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# The Trump Prophecy, Or how a Godlywood film points to a dis-United America

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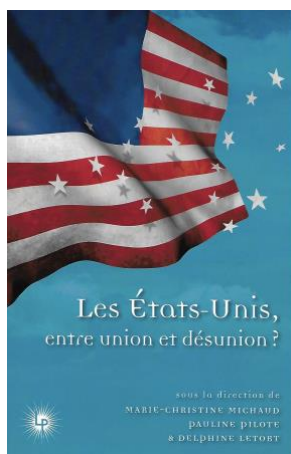
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*The Trump Prophecy,*  
**Or how a Godlywood film points to a dis-United America**  
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When people think of American cinema, what often comes to their minds are the names of Hollywood blockbusters which dominate the international box office. However, *The Trump Prophecy* (Stephan Schultze, 2018)<sup>1</sup> is far from the world of Hollywood studios as it is a product of the American Christian film industry. This film industry, also called Godlywood<sup>2</sup>, is independent from the Hollywood industry. It started developing at the beginning of the 20th century and consists in productions made by conservative Christians for the conservative Christian audience and often released in today's mega-churches<sup>3</sup>. Its size now justifies the use of the word 'industry' even if its productions, *i.e.* Godlywood films, are mostly unbeknown to mainstream American audiences and even less so to international ones. They nevertheless constitute a truly American cinematographic genre with its own companies<sup>4</sup> and characteristics such as a southern location, scenes of intense prayers, the defense of traditional values, a pro-life stance and a proselytizing intent that appeal to their niche market essentially made up of conservative evangelical Christians<sup>5</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eKZGIvLQD9I>, accessed on January 15, 2022.

<sup>2</sup> See Nathalie DUPONT, *Between Hollywood and Godlywood: The Case of Walden Media*, London, Peter Lang, 2015.

<sup>3</sup> For more on the development of the American Christian film industry, see for example Terry LINDVALL, *Sanctuary Cinema: The Origins of The Christian Film Industry*, New York, New York University Press, 2007, Terry LINDVALL and Andrew QUICKE, *Celluloid Sermons: The Emergence of the Christian Film Industry, 1930-1986*, New York, New York University Press, 2011, and Sébastien FATH, *Dieu XXL*, Paris, Editions Autrement, 2008.

<sup>4</sup> On the notion of genre see for example Steve NEALE, *Genre and Hollywood*, London, Routledge, 1999. One example of Godlywood company is Sherwood Pictures which was created in 2003 by the Kendrick brothers, two pastors from the Sherwood Baptist Church in Albania, Georgia, who then created Kendrick Brothers Productions. Nathalie Dupont, *op. cit.*, 249-251, and <https://sherwoodbaptist.net/ministries/sherwood-pictures/>, accessed on January 13, 2002 and <https://kendrickbrothers.com>, accessed on January 20, 2022.

<sup>5</sup> See for example Randall BALMER *Thy Kingdom Come: How the Religious Right Distorts the Faith and Threatens America*, New York, Basic Books, 2006, and *Bad Faith: Race and the Rise of the Religious Right*, Grand Rapids, Eerdmans, 2021, Mokhtar BEN BARKA, *La droite chrétienne américaine. Des origines à nos jours*, Paris, Editions du Croquant, 2022.

The present case study is first going to show that *The Trump Prophecy*, which calls for unity through prayer and celebrates Donald Trump as the only true saviour for America (consequently approving his divisive presidency at the time of its release), is a Godlywood film featuring American conservative Christian values that have in fact increasingly contributed to polarize and divide America at the time of Trump. The article will then show that Trump, the film's production, its second part and the conditions of its release reflect the on-going division between the conservative evangelical Christians, who contributed to the 2016 election of Donald Trump (and to that of other conservative presidents before him), and a more mainstream and lay part of the United States which did not fail to point out and make fun of the strangeness of the film. Finally, the present case study will highlight that the theme of the film, its production, its second part and the conditions of its release also caused controversy within the evangelical community itself, as some evangelical Christians did not agree with the film's stance, thus pointing to an even more dis-united America.

### *The Trump Prophecy* as a typical Godlywood film featuring conservative Christian divisive values

*The Trump Prophecy* is based on *The Trump Prophecies*, a book published by Mark Taylor and Mary Colbert<sup>6</sup> in 2017. The film focuses on Mark Taylor's story, a firefighter suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder to whom God reveals in April 2011 that Donald Trump will be president of the United States. The film then presents the consequences of this prophecy as it shows Mary Colbert creating a national prayer chain with evangelical conservative Christians so that God can hear them and eventually fulfill Taylor's "Commander-in-chief prophecy" during the 2016 presidential elections. The film also has a second part which is a thirty-minute documentary showing testimonies from conservative leaders explaining why political life must be based on the Christian religion and on prayer.

*The Trump Prophecy* corresponds to the criteria of Godlywood films and thus to the divisive values defended by American conservative Christians.

Indeed, the production comes from the Christian film world since it is the result of a collaboration between ReelWorks Studio, an independent Christian company founded in 2009 and whose goal is to produce "inspirational and redemptive storytelling for all media"<sup>7</sup>, and Liberty University<sup>8</sup> which is sometimes described as one of the most conservative universities in America. This university<sup>9</sup>, created in Virginia in 1971 by Jerry Falwell Sr., founder in 1979 of the Moral Majority (a conservative

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<sup>6</sup> She specializes in creating Christian networks and is married to Don Colbert the doctor who helped Mark Taylor overcome his trauma. Both are well-known among evangelical circles and often take part in shows of televangelists like Jim Bakker, Sid Roth and Kenneth Copeland. See for example "Being Healed Versus Being Well", *Kenneth Copeland Ministries*, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=giDw9weliOc>, accessed on January 14, 2023.

