order. Rasley attempts to validate his claim by asserting that the alleged cultural takeover is in accordance with an Islamic doctrine. He refers to radical Muslims’ plan to covertly subjugate American culture as a part of “hijra,” which he claims is an established Islamic doctrine that facilitates “invasion through immigration.” Similar to descriptions of the meaning of “taqiyyah” and other Islamic terms found in the previous chapter, this term is grossly misunderstood. To Muslims, “hijrah” is simply a term for the Prophet Muhammad’s emigration from the city of Mecca to Medina, where he laid the

142 Rasley, “Trump’s Most Important Message.”
143 Rasley, “Trump’s Most Important Message.”
foundation for the Islamic community. In later years, it has begun to carry symbolic meaning, as Muslims use it to symbolize the willingness to go through hardships for one’s faith and to retain the feeling of hope in times of persecution.144

A different op-ed piece, titled “Donald Trump Has an Opportunity with Evangelicals” (2015), ties the fear of Muslims specifically to the evangelical community. It is written by David Brody, a well-known personality on Pat Robertson’s Christian Broadcasting Network who later became the network’s White House Correspondent. Brody argues that Trump’s wish to stop Muslim immigration is a golden opportunity for him to improve his relationship with evangelical voters, and he accentuates Muslim immigration as an essential issue in the presidential election. Brody also urges Trump to delve further into the “underlying theological problems with Islam and the Quran” in his political rhetoric. Brody’s article does not merely call for a political rhetoric characterized by a theological dichotomization of Islam and Christianity, but he also calls for Trump to follow up his statement by delving “in to the deeper discussion of why radical Islamic terrorists hate our way of life.” Finally, he emphasizes the necessity for Trump to turn his critique of Islam into a larger movement that will call for Muslim leaders to denounce Sharia law and jihad in order to resonate properly with evangelicals.145 In contrast to the Baptist Press’ coverage of the evangelical reaction to then-candidate Trump’s statement, Brody’s op-ed is positive, to an extent even celebratory, to what he sees as the presidential candidate’s attempt to appeal to the Christian Right.

Charisma’s strong ties to the Christian Right became more evident when Trump held his election promise and signed the immigration order and several prominent evangelical leaders supported it. Like the Baptist Press, Charisma also covered Franklin Graham’s comments. Charisma presents his reply to the protests over Trump’s rhetoric in a news article titled “Franklin Graham: How Christians Should Respond to the ‘Muslim’ Ban” (2017) written by Jessilyn Justice. Justice reports that Graham stresses the importance of a thorough vetting process of all immigrants and that authorities should ensure that none of the immigrants have views that are incompatible with the American Constitution. Graham elaborates by explicitly mentioning radical Muslims’ alleged desire to bring Sharia law to America as one of these views. Referring to Graham’s comments as “words of wisdom,” Justice reveals a clearly positive attitude toward his statements about the immigration

order. This is in stark contrast to the Baptist Press’ coverage of Franklin Graham’s support of Trump’s Islamophobic statements, which was more neutral, and also presented some critical views on Graham and other evangelical leaders’ support of Trump. Based on the Islamophobic discourse and the support for the statements of Trump and Christian Right, it appears that Charisma belongs, and attempts to appeal to, a segment in American Pentecostalism that is located in the far-right of the American political spectrum. This is not surprising when reviewing the development of American Pentecostalism since its beginning in the early 20th century. Stephens asserts that a “vocal segment” of Pentecostals formed an alliance with other highly conservative Christians after they had become accepted in the broader evangelical community.

The clear ties to the Christian Right and support of Donald Trump raises the question of how Charisma’s discourse conveys the role of the political Left in this issue. The portrayal of the Left as an enemy is pervasive in many of Charisma’s op-eds and editorials in general. For example, in the op-ed piece “The Left Really Is Trying to Silence Us” (2018), Michael Brown, a radio host and author of the book Playing with Holy Fire: A Wake-Up Call to the Pentecostal-Charismatic Church, indicts the Left’s call for diversity and tolerance. He sees this as hypocrisy, as the Left is itself responsible for the suppression of views that oppose their own. As he argues, “The left wants to enforce its intolerant groupthink on everyone else. leftist tolerance is a myth.” Similar views can be observed in the editorial “The Left Finds a New Way to Bash Trump: His Connection With Pentecostals” (2017) written by the founder of Charisma, Steve Strang. The editorial is a response to a blog post published on the website Right Wing Watch, which criticizes POTUS Shield, a network of Pentecostal leaders, and their goal of “helping Trump bring about the reign of God in America and the world.” Strang argues that the Left sees these Pentecostal leaders’ “spiritual warfare” as threatening. He also emphasizes the opposing worldview of the Left, as he states that, “I'm sure those attacking us are people we would like if we were neighbors. But their worldview is diametrically opposed to ours, and they are vying for power in our culture and the

