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"Simply the Way God Made Us".
Religious Language in Phyllis Schlafly's Antifeminist Manifesto

Abstract: This contribution employs the Discourse-Historical Approach (DHA) to analyze religiously-laden rhetoric in the conservative grassroots campaign that blocked the ratification of the Equal Rights Amendment (ERA) in the early 1970s. By adopting a case-study approach, the paper aims to illustrate some of the ways in which religious language has been employed to realize specific political goals. The text under investigation is Phyllis Schlafly's 1972 manifesto entitled "What's Wrong with 'Equal Rights' for Women". A prominent conservative icon, Schlafly can be credited with achieving important victories in her antifeminist crusade that purposefully brought conservative family values into the political limelight.

Keywords: *antifeminism*, *conservatism*, *Phyllis Schlafly*, *ERA*, *Manifesto*, *family values*

1. Introduction

In this contribution, I employ the Discourse-Historical Approach (DHA)[1] to analyze the use of religious elements for persuasive ends in a 1972 manifesto entitled "What's Wrong with 'Equal Rights' for Women"[2] that launched Phyllis Schlafly's grassroots campaign to stop the ratification of the Equal Rights Amendment.[3] As its starting point, the investigation takes up the call "to look at how claims to have a religion (or its denials) are strategic discursive tools used by individuals, groups, institutions and governments in organizing social practices".[4] By analyzing religiously-laden rhetoric used to rally support for an antifeminist cause in a historical conservative manifesto, the paper aims to illustrate some of the ways in which religious language has been employed to realize specific political goals.

But how are we to distinguish between what is religion and what is secular in political communication and how has the use of religious discourse been analyzed in this particular field? Bruce Lincoln's influential definition describes religion as "discourse whose defining characteristic is its desire to speak of things eternal and transcendent with an authority equally transcendent and eternal".[5] The

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[1] Martin Reisigl, "The Discourse-Historical Approach", in John Flowerdew and John E. Richardson, eds., *The Routledge Handbook of Critical Discourse Studies* (London and New York: Routledge, 2018), 44-59; Martin Reisigl and Ruth Wodak, "The Discourse-Historical Approach", in Ruth Wodak and Michael Meyer, eds., *Methods of Critical Discourse Analysis*, Second Edition (London: SAGE, 2009), 87-121; Ruth Wodak, "The Discourse-Historical Approach", in Ruth Wodak and Michael Meyer, eds., *Methods of Critical Discourse Analysis* (London: SAGE, 2001), 63-93.

[2] The manifesto was originally published in *The Phyllis Schlafly Report*, 5:7 (February 1972). This version can be downloaded from *Eagleforum.org*. The manifesto was reprinted in Ed Martin, ed., *Phyllis Schlafly Speaks*, Volume 5: *Stopping the ERA* (Skelling America, 2019), 17-32.

[3] First drafted in 1923, the text of the Amendment was revised several times before the Congress approved the following version in 1972: "Equality of rights under the law shall not be denied or abridged by the United States or by any state on account of sex. The Congress shall have the power to enforce, by appropriate legislation, the provisions of this article". The efforts to get the Amendment ratified by 38 States are still ongoing (Alex Cohen and Wilfred U. Codrington III, "The Equal Rights Amendment Explained", *Brennan Center for Justice* (January 23, 2020), *www.brennancenter.org*.

[4] Teemu Taira, "Religion and the Secular", in Ruth Wodak and Bernhard Forchtner, eds., *The Routledge Handbook of Language and Politics* (London and New York: Routledge, 2018), 591.

[5] Bruce Lincoln, *Gods and Demons, Priests and Scholars: Critical Explorations in the History of Religions* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2012), 1.

modern distinction between religion and the secular that treats the two as being endowed with different rationalities, associated with two different languages, is attributed mainly to the influence of Jürgen Habermas. For Habermas, religion and its language belong to the private sphere of a particular community, while the supposed universality of the secular language makes it suitable to serve the public and political spheres.[6] More recently, writing about what he calls a new post-secular world, Habermas has called for a re-evaluation of the epistemic break between the two supposedly different languages in politics, arguing that "religion should not be excluded from public discussion, although religion remains subordinated to the rules of public discussion, because religious arguments and utterances should be translated into secular, 'generally accessible language'".[7]

Notwithstanding this recent re-evaluation, in the current scholarly debate about the role of religion in the political sphere the approach championed by thinkers such as Habermas and Tariq Modood[8] continues to represent religion and the secular as "essentially different rationalities and languages".[9] In fact, it has been argued that the modern invention of the 'religious' sphere serves to create "a peripheral space separate from the political sphere", at the same time as it creates a discourse "that naturalizes Euro-American secular rationality".[10]

A different approach to the analysis of the intertwining of religion and politics is represented by the dedicated research area of political theology that investigates the ways in which "theological concepts, ideas and discourses relate to politics".[11] This approach emphasizes the role that religious language plays in political communication by questioning the extent to which contemporary politics can do without theological language. For example, a common contemporary phenomenon is that of appropriating discourse on religion that both minority and majority groups engage in either, in the case of the former, "by making strategic claims to have a religion in order to get recognition" or, in the case of the latter, by trying "to maintain its position in ever-more diverse societies by re-labelling practices and symbols that have been previously considered 'religious' as 'cultural' or part of 'tradition'".[12] The case-study discussed in this paper allows us to examine the historical roots of the second kind of discursive appropriation that has stood the test of time, as conservative political actors continue to leverage religious discourse to legitimate antifeminist ideology in the twenty-first-century United States.[13]

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[6] Taira, "Religion and the Secular", 587-588; Jürgen Habermas, "An Awareness of What Is Missing", in Jürgen Habermas et al., eds., *An Awareness of What Is Missing: Faith and Reason in a Post-secular Age* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2010), 15-23.