<sup>7</sup> <https://reelworks.net>, accessed on May 20, 2021.

<sup>8</sup> Carol KURUVILLA, "An Evangelical University is Helping to Create a Movie about how Trump was chosen by God", *The Huffington Post*, June 5, 2018, <https://www.huffpost.com>, accessed on June 10, 2020.

<sup>9</sup> <https://www.liberty.edu/champions>, accessed on July 16, 2020.

political Christian lobby), is now headed by his son, Jerry Falwell Jr.. The latter is a great supporter of Trump, which led him to be part of Trump's informal faith advisory board at the White House<sup>10</sup>, a board that for example defended staunch pro-life arguments and advised Trump on the nominations of three conservative Supreme Court Justices who later contributed to the June 2022 very divisive decision to overturn the 1973 ruling that had authorized abortion.

Another Godlywoodian characteristic of *The Trump Prophecy* is the importance of prayer, of the Bible and of a life led according to its precepts. The film thus shows scenes of prayers, for example by the hero's wife who asks God to help her husband, a traumatized firefighter who extracted the body of a dead child out of a burnt drug house. In fact, it was just after this prayer that on April 28, 2011 the hero watched a television interview with Donald Trump during which God revealed to him that he was hearing the president's voice<sup>11</sup>. The clasped hands visibly featured as a central theme on the film's posters reinforce this important Godlywood feature<sup>12</sup>. *The Trump Prophecy* then shows a growing number of believers joining the prayer chain for the 2016 presidential elections (and, on election night, blowing a horn looking like the biblical shofar) so that Trump can reach the highest office in the country. The prophecy, which became known as the "Commander-in-chief prophecy", was eventually fulfilled but it meant that no contestation was allowed as it was God's will, as presented in the film. Everybody thus had to believe Mark Taylor and similar defenders of the prophecy while praying for and blindly submitting to the conservative evangelical Christians' and the film's chosen hero, the notion of blind submission to the Supreme Authority, to the chief anointed by God being important in the film, but rather divisive in a democracy.

Praying for and respecting God's choice was also intended in the film's study guides. Indeed, Godlywood films' overt proselytizing intent are featured in the study and prayer guides that accompany the release of these productions on screens and in mega-churches<sup>13</sup>. These guides, sometimes available in both English and Spanish<sup>14</sup>, are often intended for pastors and their congregations, who in the present case could get access to a 30-day prayer *Trump Prophecy* guide. It should be noted that this proselytizing aspect leads many Godlywood films to develop their story in a rather heavy-handed way while being somewhat boring and long, *The Trump Prophecy* being no exception to this. The people portrayed in the film are indeed seen as the 'good guys' completely

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<sup>10</sup> Jerry Falwell Jr.: *Moderate Republicans make my Blood boil*, Programme *JUSTICE w/ Judge Jeanine*, <https://www.foxnews.com>, April 30, 2017, accessed on July 16, 2020, and Carol Kuruvilla, *op. cit.*.

<sup>11</sup> "You are hearing the voice of the president". *This Week's Television Guest: Mark Taylor & Mary Colbert*, <https://sidroth.org/television/tv-archives/mark-taylor-mary-colbert/>, September 24, 2017, accessed on September 7, 2021.

<sup>12</sup> <https://www.imdb.com/title/tt8235296/>, accessed on July 21, 2021. The trailer of *War Room* (Alex Kendrick, 2015) also highlights the prayer theme which is central to the film: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=b8gZBnp7gF0>, accessed on January 21, 2022.

<sup>13</sup> See for example all the resources available for the Godlywood film *The War Room* (Alex Kendrick, 2015) at <http://www.kendrickbrotherscatalogue.com/warroom/resources>, accessed on May 10, 2022.

<sup>14</sup> So as to reach out to the growing number of Hispanic evangelical Christians.

devoted to the accomplishment of God's will to which everyone should submit, whether they like it or not.

The film's hero lives in Orlando, Florida, and another characteristic of Godlywood films is that they often take place in the Bible Belt, this southern part of the United States where there are many white evangelical Christians who represented 20% of all American voters in 2016 and 19% in 2020, but who mostly voted for Trump in these elections as 77% of them chose the Republican candidate in 2016 and 84% in 2020<sup>15</sup>. This part of America likes Godlywood films because they address uniting American themes like courage, self-sacrifice and patriotism through specific professions such as policeman and firefighter, the latter being Mark Taylor's former job. But many southern white evangelical Christians also like Godlywood productions because these films highlight the traditional family while often condemning any deviant form, the defense of traditional family values and themes ranking high among the political concerns of the American evangelical right. The importance of the traditional marriage, couple and of family unity (with a wife and children usually subjected to paternal authority) is therefore often underlined by Godlywood films (which sometimes deal with the problem of abortion through divisive pro-life arguments). *The Trump Prophecy* precisely shows us a traditional southern Christian couple determined to overcome the husband's trauma and then united in the defence of God's choice, alongside other traditional southern Christian couples like Mary and Don Colbert.