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government.” One study indicates that Pentecostals are not as disdainful of the Left as one might expect. To their surprise, Greeley and Hout found that Pentecostals were more likely than their conservative Christian peers to vote for Democratic candidates Bill Clinton and Al Gore in the 1996 and 2000 presidential elections, in spite of being considered the most conservative Christian group. However, Stephens asserts that Southern Pentecostals have shown a disdain for the liberal establishment and the Democratic Party since the Catholic John F. Kennedy won the presidential election in 1960.

Charisma continues this disdain for the liberal establishment in their coverage of the immigration order. A prominent part of Donald Trump’s rhetoric during his presidential campaign was the indictment of what he perceived to be the political establishment’s fear of offending certain groups in order to not break social norms. He referred to these elites with the derogatory term “politically correct.” The indictment of weak and politically correct political leaders is also a prominent part of Craig’s op-ed piece. He argues that these political leaders have:

[…] proceeded to divide our country into as many groups and subgroups of people as possible, almost all with competing interests, needs and demands. They have stifled our freedoms so as not to “offend” even the smallest of those groups, even if only the slightest possibility exists such a thing might occur. And they have cast everyone as either a victim or an oppressor in a never-ending clash of classes, races and religions.

He claims that this will facilitate Islam’s increasing influence on America. This reflects one of Cimino’s key findings, which is that different types of evangelical literature on Islam tend to convey the notion that Islam’s real nature is “obscured in a secular and politically correct society.” This entails a belief that political leaders and society at large turn a blind eye to the alleged inherently violent nature of Islam in order to preserve the values of relativism in a religiously diverse society.

153 Craig, “The Case for Donald Trump, III.”
154 Cimino, ”No God in Common,” 169.
Other articles in *Charisma* more explicitly link the political correctness of the Left with a facilitation of a covert Muslim attack on American culture. This line of thought is particularly visible in the op-ed piece “‘Allahu Akbar’ Becomes a Rallying Call as Leftists Join Forces With Radical Muslims to Fight Trump All Across America” (2017) written by Michael Snyder, a Republican candidate for the First Congressional District of Idaho. Snyder begins his article by claiming that an “unholy alliance between anti-Trump leftists and radical Muslims is beginning to emerge all over America.” The “unholy alliance,” he claims, is evidenced through the fact that the people protesting against Trump’s immigration order are a mix of two different groups of people:

On the one hand, you have hardcore Muslims who are chanting “Allahu Akbar” and believe Islamic law will someday prevail over the U.S. Constitution; and on the other hand, you have radical leftists marching right next to them protesting for women’s rights, gay rights and civil rights. The ironic thing about all of this is that if the radical Muslims have their way, the leftists will either convert to Islam someday or be completely destroyed. But for now, they need one another, and so a very odd marriage of convenience has taken place.\(^{155}\)

Snyder elaborates that “radical Muslims” and “radical leftists” share a common purpose in spite of different worldviews. Liberals are allegedly embracing radical Islam because they assume that it makes them seem more tolerant. Moreover, he argues that radical Muslims are useful to liberals because they share a common enemy in Donald Trump and other conservative politicians.\(^{156}\) Snyder’s op-ed is an example of a typical characteristic of culture war rhetoric. Hunter argues that both sides of the culture war tend to portray the other side as extremists in order to give the impression that the other side is removed from the opinion of ordinary Americans.\(^{157}\) By labelling the opponents of President Trump’s immigration order as “radical” leftists alongside radical Muslims, Snyder makes the Left’s political agenda seem more extreme and therefore also separates it from the interests of mainstream Americans.

This fear of an alliance between “radical Muslims” and American liberals found in this article is a fitting example of what David D. Belt labels “political frame-bridging.” This


\(^{156}\) Snyder, "Rallying Call."

\(^{157}\) Hunter, *Culture Wars*, 146.
is a term for the perception among social conservatives that there exists a link between their foreign and domestic enemies, and that these two enemies conspire to destroy the United States. Belt maintains that this is a train of thought that has become increasingly common among conservative culture warriors since 9/11. In this instance, the role of the foreign enemy is given to Muslims, while the role of the domestic enemy is given to the Left in American politics.