[7] Jürgen Habermas, "'The Political': The Rational Meaning of a Questionable Inheritance of Political Theology", in Judith Butler et al., eds., *The Power of Religion in the Public Sphere* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2011), 15-33, 25. To illustrate how this process of translation might work, Taira uses the example of the biblical idea that humans are created in the image of God used to defend human freedom and autonomy (Taira, "Religion and the Secular", 588).

[8] See, for example, Tariq Modood, "Moderate Secularism: Religion as Identity and Respect for Religion", *Political Quarterly*, 81 (2010), 4-14, and "Rethinking Political Secularism: The Multiculturalist Challenge", *Patterns of Prejudice*, 55.2 (2021), 115-124.

[9] Taira, "Religion and the Secular", 589.

[10] Ibid., 594. The modern myth that presents "politics [as] a sphere of (Euro-modern) rational activity, as distinguished from the 'religious' sphere full of irrational and supernatural ideas" (ibid.) is discussed in an influential contribution by Timothy Fitzgerald, *Religion and Politics in International Relations* (London: Bloomsbury, 2011) who traces the separation of the two spheres to the seventeenth century.

[11] Taira, "Religion and the Secular", 590. See also Carl Schmitt, *Politische Theologie: Vier Kapitel zur Lehre von der Souveränität* (Berlin: Duncker & Humblot, 1922).

[12] Taira, "Religion and the Secular", 595.

[13] Conservative Republican women consistently approach women's issues from an antifeminist standpoint of traditional gender roles and religious values as Catherine N. Wineinger has documented in *Gendering the GOP: Intraparty Politics and Republican Women's Representation in Congress* (New York: Oxford U.P., 2022). On the same topic, see also Deana N. Rohlinger, "Mobilizing the Faithful: Conservative and Right-Wing Women's Movements in America", in Holly J. Cammon et al., eds., *The Oxford Handbook of U.S. Women's Social Movement Activism* (New York: Oxford U.P., 2017), 150-171; Melissa Deckman, *Tea Party Women* (New York: New York U.P., 2016); Leslie Dorrough Smith, *Righteous Rhetoric: Sex, Speech, and the Politics of Concerned Women for America* (New York: Oxford U.P, 2014).

2. Religious Language in American Political Discourse

The role that religious language has played and continues to play in American political discourse has been addressed extensively on the level of federal politics. The existing literature on the topic has privileged the analysis of religious elements in the language of leading male politicians (mainly U.S. presidents and presidential candidates). On the contrary, American women politicians' use of religious discourse has been largely neglected.[14] The main strand of research dealing with male politicians' use of religion can be exemplified through the work of Aditi Bhatia. [15] Bhatia's investigation of the use of religious imagery in George W. Bush's speeches identified a new "dichotomizing" discourse that has emerged in the post-9/11 era. This discourse tends to be articulated through a bipolar, largely American-centric narrative "that proceeds to divide the world into two narrowly defined and rigidly allocated parts, 'us' and 'them'".[16] Bhatia reports on a previous study that compared some key call-to-arms historical speeches with those delivered by George W. Bush, in which four generic features characteristic of this political genre were described:

a. creation of a legitimate and wholly good authority;
b. appeal to the historical values of cultural values and tradition;
c. construction of a wholly evil "other"; and
d. appeal for unity behind the wholly good.[17]

As I intend to show in the analysis of Phyllis Schlafly's anti-ERA manifesto, historical antifeminist discourse employed similar discursive strategies. Similarities include, for example, the use of appeals to common Judeo-Christian values, as well as denunciation of the feminist movement as the Evil Other, on a par with the godless communist regime.

Arnaud Vincent's corpus-based investigation of the religious rhetoric of U.S. Presidents is another important recent study exemplifying the main strand of research on religious language in American politics.[18] Vincent's work is of particular relevance to the present investigation as it offers a dedicated chapter on the Cold War era and its impact on the use of religious discourse in political communication. Using corpus linguistics methodology, Vincent shows how, in the 1950s and 1960s, religious rhetoric in American politics

> drew on several biblical imageries and depicted a Manichean vision of a world torn apart between America – under God, free, shining, the last best hope of human kind – and an evil communist empire – a reincarnation of Biblical Egypt, a tyrannical and materialistic state where enslaved people would live in darkness and fear.[19]

Vincent's research will be discussed in more detail later in this section.

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[14] But see Ruth Wodak, "Gender and Body Politics", in R. Wodak, *The Politics of Fear: What Right-wing Populist Discourses Mean* (London: SAGE, 2015), 151-176.