Finally, let us mention that *The Trump Prophecy* is a typical Godlywood film through its release<sup>16</sup>, even if this is not really what determines a cinematographic genre. Godlywood screenings, notably in the South, are often transformed into events likely to interest whole communities of believers targeted by advanced ticket group sales destined to fill entire cinemas so as to spread the good word on a film ahead of its official release. Fathom Events was in charge of *The Trump Prophecy*'s advanced ticket sales which began on June 1, 2018 (Rick Eldridge, producer of the film, stated that 18,000 had been sold<sup>17</sup>). The film was then released on approximately 600 screens on October 2 and 4, 2018, and was distributed by Fathom Events through its Digital Broadcast Network, in partnership with theaters located in key markets such as the Bible Belt area and the Midwest. However, *The Trump Prophecy*, which cost around \$1 million to shoot, ended up grossing just \$671,198, which was rather disappointing for those who had high hopes for the film<sup>18</sup>. In addition,

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<sup>15</sup> Ruth IGIELNIK, Scott KEETER and Hannah HARTIG, "Behind Biden's 2020 Victory", June 30, 2021 <https://www.pewresearch.org/politics/2021/06/30/behind-bidens-2020-victory/>, accessed on October 23, 2021.

<sup>16</sup> Godlywood films are very often shown in mega-churches on well-equipped mega screens where numerous ceremonies gather a large number of people.

<sup>17</sup> Jared GILMOUR, "Donald's Trump Presidency was Part of God's Plan, New Movie Suggests", *The Charlotte Observer*, October 3 2018, <https://www.charlotteobserver.com>, accessed on July 10, 2020. The film's release had been initially planned on 1,200 screens.

<sup>18</sup> <https://www.boxofficemojo.com>, accessed on May 23, 2020.

journalists who attended various screenings pointed to a low attendance, including in Lynchburg, hometown to Liberty University<sup>19</sup>. As with many Godlywood films, there is no mention of any international box office, those films being hardly released outside the United States.

All the aforementioned characteristics therefore show that *The Trump Prophecy* belongs to the Godlywood genre which presents a conservative evangelical America whose values are those of the Republican Party (and sometimes of extreme conservatives on the Republican party's right fringe), values whose staunch defense has contributed to divide America.

### *The Trump Prophecy's* theme, production, structure and release reflect a divided America

Though based on his name, *The Trump Prophecy* hardly shows Trump himself. Indeed, what essentially matters in the film is what God wants for him, and the subsequent fact that people have to abide by God's will and pray for it, as explained by Chris Nelson who plays Mark Taylor and is a film professor at Liberty University: “[*The Trump Prophecy* is really] about the fate of a common man hearing from the Lord and being given wisdom and advice from fellow believers to pray about that”<sup>20</sup>. The film thus celebrates Trump as God's and consequently America's only true champion, a champion who has however greatly divided America.

Indeed, the 2016 U.S. presidential elections, the 2018 mid-terms elections (the year of the film's release) and then the 2020 presidential elections, followed by the January 2021 invasion of the Capitol in Washington D.C. (leading to the subsequent inquiry from Congress) have kept showing how America has been dis-united on the subject of Trump. This is part of the widening gap between a moderate part of the population of the Northern East Coast and the West Coast, and another more conservative part often living in the Midwest and the Bible Belt that tend to vote for the Republicans<sup>21</sup> as it feels disadvantaged because of unemployment (for example in the Rust Belt), and have been convinced of a decline of American intrinsic founding values based on the Bible (and “one Nation under God”), patriotism and individual freedom. In fact, in the eyes of a conservative part of the population, these values have been subjected to insidious sapping attacks by green, homosexual and even pedophile<sup>22</sup> leftists who have been misleading American youth. Among those convinced of such a decline are white conservative evangelical Christians, a sort of ethno-religious group that represents

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<sup>19</sup> Tara Isabelle BURTON, “Christian Nationalism, explained Through One Pro-Trump Propaganda Film”, October 8, 2018, <https://www.vox.com>, accessed on January 17, 2020.

<sup>20</sup> *The Trump Prophecy hitting Thetaers: How God Told This Firefighter His Plan for America*, CBN, <https://www1.cbn.com/content/trump-prophecy-hitting-theaters-how-god-told-firefighter-his-plan-america>, accessed on April 27, 2022.

<sup>21</sup> <https://www.fec.gov/resources/cms-content/documents/federalelections2016.pdf>, *Presidential Election Results: Biden wins*, <https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2020/11/03/us/elections/results-president.html>, and *Midterm Elections 2022*, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/elections/midterms-2022/>, all accessed on January 5, 2022.

<sup>22</sup> Taylor also said that “Thousands of elite pedophiles have been arrested in Trump's crackdown on satanic pedophile cults”, <https://www.facebook.com>, accessed on January 21, 2022.

the main audience of Godlywoodian films and that sees Trump as God's chosen hero. The real Mark Taylor can be associated with them as, according to his 2011 prophecy that led to his book and then the film, Trump does represent the arm of God<sup>23</sup>. Taylor has often opened up about this on the radio and on television while talking about his book and the film<sup>24</sup>, and for him (and other similar pro-Trump evangelical prophets<sup>25</sup>) God was going to use Trump to put an end to the anti-Christian plan which had been undermining America and its core values. Some of the words used for his prophecies were then echoed in Trump's 2016 campaign catchphrase "Make America Great Again"<sup>26</sup>, which thus pleased the conservative electorate, notably the white evangelical one.

*The Trump Prophecy* inserts itself in this divisive context with its subject, its title and its insistence on the power of prayer as when for example, at Mary Colbert's initiative, people come together as "the body of Christ" in a nationwide chain of conservative evangelicals praying for the fulfillment of Taylor's prophecy and the 2016 election of Trump<sup>27</sup>. The film and its key praying element as "a deeper message that we really emphasize in the movie"<sup>28</sup> are thus in keeping with the alliance between Trump and important evangelical leaders like Jerry Falwell Jr., an alliance then formalized with the creation of Trump's aforementioned and divisive informal faith advisory board at the White House.