These sentiments are substantiated in the article “What Do We Already Know About the Syrian Refugees” (2017) published by Charisma News and written by the organization Christian Freedom International, an organization dedicated to helping Christian refugees worldwide. The organization argues in favor of President Trump’s immigration order by claiming that the real motivation for the Democratic Party’s wish to take in an increasing number of refugees is a part of an intricate plan to recruit more voters and gain political hegemony, rather than mere humanitarian concerns. The organization points to a report by the non-partisan Pew Research Center that states that Muslims are likely to vote for the Democratic Party. The report also states that Muslims also tend to favor a big government that provides more services for the population. On this basis, the organization asserts that Muslim refugees are likely to depend on public assistance after they become American citizens. The organization argues that in contrast to these Muslim immigrants, Christian immigrants are likely to become economically self-reliant quickly and vote for the Republican Party.

The line of argument that liberals and radical Muslims conspire to overthrow America is also present in the coverage of the various legal challenges to the immigration order. This can be observed in a series of op-ed pieces written by Bryan Fischer. Fischer is known as one of the most extreme right-wing Christian leaders in America, having claimed that homosexuals were responsible for the Holocaust. The first op-ed piece “Facing Islamic Terror, Thank God for President Trump” (2017) is a fearful indictment of the efforts to stop the Executive Order. He hails Trump as one of the only Western political leaders that is aware of, and able to engage, the threat of Islam. He labels the judges who attempted to block the immigration order as “politically driven activists masquerading as federal judges.” This is a label that promotes a line of argument that the American political system is rigged in

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favor of the Left, and that the legal system is infested by individuals who are covertly using their office to supports their liberal agenda rather than making correct rulings.

Fischer continued to criticize the judges that were attempting to stop the president’s immigration order. In an op-ed piece titled “The President Should Ignore Judge Watson” (2017), Fischer criticizes Derrick Watson, the Hawaiian judge who granted a temporary restraining order that halted the revised immigration order on the grounds that it also violated the First Amendment. Fischer attacks Watson’s credibility by referring to him as a “minor league judge,” and urges the president to simply ignore Watson’s ruling. In his concluding remarks, Fischer implies that Watson is friendly with radical Muslims: “And Judge Watson himself should be impeached for violating his oath of office to uphold ‘the laws of the United States’ and be removed from office before he puts ISIS in charge of immigration policy.”

Although the comment that judge Watson wishes to put ISIS in charge of American immigration policy is by all accounts an exaggeration, it indicates that Fischer is under the impression that the judge is part of the agenda to facilitate radical Muslim’s takeover of America.

The discourse found in these two op-ed pieces is a contrast to Bivins’ take on the Christian Right. He argues that in spite of zealous engagement with political matters, for example through vocal criticism of the state, courts, and laws, activists within the Christian Right are still convinced that “no human effort can fix what evil has broken.” In the case of Fischer’s op-eds, however, President Trump is ascribed the role of precisely an individual that can mend what these judges have allegedly broken. In the first article, the description of the president is akin to that of a savior: someone that is not afraid to fight the powers that are supposedly threatening America. In the second article, the president is portrayed as a person that holds significant power through his office, to the extent that he has the option to ignore the judicial branch of the government.

A third of Fischer’s articles also lionized President Trump, but it placed more focus on the Constitution and other specific laws. In the op-ed piece “Even a ‘Muslim’ Travel Ban Would Be Legal” (2017), he portrays the president as a righteous leader working to protect America from Muslims while facing resistance from liberal critics and a corrupt and malfunctioning legal system. Fischer contends that “critics on the left have accused Trump of fascism and see the courts as our protectors. It’s the other way round. The courts are acting as

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162 Bivins, Religion of Fear, 231.
dictators, threatening our security and the rule of law, while at the same time the president is the one seeking to protect the American people.” The article is an argument for Trump’s right as president to ban Muslims from entering the United States. Fischer argues that the president has “unquestioned unilateral authority” to restrict immigration, while the judicial system has no particular right to infringe upon the rights of the executive branch of the government.163 Here, Fischer presents a take on the First Amendment and Muslims that is radically different from that of Russell Moore’s blog post on two distinct levels. For one, Fischer argues that the immigration order does not violate the First Amendment because First Amendment rights do not apply to individuals that are not citizens of the United States. Thus, he ignores the argument that the immigration order violates the immigration order still singles out a specific religion for official government disapproval, an argument that Moore supports. The second difference is rooted in their understanding of Islam. Like the vast majority of people, Moore defines Islam as a religion and therefore argue for Muslims’ right to religious liberty. Fischer, on the other hand, disregards the First Amendment on the basis that he views Islam primarily as a totalitarian ideology rather than a religion, a point of view he shares with many of President Trump’s cabinet members and advisors.164 On this basis, Fischer refers to a statute which states that immigrants who are affiliated with the Communist Party or other totalitarian parties are considered “inadmissible aliens,” and that President Trump therefore can rightly deny them entry.165