[15] Aditi Bhatia's work can be cited here, for example, "The Discursive Construction of Terrorism and Violence", in John Flowerdew and John E. Richardson, eds., *The Routledge Handbook of Critical Discourse Studies* (London and New York: Routledge, 2018), 434-446; "Religious Metaphor in the Discourse of Illusion: George W. Bush and Osama bin Laden", *World Englishes*, 26.4 (2007), 507-524. See also Gordon C. Chang and Hugh B. Mehan, "Discourse in a Religious Mode: The Bush Administration's Discourse in the War on Terrorism and Its Challenges", *Pragmatics*, 16.1 (2006), 1-23.

[16] Bhatia, "The Discursive Construction", 435.

[17] Ibid., referring to the study by Phil Graham, Thomas Keenan and Anne-Maree Dowd, "A Call to Arms at the End of History: A Discourse-Historical Analysis of George W. Bush's Declaration of War on Terror", *Discourse & Society*, 15.2-3 (2004), 199-221.

[18] Arnaud Vincent, *The Religious Rhetoric of U.S. Presidential Candidates: A Corpus Linguistics Approach to the Rhetorical God Gap* (London and New York: Routledge, 2020).

[19] Ibid., 30.

With this case-study, I attempt to redress the balance that has so far tipped the scales in favour of research focusing on leading male politicians' use of religious language. The bias underlying the lack of attention to the prominent role that religious women have played on the level of national politics points to scarce interest in less visible, typically women-led forms of political activity such as grassroots activism.[20] Thus the choice of the prominent conservative personality Phyllis Schlafly, who passed away in September 2016 at the age of 92, a few months after publicly endorsing Donald Trump as the Republican Presidential candidate,[21] is timely. "She loved her country. She loved her family. And she loved her God", recited the then Presidential candidate at Schlafly's funeral.[22] Trump's presence reinforced Schlafly's credentials as the "Conservative Movement's Founding Mother",[23] whose distinguished career as a religious (Roman Catholic) grassroots activist spanned decades, starting in the post-World War II period. Schlafly's prominence is mainly attributed to the decisive role she played in the successful campaign to block the passage of the Equal Rights Amendment (ERA) in the 1970s, which is the focus of the present investigation.[24] However, long before deciding to commit herself to the antifeminist cause, Schlafly had been busy getting "the grassroots to pressure their elected representatives to stand strong" on issues such as anti-Communism (international and domestic), national defense and nuclear warfare.[25] In fact, this is where her main priorities lay in the 1960s, when Schlafly became adamant that the Kennedy-Johnson administration's defense policy "was making the nation unconscionably vulnerable to nuclear attack or blackmail from the Soviet Union".[26] This conviction prompted her to campaign relentlessly, employing her outstanding writing and speaking skills, to protect America from godless Communism.

What made Schlafly special was her ability to engage with her audience in a direct, forceful and effective language that combined carefully distilled legal and technical knowledge with references to her faith that filled her speeches and writing. Her intense political commitment was, in fact, the product of her faith. Her activist mobilization reflected her deeply held religious beliefs about the moral duty of a good Christian woman who had to answer the spiritual call and defend her country from such threats as the Soviet regime or feminism.

It was in the early 1970s, as the ERA ratification was making progress, that feminism, representing a threat to conservative family values, started to influence Schlafly's political vision. To contextualize the use of religious language in Schlafly's 1972 manifesto, we first need to look at the role that religion played in dominant political discourse of the time. As already hinted at above, religion was intensively exploited as a potent rhetorical weapon in American anti-communist propaganda that Schlafly had

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[20] Fortunately, recent linguistic research on present-day online forms of religious women's activities has shed some light on non-elected women activists. See, for example, Mareike Fenja Bauer, "Beauty, Baby and Backlash? Anti-Feminist Influencers on TikTok", *Feminist Media Studies*, 24.5 (2023), 1-19; Helen Ringrow, "'I can feel myself being squeezed and stretched, moulded and grown, and expanded in my capacity to love loudly and profoundly': Metaphor and Religion in Motherhood Blogs", *Discourse, Context & Media*, 37 (2020), 100429; Catherine Tebaldi, "Tradwives and Truth Warriors: Gender and Nationalism in US White Nationalist Women's Blogs", *Gender & Language*, 17.1 (2023), 14-38.

[21] David Weigel and Jose Del Real, "Phyllis Schlafly Endorses Trump in St. Louis", *The Washington Post* (11 March 2016), *www.washingtonpost.com*. In Schlafly's last published work, *The Conservative Case for Trump* (co-authored with Ed Martin and Brett Decker, Washington D.C.: Regnery, 2016), that came out posthumously, she rallied her grassroots followers to support Trump as "an American patriot with policies that will make America great again" (7).

[22] CNN, "Trump Speaks at Phyllis Schlafly's Funeral", 10 September 2016, *youtube.com*.

[23] Donald T. Critchlow, *Phyllis Schlafly and Grassroots Conservatism: A Woman's Crusade* (Princeton: Princeton U.P., 2015), 270. In a different way, perhaps, Schlafly's credentials were reinforced by Cate Blanchett's portrayal of her in Dahvi Waller's TV mini-series *Mrs. America* (Hulu, 2020).

[24] On the history of the proposed Equal Rights Amendment (ERA) and its relationship to the women's movement see Kelsy Kretschmer and Jane Mansbridge, "The Equal Rights Amendment Campaign and Its Opponents", in Cammon et al., eds., *The Oxford Handbook of U.S. Women's Social Movement Activism*, 71-88.

[25] Critchlow, *Phyllis Schlafly*, 166.