As depicted in the film, evangelical prophets and those who believed them thus ignored Trump's many flaws<sup>29</sup> and, abiding by God's will, considered him as the biblical hero who was going to save America. Their divisive literal analysis of the Bible even led them to see Trump as a new Cyrus the Great, the non-Jewish King of Persia who became God's chosen instrument to free the Jews of Babylon and rebuild Jerusalem by allowing them to return there (which led the Israeli Mikdash Educational Center to mint a coin showing both men's effigies side by side)<sup>30</sup>.

This attitude is not surprising from conservative believers convinced that America has a special relationship with God who governs all aspects of their lives, good or bad, from the most serious to

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<sup>23</sup> *This Week's Television Guest: Mark Taylor & Mary Colbert*, <https://sidroth.org/television/tv-archives/mark-taylor-mary-colbert/>, September 24, 2017, accessed on September 7, 2021.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, and *The Trump Prophecy hitting Theaters: How God Told This Firefighter His Plan for America*.

<sup>25</sup> Mark Taylor was not the only one who predicted that Trump would become president as shown by James A. BEVERLEY in *God's Man in the White House*, Ontario, Castle Quay Books, 2020.

<sup>26</sup> Erin PROPHET, "Fulfillment of prophecy? Yes, Some Evangelicals really do Believe Trump is the 'Chosen One' ", October 18, 2020, <https://www.salon.com>, accessed on November 13, 2021. Trump's campaign slogan is in fact a throwback to Ronald Reagan's 1980 campaign slogan "Let's make America Great again".

<sup>27</sup> "The Trump Prophecy", *Liberty Champion*, September 10, 2018, <https://www.liberty.edu/champion/2018/09/the-trump-prophecy/>, accessed on January 6, 2023.

<sup>28</sup> *The Trump Prophecy hitting Theaters: How God Told This Firefighter His Plan for America*.

<sup>29</sup> We can add that conservative evangelicals seemed to forgive Trump a lot more than Bill Clinton during the Monicagate.

<sup>30</sup> Tara Isabella BURTON, "The Biblical Story the Christian Right uses to Defend Trump", March 5, 2018, <<https://www.vox.com>>, accessed on July 18, 2020 and Katherine STEWART, "Why Trump Reigns as King Cyrus", *The New York Times*, December 31, 2018, <https://www.nytimes.com>, accessed on July 20, 2020.

the most innocuous<sup>31</sup>. Trump, despite his many flaws, therefore became the very masculine instrument chosen by God to extricate America from the moral quagmire in which conservative Christians said it had sunk (with for example the 1973 Supreme Court decision *Roe v. Wade* authorizing abortion). The elected Republican president was therefore going to put the United States back on the right track and in accordance with its founding Christian values.

This can also be seen in the second part of *The Trump Prophecy* that switches from Mark Taylor as the main character to testimonies from conservative leaders (some being controversial like former Lt. Gen. William Boykin<sup>32</sup>), a part that was thus presented by Rick Eldridge, the film's producer: "After the movie there's going to be a reflective time with men from various aspects of world economics, of military talking about what does it really mean [sic] to make America great again"<sup>33</sup>. But this second part is problematic and divisive as it implies that rejecting Trump as president is tantamount to resisting God's will. As a consequence, people have to submit to Trump's political authority and blindly support him as a leader, as it is the equivalent of submitting to God and His choice as explained in the Bible<sup>34</sup>. This view of Trump also prompted some conservative evangelical leaders like Paula White and Robert Jeffress, who were also part of Trump's circle of informal faith advisors at the White House, to imply that Trump's authority should also have no limit since he had a divine mandate to rule the nation<sup>35</sup>. All those opinions are very divisive in a democracy and have notably been rejected by a more moderate America.

Indeed, *The Trump Prophecy* and its divisive subject have also been part of a tensed relationship between many mainstream secular media (whether traditional or digital) and Trump and his supporters. In fact, with the notable exception of conservative *Fox News* channel, conservative evangelicals see many mainstream secular media as unreliable sources of information that can only provide "fake news", while their Christian counterparts rely on faith, the only filter of truth, to provide information that is in fact not based on extensive investigations and thoughtful analyses but on prophecies, the literalness of the Bible and theological analyses leading to "faith news". Therefore Christians should only pay attention to Christian media such as for example CBN (Christian Broadcasting Network), which is prominently featured in *The Trump Prophecy* and which was

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<sup>31</sup> In a 2018 opinion poll, 96% of evangelicals said they talked to God, 45% said God talked directly with them and 90% said that God directly determined what happened in their lives all or most of the time. *Beliefs about God's Involvement in the World*, Pew Research Center, April 25, 2018, <https://www.pewforum.org>, accessed on July 18, 2020.

<sup>32</sup> Who "depicted U.S. military operations against Islamic extremist organizations such as al-Qaeda as a Christian fight against Satan, riling religious rights groups and organizations dedicated to the separation of church and state", Dan LAMOTHE, "Exclusive: Lt. Gen. William Boykin, past Delta Force commander, hit with Army reprimand", *The Washington Post*, May 22, 2014, <https://www.washingtonpost.com>, accessed on June 9, 2020.

<sup>33</sup> *The Trump Prophecy: Leaders Compilation*, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=E1hB083GrXs>, accessed on April 27, 2022.

<sup>34</sup> *Romans 13:1-7*. This shatters the idea of free will implied by a democratic choice.