Craig’s understanding of the First Amendment is also in stark contrast to what can be found in Moore’s blog post. He argues that the Christian values of America are waning in favor of diversity and multiculturalism. He ties this specifically to the Constitution in part two of his series of op-eds, where he asserts:

“We used to have a distinctly American culture that we were proud of and that we fully expected immigrants to embrace and assimilate to. But now we don’t teach American culture, or at least Western Civilization, and we are told to embrace diversity. They say that diversity enriches us, but they don’t say that it unites us, which is what our Constitution prioritizes.”166

164 Esposito and DeLong-Bas, Shari‘ah: What Everyone Needs to Know, 11.
165 Fischer, "Even a 'Muslim' Travel Ban."
Moore subscribes to the understanding of the First Amendment that stresses the guarantee for religious liberty for adherents of all religious beliefs, regardless of how different these religious beliefs are from Christianity. Craig, however, argues that this interpretation of the First Amendment and the increasing celebration of pluralism is one of the fundamental problems in contemporary American society. This, he claims, is because it has facilitated an ongoing process where what he perceives to be the original Christian identity of America is being subverted. As Bivins contends, for the last few decades, one of the Christian Right’s main arguments is that powerful forces are pressuring the Christian majority of America out of public space while protecting the rights of religious minorities in the name of religious liberty. This is the core message of Craig’s op-ed piece, as he explicitly indicts how the contemporary understanding of the First Amendment protects Muslims and undermines America’s Christian heritage.

Craig’s entire argument rests on the perception that proponents of diversity and multiculturalism have corrupted the freedoms outlined in the Constitution to mean something entirely different in contemporary America. Bivins maintains that a common belief among the Christian Right is that political liberalism “represents a perversion of the vision of America’s founders.” Craig cites the Free Exercise Clause and explains that the nation’s Founders likely had a very different understanding of religious liberty than the understanding where all individuals, Christian or not, are entitled to the free exercise of their religious beliefs:

I can’t imagine our Founders would have accepted or encouraged thousands of Muslims to come to our country and then encourage them to openly practice their religion. We know from their writings that there were indeed some Muslims here already and that the Founders were not against their being here. But they believed that the free exchange of ideas would convince people of what was true, and Christianity would win out in the end.

Thus, he argues that the Founders intended the freedom of religious expression to be the expression of Christian values, not religious values in general. These statements regarding the

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167 Craig, “Case for Donald Trump, III.”
168 Bivins, Religion of Fear, 79.
169 Craig, “Case for Donald Trump, III.”
170 Bivins, Religion of Fear, 218.
171 Craig, “Case for Donald Trump, III.”
First Amendment demonstrate a typical characteristic of the ongoing culture wars. Hunter posits that both belligerents of the culture wars persistently attempt to “monopolize the symbols of legitimacy and the American heritage.”\(^{172}\) In this context, the symbols of legitimacy and American heritage are the nation’s Founders and the Constitution. By arguing that the Founders shared the perspective that America was to be a nation built on Christian values, Craig monopolizes this important symbol in order to legitimize his attack on Muslim immigration and the value of pluralism that facilitates it. In Moore’s understanding of the First Amendment, there is no sign of a belief that the principles of the First Amendment have been changed since its implementation more than two centuries ago. Rather, Moore’s take is characterized by the opinion that President Trump and his supporters ignore Muslims’ right to religious liberty, a development he predicts might affect other religious groups sooner or later.\(^{173}\)