[26] Ibid., 163.

endorsed in a number of popular books.[27] The early Cold-War period, according to the results of Vincent's corpus-based investigation, produced a specific "insistence – in campaign rhetoric – on slavery, atheism and on the terms crusade, soul, souls, spiritual and spirituality".[28] In that period, both Republican and Democratic presidential candidates used religiously tinted language. Another significant finding from Vincent's study points to the increasing frequency of references to Judeo-Christian America. In fact, as Vincent explains,

> a cold-war-related usage of the phrase judeo-christian [served] as an ecumenical and consensual call from both parties to fight against godless communism. Around the 1970s, the story of a Judeo-Christian America became far more partisan and served a new type of fight – now domestic rather than foreign – against a new type of enemy, i.e. 'the liberalism'. This modification in tone was the product of the Republicans' defense of their conservative agenda – which they defined as inspired by the Judeo-Christian tradition – against the liberal agenda.[29]

In other words, this is the moment when a new religious theme emerges in American political discourse. In this theme, a new emphasis is placed on the terms "family" and "family values" that are discursively re-invented to symbolize conservative gender roles associated with the patriarchal family. Vincent's corpus-based findings substantiate previous research that claimed that, for the GOP, "a word like family appears draped with a religious cloak".[30] That "family values" is an expression of twentieth-century Republican coinage is attested by Prothero's Dictionary of Religious Literacy:

> Family values.
> Although this term sounds ancient, it is actually of recent vintage, first used in its current sense in the late 1960s and injected into American cultural politics in the late 1970s. The Republican Party platforms of 1976 and 1980 endorsed 'family values' as an antidote to what conservatives saw as the moral degradation of American society brought on by the sexual revolution, rock'n'roll, and the counterculture.[31]

As the analysis of Schlafly's manifesto will show, the text under investigation appears to exemplify one of the earliest samples of this kind of religiously-laden political rhetoric. The next section will introduce my methodological approach.

3. Methodological Framework

To prepare the ground for the analysis, I will first sketch out the methodological framework and provide an overview of some previous research that has examined historical speeches by American women activists. The main methodological framework adopted in this study is represented by the DHA. The key notions that characterize the DHA as a special strand of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) are critique, ideology and power.[32] Being critical for a DHA analyst means "gaining distance from the data ...

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[27] On Schlafly's role in the anti-communist crusade see David Domke and Kevin Coe, *The God Strategy: How Religion Became a Political Weapon in America* (New York: Oxford U.P., 2008), Chapters 5 and 6; Critchlow, *Phyllis Schlafly*, Chapters 3 and 7.
[28] Vincent, *The Religious Rhetoric*, 21.
[29] Vincent thus concludes that "the salience of a certain ideological language against Communism is real" (Vincent, *The Religious Rhetoric*, 23).
[30] Ibid., 44. The reference to previous research is to Amy Sullivan, *The Party Faithful: How and Why Democrats Are Closing the God Gap* (New York: Scribner, 2008).
[31] Stephen Prothero, *Religious Literacy: What Every American Needs to Know-And Doesn't* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 2007), 222-223. See Seth Dowland, *Family Values: Gender, Authority, and the Rise of the Christian Right* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2015) for a discussion on how the new Christian Right leaders were able to frame opposition to abortion, feminism and gay rights as 'defense of family'.
[32] Reisigl and Wodak, "The Discourse-Historical Approach", 87.

embedding the data in the social context, clarifying the political positioning of discourse participants, and having a focus on continuous self-reflection while undertaking research".[33] A flexible definition of ideology in this framework highlights the "(often) one-sided perspective or world view composed of related mental representations, convictions, opinions, attitudes and evaluations, which is shared by members of a specific social group".[34] Finally, the DHA prioritizes the analysis of the ways in which powerful text producers discursively manipulate and control "the social occasion by means of the genre of a text, or by the regulation of access to certain public spheres".[35]

According to Wodak, DHA's main analytical strength lies in its capacity to "[allow] relating the macro- and meso-level of contextualization to the micro-level analyses of texts." The analytical procedure consists of "the so-called 'entry-level analysis' focusing on the thematic dimension of texts", combined with "the 'in-depth analysis' which scrutinizes coherence and cohesion of texts in detail".[36] In the first instance, the analyst focuses on the contents of texts aiming to identify the most important discourse topics. This is done in order to assign specific texts to particular discourses. Secondly, the attention shifts to "the genre, the macro-structure of the text, discursive strategies and argumentation schemes".[37] Of particular importance to the DHA is the four-level model of context articulated into:

- the immediate, language or text-internal co-text and co-discourse;
- the intertextual and interdiscursive relationship between utterances, texts, genres and discourses;
- the extralinguistic social variables and institutional frames of a specific 'context of situation';
- the broader sociopolitical and historical context[38]

The research questions that can be investigated through the DHA include, to give a few examples, the following:

- How are persons, objects, phenomena/events, processes and actions named and referred to linguistically?
- What characteristics, qualities and features are attributed to social actors, objects, phenomena/events and processes?
- What arguments are employed in the discourse in question?[39]

These and other research questions are associated with different types of discursive strategies, that are defined as "a more or less intentional plan of practices (including discursive practices) adopted to achieve a particular social, political, psychological or linguistic goal".[40] The discursive strategies of nomination, predication, argumentation, perspectivization/framing/discourse representation and intensification/mitigation can be located at different levels of linguistic organization and complexity.[41]

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[33] Ibid.
[34] Ibid., 88. Reisigl and Wodak explain that "[f]or the DHA, language is not powerful on its own – it is a means to gain and maintain power by the use powerful people make of it".
[35] Ibid., 89.
[36] Wodak, *The Politics of Fear*, 50-51.
[37] Ibid.
[38] Reisigl and Wodak, "The Discourse-Historical Approach", 93.
[39] Ibid., 93-94.
[40] Ibid., 94.
[41] The table containing a selection of discursive strategies can be found in Reisigl and Wodak, "The Discourse-Historical Approach", 95.