<sup>35</sup> Michelle BOORSTEIN, "Trump Pastor Paula White: The President '100 percent is a Christian... a Person of repentance'", *The Washington Post*, September 9, 2017, <http://www.washingtonpost.com>, accessed on November 4, 2021.



founded in 1960 by the very conservative televangelist Pat Robertson<sup>36</sup>. This channel positively advertised the film while many mainstream media did not and pointed out that it was produced by Jerry Falwell's very conservative Liberty University. Some mainstream reviews and user's comments on the film were also quite scathing:

"[...] In the end, it's difficult to say what we're supposed to take away from *The Trump Prophecy* because it asks us to accept everything at face value, rather than forcing us to probe its provocative premise. If the movie was designed to convince non-believers that Trump really is God's selection, the paper-thin storytelling won't do the trick [...]

[...] If there's something bad about any movie, it's probably represented somehow in *The Trump Prophecy* [...]

[...] Even propaganda films gotta have standards... There's no attempt here to make a good movie. [...]

[...] This is just ridiculous [...]

[...] One of the worst films ever created"<sup>37</sup>.

In addition, mainstream social networks contacted for the digital marketing of the film were very suspicious. Facebook considered advertisement for *The Trump Prophecy* to be political advertising and therefore did not authorize it. When asked by *The Trump Prophecy*'s producer about its refusal, Facebook then issued the following answer: "The text and/or imagery you're using qualifies as political, based on the definition we're using for enforcement"<sup>38</sup>. This is rather understandable as the film was released a month before November 2018 midterm elections that Trump and the Republicans hoped to win, a timing thus explained by the film's producer:

"We think it's going to be a phenomenal time on October 2<sup>nd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> [2018] for all across the nation's Christians to come together and understand what our purpose is in this coming election and in our world today and pray for those in authority over us [as] the nation really needs to hear some messages of God's intervention in our country"<sup>39</sup>.

### Reactions to *The Trump Prophecy* also point to a divided American Christian community

This division appeared within the very institution that gave birth to the film. The production of the film had brought together nine members of Liberty University's film department (including

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<sup>36</sup> Like Jerry Falwell Sr., Pat Robertson favoured a conservative Republican policy based on Christian principles. He created the Christian Coalition of America in 1987 and unsuccessfully ran in the 1988 Republican primaries.

<sup>37</sup> <https://aisleseat.com/trump-prophecy>, accessed on June 6, 2020, <https://boxofficerevolution.wordpress.com>, accessed on July 4, 2020, <https://doubletoasted.com/reviews>, accessed on July 25, 2020, and *user reviews*, <https://www.imdb.com>, accessed on October 10, 2021.

<sup>38</sup> Caleb PARKE, "Facebook blocks *Trump Prophecy* Movie Ads for being Political", *Fox News*, June 21, 2018, <https://www.foxnews.com>, accessed on September 24, 2021.

<sup>39</sup> *The Trump Prophecy: leaders Compilation*, and *The Trump Prophecy hitting Theaters: How God Told This Firefighter His Plan for America*. In 2018, the Democrats regained control of the House of Representatives.

director Stephan Schultze and Chris Nelson) and about fifty of their students as part of a hands-on study project. However, within Liberty University itself, some students disagreed with the film's stance and launched a petition calling for the project to be cancelled<sup>40</sup>. They notably disagreed with *The Trump Prophecy*'s "open support of Trump", asking what "the point [was] of making this movie other than to further push Donald Trump up on a Messianic pedestal?"<sup>41</sup> and disagreed with the film's presentation of Mark Taylor as a modern-day prophet, pointing out that his prophecies were dubious, when not far-fetched<sup>42</sup>. The signatories then no longer wanted to see the film, sometimes described as "heretical" in its stance, associated with their university as it could "reflect poorly on [them] and the [university] as a whole"<sup>43</sup>, some even fearing that all the hype around *The Trump Prophecy* would prevent them from finding a job once they graduated from Liberty University. When the film was released on October 2, 2018, the petition had collected more than 2286 signatures<sup>44</sup>. Asked about this, the film's director said that it was up to the viewer to decide whether Taylor was a true prophet or not, that only a few students had left the project intended to give them some filming experience, thus making them ready to work on a set once they had graduated<sup>45</sup>. As for Jerry Falwell Jr., president of the university, he stressed that his support for Donald Trump was his personal initiative (which led some students to return their diploma) and did not involve the university nor its employees<sup>46</sup>.

*The Trump Prophecy* also divided evangelicals. For example it presents audiences with the hope of an even closer relationship between the United States and Israel. This is of paramount importance in the eyes of evangelicals who are fervent believers in the word of the Bible and are therefore convinced that the return of the Jews to the Holy Land of Israel and their permanent establishment there is the prerequisite for the Second Coming of Christ<sup>47</sup> (as also prophesied by Mark Taylor<sup>48</sup>). Some of these Christians belong to the American Christian organization *Christians United for Israel* whose goal is to defend Israel and the Jewish People<sup>49</sup>. God will therefore reward those who favour this return and help Israel while He will punish its enemies like for example Iran, Israel's

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<sup>40</sup> "Cancel the Liberty University Film Program's Heretical Film Project", <https://www.change.org/p/liberty-university-cinematic-arts-program-cancel-the-liberty-university-film-program-s-heretical-film-project>, accessed on July 20, 2020.

<sup>41</sup> Lauren MARKOE, "Did Trump fulfill a Divine Prophecy? What to expect from a New Liberty University Film?", *The Washington Post*, May 31, 2018, <https://www.washingtonpost.com>, accessed on January 22, 2020.