Craig’s take on the First Amendment and religious liberty can be assessed in light of existing research on Pentecostal perceptions of religious liberty. Unlike the Baptist tradition, the Pentecostal movement does not have a history of zealously defending religious liberty. In spite of this, research has shown that religious liberty is also highly important to Pentecostals. Based on numbers from Pew Research Center’s major survey of global Pentecostalism from 2006, Robert D. Woodberry argues that there are two different trends in Pentecostal attitudes toward religious liberty. First, most Pentecostals will “likely support symbolic statements of Christian nationhood.” Second, Pentecostals are not likely to be willing to limit the religious liberty of adherents of other religions than their own.\(^{174}\) Craig’s sentiments are consistent with the former characteristic, as he laments the perceived waning of Christian values in American society. Charisma’s decision to publish his point of view is perhaps not surprising, considering that Aimee Semple McPherson, one of America’s most notable Pentecostals, championed Christian nationalism. The Pentecostal preacher is known as an innovator in American evangelical history because of her use of the media to promote her message, which included the notion that the Christian faith and patriotism were two sides of the same coin.\(^{175}\) Craig’s sentiments differ from Woodberry’s second trend, however, as his interpretation of the First Amendment explicitly excludes non-Christians from its Exercise Clause. This

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172 Hunter, *Culture Wars*, 298.
173 Moore, “Is Donald Trump Right.”
substantiates the notion that Charisma and its readership consist of a segment of Pentecostals that are highly Islamophobic and lean far to the right in the American political spectrum.

3.4 Summary

There are sharper contrasts between Charisma and the Baptist Press when it comes to the response to President Trump’s rhetoric on Muslims and the subsequent immigration order than in their discourses on Sharia law. The main difference between the two news outlets is that Charisma’s coverage is far more favorable to President Trump’s immigration order. Charisma’s staunch support can be seen in all aspects of its coverage. Charisma’s authors amplify their fearful discourse from the previous chapter by conflating the fear of Muslims and the fear of the Left. This, in addition to past research on Pentecostals, indicates that Charisma attempts to appeal to a highly conservative and Islamophobic segment of American Pentecostals that belong to the Christian Right. The Southern Baptist discourse is different than the discourse in the previous chapter. The Baptist tradition of defending religious liberty plays a significant part in the discourse on the immigration order, mostly due to Russell Moore. The Baptist Press’ coverage of the immigration order is characterized by disagreements in regard to the balance between compassion for refugees and national security. In addition to this, one part of their coverage emphasizes the plight of Christian refugees and Islam’s role in this, while another part is concerned for the immigration order’s impact on missionary efforts aimed at Muslims in Dearborn, Michigan.
4 Conclusion

This thesis has uncovered some notable differences and similarities between the Pentecostal and the Southern Baptist discourse on Muslims. Before highlighting the findings, there is a considerable difference between the two news outlets that needs to be taken into account. The Baptist Press’ coverage of Sharia law and the immigration order is dominated by news reports. Most of these news reports present the views of various leading figures within the SBC and the evangelical community. In contrast, most of Charisma’s discourse is dominated by op-ed pieces by both Pentecostals and other evangelicals and social conservatives, making their discourse more explicit. Consequently, the Baptist Press has a more neutral and elite-driven approach to Muslims and Islam.

The Baptist Press and Charisma’s coverage of Sharia law suggests that some Muslims invoke a sense of fear among both Pentecostals and Southern Baptists. This rests on a misconception of Sharia law. Both promote a fear that radical Muslims are in the process of infiltrating America and that they are working to subvert the American culture and legal system by gradually and covertly implementing Sharia law. In this part of their discourse, both news outlets make a clear distinction between the vast majority of Muslims and radical Muslims. Thus, both avoid the generalization typically found in Islamophobic discourse where all Muslims are equated with radicals and extremist groups. However, their understanding of Sharia law problematizes this clear distinction. Although there are different interpretations of it, Sharia law is essential to all Muslims. However, both Southern Baptists and Pentecostals perceive it as the driving force behind the violent ideology of radical Muslims. Consequently, they see radical Muslims as Sharia-adhering Muslims and moderate Muslims as non-Sharia-adhering Muslims. This negative view on Sharia law is also reflected in the lack of balance in several of Charisma’s news articles on religious tribunals and anti-Sharia legislation. Although the Baptist Press is more balanced in their coverage of this legislation, Richard Land reveals that many Southern Baptists are as negative to the scenario of Sharia law in American courts as Pentecostals.

This view on Muslims and Sharia law affects both Southern Baptist and Pentecostal interfaith communication and evangelistic efforts in a pluralistic American society. Although most of the missionaries that the Baptist Press and Charisma interview dispel reports about Sharia law implementation in Dearborn, Michigan, they nonetheless have an understanding of Sharia law as a threat associated with terrorists and extremists. Moreover, these
missionaries also see Sharia law as an obstacle to their endeavor to evangelize Dearborn Muslims. To these missionaries, Muslims who adhere to Sharia law are not responsive to the word of Christ, but rather work to influence and take over society.