In addition to the methodological framework of the DHA, another approach needs to be integrated in order to refine the analysis. As a foundational text of the STOP ERA movement,[42] Schlafly's output can be read as a manifesto aiming to share attitudes and ideologies among the members of the anti-ERA, anti-feminist conservative movement and to make its claims known to both the general public and the government.[43] For the analysis of such texts, van Dijk has proposed a categorization schema that has a two-fold purpose. On the one hand, the schema works as a tool to describe a movement as a social phenomenon, and, on the other, it can work as a tool to analyze the global semantic categories for the movement's foundational text(s). The list of such semantic categories includes: Identity; Actions; Time; History; Present: Place: Beneficiary; Opponents; Aims/Vision.[44] In manifestos, as van Dijk shows in the sample analysis of the online manifesto of the Black Lives Matter movement, "the ideology is usually expressed by polarized structures, emphasizing the 'Good things of Us', and the 'Bad things of Them'".[45] The function of such structures is to support a "polarized ideological organization of the global semantics of the manifesto".[46]

While van Dijk's recent work focuses on examples of present-day manifestos,[47] two studies have analyzed historical manifestos authored by American women activists in 1970s, almost contemporaneously with the publication of Phyllis Schlafly's text. Studies by Veronika Koller and Begona Nunez-Perucha thus provide some additional context in terms of the interdiscursive relationships, as conceptualized within the DHA (see above), being products of the same broader sociopolitical and historical context.[48] Differently from the manifesto analyzed in this paper, Koller's and Nunez-Perucha's investigations deal with texts expressing a feminist point of view on the role of women in contemporary American society.[49] Nunez-Perucha is interested in the changing conceptualizations of gender (in)equality. These are investigated by looking at the ways in which the roles attributed to women as a group are expressed semantically and syntactically. Her study applies van Dijk's work on feminist ideology[50] to examine local semantic and syntactic features in four feminist speeches that represent different historical period. More specifically, Nunez-Perucha is interested in "how women are lexically represented and what roles they are attributed in the clause".[51] Koller's study applies the DHA, combined with the socio-cognitive approach, to analyze a foundational text produced by a lesbian feminist collective in 1970, a manifesto that represents a sample of counter-discourse to the text written by Schlafly. Koller offers a detailed explanation of the three interrelated levels (micro-,

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[42] STOP here stands for Stop Taking Our Privileges, an acronym suggested to Schlafly by Kate Hoffman, another antifeminist activist (Critchlow, *Phyllis Schlafly*, 219).

[43] Cf. Teun A. van Dijk, "Manifestos as Social Movement Discourse", in Carmen Rosa Caldas-Coulthard and Malcolm Coulthard, eds., *Texts and Practices Revisited: Essential Readings in Critical Discourse Analysis*, Second Edition (Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, 2023), 114.

[44] Ibid., 121-122. This schema partially overlaps with the ideology schema that van Dijk introduced in *Ideology: A Multidisciplinary Approach* (London: SAGE, 1998).

[45] Van Dijk, "Manifestos", 122.

[46] Ibid., 124.

[47] In addition to the BLM manifesto, van Dijk offers sample analyses of the Stop Mare Mortum manifesto and the manifesto of the First Continental Summit of Indigenous Women Puno.

[48] Veronica Koller, "Analyzing Lesbian Identity in Discourse: Combining Discourse-Historical and Socio-Cognitive Approaches", in Christopher Hart, ed., *Critical Discourse Studies in Context and Cognition* (Amsterdam: John Benjamins, 2011), 119-142; Begona Nunez-Perucha, "Critical Discourse Analysis and Cognitive Linguistics as Tools for Ideological Research: A Diachronic Analysis of Feminism", in Hart, ed., *Critical Discourse Studies in Context and Cognition*, 97-117.

[49] Koller's case-study is the first paragraph of the Radicalesbians' 1970 manifesto "The Woman Identified Woman", while one of the four feminist speeches analyzed by Nunez-Perucha is a 1969 speech by Shirley Chisholm, a U.S. Congresswoman, who talked about inequality at work in "Equal Rights for Women".

[50] Teun A. van Dijk, "Ideological Discourse Analysis", *The New Courant*, 4 (1995), 135-161; *Discourse, Racism and Ideology* (La Laguna: RCEI Ed., 1996).