<sup>42</sup> Like for example the fact that "Barack Obama would be charged with treason and that Trump would force the release of cures for cancer and Alzheimer being withheld by the pharmaceutical industry", Harriet SHERWOOD, "The Chosen One? The New Film that Claims Trump's Election was an Act of God", *The Guardian*, October 3 2018, <https://www.theguardian.com>, accessed on July 20, 2020.

<sup>43</sup> "Cancel the Liberty University Film Program's Heretical Film Project".

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>45</sup> Carol KURUVILLA, *op. cit.*.

<sup>46</sup> Lauren MARKOE, *op. cit.*.

<sup>47</sup> This is called Christian Zionism; it also hopes for the conversion of Jews to Christianity.

<sup>48</sup> *This Week's Television Guest: Mark Taylor & Mary Colbert.*

<sup>49</sup> <https://www.cufi.org>, accessed May 25, 2020). Vice-president Mike Pence, who is an evangelical Christian, addressed its general assembly in July 2017 and 2019.

biblical Persian enemy<sup>50</sup>. This is why some American officials in the Trump administration quoted the Bible when talking about the American foreign policy towards Israel, as was the case of Secretary of State Mike Pompeo, an evangelical like Vice President Mike Pence, both men having pushed Trump to order the elimination of Major General Qasem Soleimani, a senior Iranian military official<sup>51</sup>. Therefore, it is not surprising that the importance of the link with Israel also appears in the summary of *The Trump Prophecy* on the *Christian Cinema* website, “the world’s best way to Christian movies and TV shows”, with the following sentence: “What does the current administration [Obama's] mean to the Middle East and specifically Israel?”<sup>52</sup>.

However, not all evangelicals agree with Mark Taylor, with the film’s second part and its pro-Trump conservative evangelicals. There are indeed moderate evangelicals<sup>53</sup> who constitute an evangelical silent majority whose leaders hardly spoke about Trump. This is for example the case of Leith Anderson, former head of the National Association of Evangelicals and former member of Obama’s advisory council, who insisted that evangelicalism was about faith and not politics: “Evangelicals may all share the same faith” he said, “but we don’t all share the same politics”<sup>54</sup>.

Some American Christians also remarked that the film celebrates a prophecy that was late in its fulfillment. Indeed, Mark Taylor did not immediately share his 2011 prophecy specifying that God would use Trump “to bring honour, respect, and restoration to America”, nor did he share the 2013 following one. He said it was because he was waiting for a timely sign from God, and when he did get one he started telling people about his Trump prophecies in June 2015, 10 days before Trump announced his candidacy to the Republican nomination<sup>55</sup>. The prophecies then started circulating and Mark Taylor, as well as Mary and Don Colbert, talked about them on televangelist’s *Jim Bakker Show* in June 2016. Taylor said he then received at least 12 more prophecies between 2015 and January 2017 about “Israel, the Johnson Amendment, conservative Supreme Court Justices, abortion, the overturning of *Roe v. Wade*, and the right to own guns”<sup>56</sup>, and consequently had enough material to start writing a book in 2016 with Mary Colbert.

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<sup>50</sup> *Revelation 1, Ezekiel 37*. Some Godlywood films based on the Old Testament show the importance of defending the Jewish people against the Persian oppression.

<sup>51</sup> David BRODY, “EXCLUSIVE Secretary of State Pompeo to CBN News: God May Have Raised Up Trump Like He Raised Up Queen Esther”, *CBN News*, 21 mars 2019, <http://www.cbn.com>, accessed on July 6, 2020, and John HUDSON, Josh DAWSEY, Shane HARRIS and Dan LAMOTHE, “Killing of Soleimani Follows Long Push from Pompeo for Aggressive Action Against Iran”, *The Washington Post*, January 5, 2020, <https://www.washingtonpost.com>, accessed on July 6, 2020

<sup>52</sup> <https://www.christiancinema.com/digital/movie/the-trump-prophecy>, accessed on July 27, 2022.

<sup>53</sup> See Randall BALMER, *op. cit.*, and Mokhtar BEN BARKA, *Le Protestantisme évangélique nord-américain : la gauche évangélique des origines à Barack Obama*, Paris, Publisud, 2014.

<sup>54</sup> Emma GREEN, “Evangelicalism Silent Majority”, *The Atlantic*, December 25, 2019, <https://www.theatlantic.com>, accessed on January 12, 2023.

<sup>55</sup> Mark TAYLOR and Mary COLBERT, *The Trump Prophecies*, Crane, Defender Publishing, 2017, p.107.

<sup>56</sup> Hanne Amanda TRANGERUD, “The Trump Prophecies and the Mobilization of Evangelical Voters”, *Studies in Religion*, volume 51, issue 2, May 26, 2021, <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1177/00084298211012698>, accessed on January 6, 2023.

Some Christians also pointed out that Taylor’s prophecies often turned out to be wrong. For example he first said that God talked about Trump as president in 2012, then said that God had told him that the 2018 midterm elections would be a “red tsunami” with Republicans strengthening their majority in both chambers of Congress, before declaring that Trump would be re-elected for a second term in 2020<sup>57</sup>. He also said that “The coronavirus was just a cover story Donald Trump was using to distract everyone while he arrested hordes of journalists, business leaders, and others in the media who are part of a large satanic pedophile ring”<sup>58</sup>. However, the fact that he predicted in 2015 that Trump would appoint several Justices to the Supreme Court, which turned out to be true, reinforced his credibility among conservative evangelicals, all the more so as his champion’s appointments, with congressional approval, of three conservative Justices shifted the Supreme Court more to the right.