The starkest contrast between the two evangelical groups’ discourse on Sharia law can be observed in articles that explain the connection between Sharia law and end-times prophecies. Although Muslims have been an important part of many evangelicals’ eschatological convictions for many years, the prominent role of Sharia law is a recent development. This recent development is pervasive in Charisma’s discourse, as it contains a fear that the implementation of Sharia law will facilitate the emergence of the Antichrist, which is equated with the Islamic prophetic figure Mahdi. Conversely, the Baptist Press mentions neither Sharia law nor Muslims in articles about the end-times. Due to the evangelical tendency to conflate eschatology with groups and ideas they fear, this can be interpreted as Southern Baptists being less fearful of Muslims than Pentecostals. It is, however, important to note that this might not be the case for Southern Baptist laity, who appears to have a stronger sense of antipathy toward Muslims than the SBC leadership.

Whereas the Baptist Press’ discourse on Sharia law suggests that Southern Baptists and Pentecostals have similar attitudes toward Muslims, the discourse on President Trump’s immigration order suggests otherwise. The Southern Baptist discourse reveals that there is significant disagreement within the denomination when it comes to Muslims. Some Southern Baptists see Muslim immigrants as a security threat to the United States and therefore support the immigration order. The Baptist Press also demonstrates a sense of fear connected to solidarity for the Christian refugees, which is intertwined with a fearful perception of life in Muslim majority countries. Others, most notably ERLC president Russell Moore, oppose the Christian Right consensus by criticizing Trump and his immigration order, most notably by invoking the Baptist tradition of defending religious liberty. All in all, the Baptist Press’ coverage of the immigration order indicates that Southern Baptist attitude toward Muslims is characterized by disagreement and ambivalence, as the main part of the discourse is centered around the balance of national security and compassion.

Charisma’s coverage of the immigration order can be regarded as a continuation of the discourse on Sharia law. It displays a staunch support for President Trump and his immigration order and an explicitly Islamophobic rhetoric. The fearful rhetoric from its discourse on Sharia law is, in fact, amplified, as it is even more conspiratorial. Aside from the more explicitly Islamophobic rhetoric, there are also other key differences between Charisma and the Baptist Press in their coverage of the immigration order. For one, Charisma conveys
a clear sense of belonging to the Christian Right. Secondly, Charisma conflates the fear of Muslims with a fear of the Left. They argue that these two groups are cooperating to destroy American culture and society, a process that has been facilitated by political correctness and what the authors consider a wrongful understanding of the First Amendment. These two aspects of the discourse are completely absent in the Baptist Press. In light of existing research on Pentecostals, their political affiliations, and attitudes toward religious liberty, this suggests that Charisma and its readership consist of a segment of American Pentecostals that identify themselves with the rhetoric of the Christian Right and other social conservatives. Charisma’s status as the largest Pentecostal news outlet suggests that this might be a large segment.

4.1 Suggestions for further research

American evangelical attitudes toward Muslims is an area that is still in need of scholarly interpretations. American evangelicals are not a single, unified group of people and there are diverging views on several issues both between traditions and within denominations. The most obvious alternative for scholars who want to investigate this area is to examine the attitudes of evangelicals belonging to other traditions and denominations. For example, discourse toward Muslims among Americans that belong to Adventist or Lutheran denominations, such as the Lutheran Missouri Synod, might be fruitful and may be significant contributions to this particular area of study.

Pentecostalism is a relatively new and vibrant movement within the American evangelical community where there is still a need for further research on how adherents engage aspects of religious pluralism in American society. This study has focused on a segment of American Pentecostals that belong to the far-right of American politics. Investigating the differences within American Pentecostalism on other political issues might shed light on whether Charisma merely represents a highly vocal minority, or if the attitudes in Charisma are indeed representative of a large number of American Pentecostals.

This thesis has also raised some questions related to Southern Baptists. The controversy and backlash against Russell Moore after his criticism of President Trump and his immigration order indicates that there is a cleavage developing within the denomination between younger, more moderate members and older conservatives. It appears that these more moderate forces within the denomination are challenging the conservative consensus that has prevailed since the SBC controversy. A sensible area for future research on the SBC
would therefore be to investigate whether there are other issues beside Muslim immigration that trigger disagreements between the denominational leadership and grassroots members and between elites.
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