[51] Nunez-Perucha, "Critical Discourse Analysis", 108. The goal here is to identify the lexis of "womanhood" by extrapolating "those terms that refer specifically to the women's group and encode the different roles ascribed to men and women".

meso- and macro-) that guide the linguistic interpretation of the text in the DHA methodology. The levels can be summarized as follows: at the micro-level, close linguistic analysis is conducted, with flexible linguistic parameters; at the meso-level, the focus shifts to the producers of texts (who "may use specific lexis that they assume their audience to share, thus positioning themselves and the recipients as members of the same discourse community"),[52] the distributors and the media; at the macro-level, the analyst examines the wider social formation in order interpret the findings of the textual analysis.[53] Koller's sample of generic research questions that can be supported by the tripartite analytical model includes:

- What images of the community do authors communicate in particular texts in a particular time period? [the macro-level of analysis]
- How can those images, and any changes in them, be traced in concrete texts? [the micro-level of anlaysis]
- Who is involved in the discursive practices around them, and in what role [the meso-level of anlaysis]?
- Why have such changes taken place? [the macro-level of analysis][54]

These research questions will guide the analysis of Phyllis Schlafly's use of religious language to achieve specific political goals presented in the next section.

4. Analysis: Religion in the Ideological Warfare Against Feminism

By zooming in on the use of religious references that make the text accessible and effective for the members of a specific discourse community, the analysis of Phyllis Schlafly's text sets out to identify the key ideological categories of the manifesto (i.e., the goals of the antifeminist movement, the norms and values that the movement supports and promotes), its main polarized structures (i.e., who are the 'Good' we and who are the 'Bad' they?). The investigation starts with a keyword analysis of Schlafly's text, with corpus linguistics techniques employed in order to obtain a systematic entry-level insight into the main discourse topics of the text.[55] Table 1 presents the top 100 keywords in the manifesto, with the first batch of the 25 top keywords in column 1, followed by the second batch in column 3 and so on :[56]

Type	Frequency	Type	Frequency	Type	Frequency	Type	Frequency
women's	35	congressmen	3	speak	5	what's	2
equal	37	chivalry	3	illinois	3	sex	5
rights	41	support	13	enterprise	3	unit	3
libbers	13	thy	3	children	12	dirty	3
amendment	18	men	17	magazine	4	tuesday	3
lib	11	basic	6	ads	3	agitating	2
women	71	special	8	family	14	menial	2

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[52] Koller, "Analyzing Lesbian Identity", 127.
[53] Ibid., 123-129.
[54] Ibid., 129.
[55] The length of the text is 4,057 tokens, with 1237 types and 1156 lemmas. The software used is Lancsbox Version 6 (see Vaclav Brezina, Tony McEnery, and Stephen Wattam, "Collocations in Context: A New Perspective on Collocation Networks", *International Journal of Corpus Linguistics*, 20.2, (2015), 139-173. The references corpus used to produce the keyword list is *AmE06* (a corpus of American English containing approx. 1 million tokens, that comes pre-loaded with the software).
[56] For reasons of space, the table contains the information on absolute frequencies only.

husband	16	legislation	4	job	9	deprive	2
wife	19	slavery	3	civilization	3	clique	2
motherhood	7	laundry	3	ms.	4	sewing	2
laws	12	privileges	3	contract	3	drudgery	2
liberation	6	wives	3	mother	10	judeo-christian	2
woman's	5	duties	4	enjoy	3	discretion	2
don't	5	dishes	3	law	8	soviet	3
marriage	13	respect	5	russia	3	agitation	2
financial	9	achievement	4	backbreaking	2	boredom	2
baby	10	privilege	3	full-page	2	superficial	2
woman	21	unhappy	3	fanatics	2	means	7
draft	5	permit	3	community-property	2	noisy	2
babies	5	carrying	4	wife's	2	liquor	2
american	26	russian	4	dower	2	husbands	2
customs	4	1971	3	housework	2	positively	2
pay	8	benefits	5	agitators	2	satisfying	2
it's	3	promoting	3	alimony	2	promotes	2
let's	3	assault	3	husband's	2	cries	2

Table 1. Top 100 keywords in "What's Wrong with 'Equal Rights' for Women"

As is shown in the table above, *women's* was identified as the top keyword in the text. The main collocates for *women's* are *libbers* and *rights*. An expanded wildcard search for *wom** (comprising *women's*, *women*, *woman*, *woman's*) has produced a total of 132 occurrences (normalized frequency of 325.36), with *women* yielding 71 hits. It is interesting to note that the list of the top 10 negative keywords, i.e., items that have an unusually low frequency compared to the reference corpus, contains items such as *I*, *me*, *was*.[57] This finding points to the text producer's intention to create a specific collective identity by obscuring her authorial presence as an individual antifeminist woman in the text.

By combining the keyword extraction procedure with the manual inspection of the concordance lines, three major semantic domains have been identified as represented by the different groups of items in the list of the top keywords. These include: the domain of the family, motherhood and womanhood; the domain of law, legal rights and duties; and, finally, the domain referring to the feminist movement who represent the supporters of the ERA. The first domain is represented by the following keywords: *husband, wife, motherhood, marriage, baby, babies, wives, children, family, mother, wife's, husband's, husbands, women's, women, woman's, woman, men*. Additionally, lexical items such as, for example, *laundry, dishes, housework, enjoy, dirty, sewing, drudgery, menial, boredom, positively, satisfying*, etc. can be said to represent the same domain. Within the second domain, we find *equal, rights, amendment, laws, financial, draft, pay, congressmen, support, basic, special, legislation, privileges, duties, achievement, privilege, benefits, promoting, job, contract, law, community-property, dower, alimony, unit, Illinois, discretion, means*. Finally, keywords that belong to the third domain are items such as:

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[57] These three items occupy the top three positions in the list of the top ten negative keywords, followed by *back*, *did*, *down*, *between*, *see*, *know*, *says*.

libbers, lib, assault, magazine, ads, ms., full-page, fanatics, agitators, sex, unhappy, agitating, deprive, clique, agitation, noisy, liquor. These keywords thus accurately capture the main discourse topics of the text that discusses the damaging consequences that the passage of the ERA, promoted by the "noisy" feminist movement, would have for conservative, antifeminist women who endorse the most "satisfying career" of a wife, mother and homemaker.