Moderate American Christians (including among evangelicals) also found that *The Trump Prophecy* was going too far in its support for Trump. For them, *The Trump Prophecy* heralded a man whose positions concerning immigrants, ethnic minorities and the poor are in flagrant opposition to the teaching of the Bible. Evangelical pastor Jim Wallis, founder of the Christian community of Sojourners and of the eponymous magazine said about the film: “It’s putting politics over the Gospel. It’s putting political ideology over faith” [calling] “*The Trump Prophecy* ‘heretical’ for trying to link God with a particular electoral outcome”<sup>59</sup>. The evangelical leader, who had worked with the Obama administration<sup>60</sup>, was particularly offended that the film portrayed God as favouring one candidate over another just before a major election, which in a way came down to manipulating evangelical voters. In fact, Jim Wallis belongs to the evangelicals who disagree with Trump, like for example Mark Galli, editor in chief of *Christianity Today*, the magazine founded by presidentially-connected evangelist Billy Graham, and who wrote a tribune against Trump (in the context of a possible impeachment), reproaching him with his behaviour and the damage his devoted evangelical supporters were doing to the Gospel<sup>61</sup>.

However, the moderate Christian voices on the subject of the film’s prophecy were hardly listened to by conservative evangelicals who have sometimes been referred to as “prophecy voters”, and include Pentecostal/ charismatic evangelical Christians who are thought to represent approximately 65 million Americans<sup>62</sup>. They did not ignore Trump’s many flaws but supported him

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<sup>57</sup> Harriet SHERWOOD, *op. cit.* and Lauren MARKOE, *op. cit.*

<sup>58</sup> Beth STONEBURNER, “Mark Taylor: Trump is Using Coronavirus as a Distraction to Purge the ‘Deep State’”, *Friendly Atheist*, March 13, 2020, <https://www.friendlyatheist.patheos.com>, accessed on September 10, 2021.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>60</sup> *About Jim*, <https://sojo.net/biography/jim-wallis>, accessed on July 19, 2020.

<sup>61</sup> Mark GALLI, “Trump Should Be Removed from Office”, *Christianity Today*, December 19, 2019, <https://www.christianitytoday.com>, accessed on January 5, 2023.

<sup>62</sup> Julia DUIN, “The Charismatic Christians Prophesying Trump’s Victory (And Not Backing Down)”, November 16, 2020, <https://religionunplugged.com>, accessed on November 5, 2021, Paul DJUPE and Ryan BURGER, “Evangelicals – a Note on Size and Sources”, *Religion in Public*, March 1, 2021, <https://www.religioninpublic.blog>, accessed on November

since he was the instrument of God, as said by audience members watching *The Trump Prophecy*: “God is definitely using Trump to restore America and bring revival to our land,” said cinemagoer Kathy Robinson. “He stands for the common man [sic] and protects our freedoms. And he's a good man himself – not perfect, but none of us are”<sup>63</sup>.

These people’s devotion to Trump has given rise to the term Trumpism (we can speak here of Christian Trumpism) to the point of being judged by some as a cult whose followers have lost their ability to reason and blindly follow what their consider as God’s will<sup>64</sup>. Mary Colbert herself is an example of that devotion. She did express in an interview her uneasiness with some of Trump’s derogatory comments, notably towards women, in videos and recordings that came out towards the end of the 2016 presidential campaign<sup>65</sup>, and even she “as a female [...] remembered feeling like somebody kicked [her] in the chest, hearing that”. But she “had also heard what God had to say about him” and she “was trusting on the word that [she] believed was the word of God [...] that there will be something in him greater that you even can even imagine so [she] was trusting in that word”<sup>66</sup>.

So, even if the result of the 2020 presidential elections did not turn out to be what Taylor and others had predicted, and what the film hoped for, the conservative evangelicals’ devotion to Trump and their trust in God’s led them to once again organize prayer chains and meetings for Trump to be declared the true winner just after the elections, and then before and after Congress certified Joe Biden's victory in January 2021. Paula White, who has been Trump's spiritual adviser for many years and leader of the New Destiny Christian Center, a Pentecostal church near Orlando<sup>67</sup>, even called angels from Africa and South America to the rescue<sup>68</sup>. Even if some of those prophets and leaders eventually ended up calling Trump to reason<sup>69</sup> or acknowledging that their prophecies had been wrong, much to their followers’ ire, others refused to change their minds, which highlights the division even among conservative evangelicals on this subject.

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12, 2021, and “Party affiliation among Pentecostals in the Evangelical Tradition”, *Pew Research Center*, <https://www.pewforum.org>, accessed on November 12, 2021.

<sup>63</sup> Harriet SHERWOOD, *op. cit.*..

<sup>64</sup> Virginia HEFFERNAN, “Call Trumpism What it is: a Cult”, *The Los Angeles Times*, January 10, 2020, <https://www.latimes.com>, accessed on October 29, 2021.

<sup>65</sup> “Donald Trump’s Lewd Comments about Women”, *The New York Times*, October 7, 2016, <https://www.nytimes.com>, accessed on May 5, 2018.

<sup>66</sup> *This Week’s Television Guest: Mark Taylor & Mary Colbert*.

<sup>67</sup> In 2019 Trump appointed Paula White at the head of the White House Faith and Opportunity Initiative (which replaced the Faith-based and Community Initiatives launched by George W. Bush in 2001). She was also the chair of the informal faith advisory board to president Trump. Michelle BOORSTEIN, “Trump Pastor Paula White: The President ‘100 percent is a Christian....a Person of repentance’ ”, *The Washington Post*, September 9, 2017, <http://www.washingtonpost.com>, accessed on November 4, 2021.