The keyword list also contains evidence of the use of religious language. *Thy* and *Judeo-Christian* are two prominent examples that show how religious discourse can be recontextualized and intertextually referred to in a political manifesto:

1. Our Judeo-Christian civilization has developed the law and custom that, since women must bear the physical consequences of the sex act, men must be required to bear the *other* consequences and pay in other ways. (italics in original)
2. Our respect for the family as the basic unit of society, which is ingrained in the laws and customs of our Judeo-Christian civilization, is the greatest single achievement in the entire history of women's rights.
3. We are fortunate to have the great legacy of Moses, the Ten Commandments, especially this one: "Honor thy father and thy mother that thy days may be long upon the land."

Two more excerpts containing references to Schlafly's faith can be added to the examples above:

4. If you don't like this fundamental difference, you will have to take up your complaint with God because He created us this way. The fact that women, not men, have babies is not the fault of selfish and domineering men, or of the establishment, or of any clique of conspirators who want to oppress women. It's simply the way God made us.
5. The second reason why American women are a privileged group is that we are the beneficiaries of a tradition of special respect for women which dates from the Christian Age of Chivalry. The honor and respect paid to Mary, the Mother of Christ, resulted in all women, in effect, being put on a pedestal.

These five excerpts are strategically placed in the opening part of the manifesto, unequivocally linking Schlafly's writing to foundational religious texts through overt intertextual relations.[58] The same excerpts help us identify the main polarized structures that support the organization of the manifesto. The strategic use of pronouns and possessive adjectives allows the author to present the 'US' group as the only one that embodies the values of the Judeo-Christian civilization (*our Judeo-Christian civilization*, repeated twice). The values that are referenced here include respect for the heterosexual, patriarchal family (*our respect for the family*), adherence to the legacy of the Ten Commandments (*we are fortunate to have the great legacy of Moses*), and the Christian tradition of special respect for women ([we are] *the beneficiaries of a tradition of special respect for women*). The collective identity that is discursively constructed through these intertextual references is that of a deeply religious, conservative social group whose members share some core ideological beliefs, such as, most importantly, a "gendered behavioral culture [that is] ruled by biology".[59] The defining tenets of this culture, anchored in the concept of sexual complementarity between the two sexes, were set in stone in a number of impactful twentieth-century documents produced by the Catholic Church, such as, for example, *Persona Humana*

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[58] Cf. Ruth Wodak, "Critical Discourse Analysis, Discourse-Historical Approach", in Karen Tracy, Cornelia Ilie and Todd Sandel, eds., *The International Encyclopedia of Language and Social Interaction* (John Wiley & Sons, 2015), 1-14.
[59] Amélie Ribieras, "'I Want to Thank My Husband Fred for Letting Me Come Here", in Emily K. Carian, Alex DiBranco, and Chelsea Ebin, eds., *Male Supremacism in the United States: From Patriarchal Traditionalism to Misogynist Incels and the Alt-Right* (London and New York: Routledge, 2023), 74.

(1975) and the 1985 *Ratzinger Report*.[60] Schlafly thus relies on religion to support her categorical arguments about the proper nature of the relationship between men and women and their respective roles in American society. Her claims are linguistically realized as bare assertions purporting to depict the only truthful version of reality. This version demands that the compliant addressee take for granted what Schlafly calls facts (e.g., that *the family is the basic unit of society*, that *women have babies while men don't*,[61] that there is *a fundamental difference* between women and men).

Example (4) introduces the opponents of the antifeminist worldview, who refuse to accept the ideas of the social group that Schlafly represents. The Bad 'They' are addressed directly using a second-person pronoun: *If you don't like this fundamental difference, you will have to*. Again, Schlafly's formulates her claims in a categorical way (either you like it or you don't), leaving no room for a dialogue between the two parties. At first it may not be clear that the detractors are the feminists campaigning for the ratification of the ERA. However, Schlafly quickly corrects this ambiguity by first somewhat playfully referring to feminists as *youthful agitators,* only to escalate her attack a bit later by re-labelling the same women as *'equal rights' fanatics* (inverted commas in original). The pervasive stereotype of the aggressive, foul-mouthed feminist comes alive in Schlafly's lines:[62]

6. aggressive females on television talk shows yapping about how mistreated American women are, suggesting that marriage has put us in some kind of "slavery," that housework is menial and degrading, and – perish the thought – that women are discriminated against.

Schlafly uses the same categorical language to discredit the efforts of the feminist movement as fraudulent and damaging to women:

7. It's time to set the record straight. The claim that American women are downtrodden and unfairly treated is the fraud of the century. The truth is that American women never had it so good. Why should we lower ourselves to "equal rights" when we already have the status of special privilege?