<sup>68</sup> Paula White’s speech: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vyZpJX7Ww0M>, accessed on November 2, 2021. Examples of edited videos making fun of her speech: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iiLicFO0Ftg> and <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IQifyFE49XQ>, both accessed on October 10, 2021.

<sup>69</sup> Like Pat Robertson in December 2020 (after having nevertheless predicted in October that Trump would win the election anyway) <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ahoc-hbVmVw>, accessed on November 10, 2021.

It must be added that in this very divisive context, the terms then used by these prophets, church leaders and their followers were very vindictive, aggressive and threatening<sup>70</sup>. Encouraged by their champion's refusal to concede defeat and using his own words, they argued in particular that Trump's victory in the 2020 presidential elections was stolen<sup>71</sup>, an assertion then widely disseminated on the Facebook page *Stop the Steal* created just after the presidential elections of November 3, 2020 and then with the hashtag that resulted from it<sup>72</sup>. The aforementioned vindictive, aggressive and threatening comments, combined with Trump's remarks, messages on Twitter and "claims that he was somehow cheated of a second term by a vast conspiracy"<sup>73</sup> after his November 2020 defeat, led to the shocking invasion of the Capitol in January 2021 in order to prevent Congress from certifying the 2020 presidential elections' results and hence Joe Biden's victory. That day, among Trump's supporters and attackers of Congress, some noted the presence of prophets who had predicted that Trump would eventually prevail<sup>74</sup>.

## Conclusion

*The Trump Prophecy*, which hardly shows Trump and does not really discuss his ability to be president nor his flaws, is a Godlywood film whose theme, production context, second part and release point to a very much dis-united America, as noticed by the film's producer who often insisted on this in interviews, but nevertheless hoped the film's focus on prayer would be an answer:

"We are such a divided nation right now. So I hope this film in some way can be maybe a point toward healing [...]"

We are a divided nation in a lot of ways, but when you look at leadership, when you look at it from a biblical perspective, we are called to pray for our leaders, whoever is in authority over us [...]"<sup>75</sup>.

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<sup>70</sup> See for example <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Yoffm4OIn-4>, accessed on November 10, 2021.

<sup>71</sup> This is part of their conspiracy theories which are widely shared by Mark Taylor.

<sup>72</sup> Sébastien SEIBT, « Présidentielle américaine: 'Stop the Steal', l'opération éclair sur Facebook des pro-Trump contre Biden », *France 24*, November 6, 2020, <https://www.france24.com>, accessed on November 12, 2021. Facebook then announced on January 11, 2021 (just after the invasion of the Capitol and before Inauguration Day) that the content linked to the 'Stop the Steal' movement was going to be removed. Mike ISAAC, "Facebook will Remove 'Stop the Steal' misinformation", *The New York Times*, January 11, 2021, <https://www.nytimes.com>, accessed on November 5, 2021.

<sup>73</sup> Peter BAKER, "Trump's Final Days of Rage and Denial", *The New York Times*, December 5, 2020, <https://www.nytimes.com>, accessed on October 7, 2021. We are therefore faced with a community that feeds on its own discourse and denounces "fake news". Julia DUIN, *op. cit.*

<sup>74</sup> They may have been also influenced by the QAnon movement that said Trump was going to use the army to take back the White House. Aaron C. DAVIS, "Red Flags", *The Washington Post*, October 31, 2021, <http://www.washingtonpost.com>, accessed on November 14, 2021, Julia DUIN, "For Christian Prophets Who Predicted Donald Trump's Reinstatement in 2021, No Apologies", *Newsweek*, January 4, 2022, <https://www.newsweek.com>, and James A. BEVERLEY, *The QAnon Deception: Everything You need to Know about the World's Most Dangerous Conspiracy Theory*, Concord (North Carolina), EqualTime Books, 2020.

<sup>75</sup> *The Trump Prophecy hitting Theaters: How God Told This Firefighter His Plan for America*, and Caleb PARKE, *op. cit.*

However, the film failed to provide an answer to this dis-united America while the reactions it led to give a sort of window into Christian nationalism in the United States<sup>76</sup>. Trump's evangelical prophets and devoted supporters, who still hope for his return to power<sup>77</sup>, were all the more vindicated in June 2022 when the federal Supreme Court overturned the 1973 Roe v. Wade Supreme Court decision they and Mark Taylor so much abhorred. As a now more conservative Supreme Court is going to be Trump's long-lasting legacy, Trump's prophets and supporters might try to push prayer back into school<sup>78</sup>, another divisive American subject which is in keeping with *The Trump Prophecy's* prayer theme. They might also target the divisive same-sex marriage legalized in all 50 states by the Supreme Court in 2015, unless their efforts are thwarted both by the Respect for Marriage Act signed into law by Joe Biden in December 2022, and the growing acceptance of same-sex marriage among younger evangelicals and non evangelical Protestants<sup>79</sup>.

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<sup>76</sup> Tara Isabelle BURTON, *op.cit.*

<sup>77</sup> Rich EDSON, "Evangelical vote at stake for 2024 Republican Hopefuls", *Fox News*, January 10, 2023, <https://www.foxnews.com>, accessed on January 12, 2023.

<sup>78</sup> School-mandated prayers in public were declared unconstitutional by the Supreme Court in 1962.

<sup>79</sup> Riham ALKOUSAA, "Evangelical Christians becoming less opposed to gay marriage, poll finds", *Reuters*, June 27, 2017, <<https://www.reuters.com>>, accessed on January 12, 2023, and Gabriel BORELLI, "About six-in-ten Americans say legalization of same-sex marriage is good for society", *Pew Research Center*, November 15, 2022, <https://www.pewresearch.org>, accessed on January 12, 2023.