8. These women's libbers do, indeed, intend to "break the barriers" of the Ten Commandments and the sanctity of the family. It hasn't occurred to them that a woman's best "escape from isolation and boredom" is - not a magazine subscription to boost her "stifled ego" - but a husband and children who love her.

The passage in (8) contains additional examples of explicit references to religious discourse (*the Ten Commandments*, *the sanctity of the family*). But the manifesto also introduces additional religious elements in a covert way. Indeed, Schlafly varies the discursive strategies that promote her conservative agenda. In a dedicated section of the manifesto entitled "Equal Rights in Russia", Schlafly offers an apocalyptic portrayal of women's conditions in the USSR. She starts by comparing the text of the Amendment with a specific article in the Soviet Constitution: "Woman in the U.S.S.R. is accorded equal rights with men in all spheres of economic, state, cultural, public and political life." This juxtaposition

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[60] See Mary Anne Case, "Trans Formations in the Vatican's War on 'Gender Ideology'", *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society*, 44.3 (2019), 639-664. Case explains that feminist claims "in favour of a total equality between man and woman and freedom from biologically determined roles" unequivocally clashed with John Paul II's theological anthropology of sexual complementarity, according to which the equal dignity of man and woman is "premised on and manifest in essential and complementary differences" (648).

[61] Not all women do, can or want to.

[62] The pervasiveness of this stereotype has been confirmed by recent studies of online antifeminist discourse, for example, Kimberly J. Lopez et al., "One Day of #Feminism: Twitter as a Complex Digital Arena for Wielding, Shielding, and Trolling talk on Feminism", *Leisure Sciences*, 41.3 (2019), 203-220; Jessica Aiston, "'Vicious, Vitriolic, Hateful and Hypocritical': The Representation of Feminism within the Manosphere", *Critical Discourse Studies*, 21.6 (2024), 703-720.

serves a double purpose. Firstly, Schlafly makes another contribution to her crusade against godless Communism. Secondly, she establishes a link between the feminist movement and the most un-American kind of society, the communist regime. Thus, Schlafly's antifeminist representation of the ERA supporters merges feminism with godless communism.

The projected collective identity that Schlafly creates for an idealized American woman is characterized by traits such as religious devotion, conservatism and antifeminism. In her worldview, it is this ideal woman, not the *noisy feminist agitator*, who represents the majority of American women. Schlafly's manifesto traces a linear trajectory from some remote Christian Age of Chivalry into the twentieth-century United States for a mythical tradition of special respect that allegedly has always been and continues to be reserved to women who believe in the sanctity of heterosexual marriage and the primacy of motherhood. That the audience Schlafly was addressing was composed of privileged, white, middle-class women only is a question that the manifesto skillfully avoids.

Women libbers, on the other hand, are represented as a tiny minority that has set out to assault the heterosexual family, advocate for abortions instead of babies, degrade the role of wife, mother and homemaker that, as Schlafly claims, the majority of American women aspire to. In Schlafly's words, the ERA supporters aim to destroy the customs, norms and values of the Judeo-Christian civilization, exposing America to the risk of falling prey to the godless communist regime.

5. Conclusion

This paper has attempted to enrich our understanding of some of the ways in which religion, language and politics are intertwined in the American context by examining a case-study that centered on Phyllis Schlafly's contribution to conservative antifeminism. Schlafly fought and achieved important victories in the crusade that brought conservative family values into the political limelight. It is beyond the scope of this investigation to discuss whether Schlafly's role as a woman protagonist in the grassroots conservative movement actually set an example of an ambitious housewife-activist "who liberated herself from patriarchal constraints while maintaining, in appearance, a traditional lifestyle".[63]

What needs to be recognized and researched further is Schlafly's role in the representation of feminists as a threat to *us*, to *our* nation. As a discursive move, the construction of feminists as a threat to a supposedly established order has enjoyed a remarkable continuity in time.[64] This strategic argument has enabled Schlafly to create a new gendered discourse in which

> white middle-class Christian women [are cherished] as *mater familias*, white middle-class heterosexual Christian men as 'normal', and all other individuals (i.e. those who differ in terms of gender, ethnicity/'race', religion, social class and sexual orientation) [are] conceptualized as 'outside' of the family (i.e. as not belonging to the family at all).[65]

This paper has analyzed the ways in which religious discourse can be exploited in order to achieve specific political goals. The use of religious elements through overt and covert intertextual references enabled Phyllis Schlafly to make authoritative claims about her vision of conservative gender role and the dangers associated with the feminist movement that she was able to link to the most un-American system of government represented by the Soviet communist regime. Powerful in her role of a housewife-activist, Schlafly rode on the strength of her religiously-infused mission that sanctioned her access to the public sphere as a defender of conservative values.

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[63] Ribieras, "'I Want to Thank My Husband", 82.
[64] Cf. Wodak, *The Politics of Fear*, 2.
[65] Ibid., 151.

Religion as a factor in the political mobilization of conservative women activists needs to be researched further. Perhaps religion is a simplistic explanation, but, as the analysis of religious language in Schlafly's political manifesto has shown, her writing is permeated with references to her faith. Whether she used these as "strategic discursive tools",[66] or whether she was driven by her faith, Schlafly was able to leverage religious discourse to successfully rally support for the antifeminist cause.

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[66] Taira, "Religion and the Secular", 591.