This dissertation examines the religious rhetoric of Ronald Reagan as part of a strategy to rebuild his political base following a disappointing level of support after his first two years in office. In particular, this examination will focus on a triad of speeches given to Christian Evangelicals within ninety days of a re-election Memorandum issued by Reagan Pollster, Dick Wirthlin. I will closely examine the texts of Reagan's early 1983 speeches to the National Religious Broadcasters, National Prayer Breakfast and the National Association of Evangelicals. In doing so I will show the way that the three speeches worked to convey the President's agenda in language that was commonly shared not only by those three groups but also by President Reagan. I'll argue that by using an intensified language of identifying symbols and linguistic nuances, the President was able to speak with a rhetorical urgency that was rooted in both the history of the Evangelical movement and Ronald Reagan's personal religious experience. Additionally, I'll show how Reagan's ability to linguistically identify with politically conservative Evangelical Christians was how he was able to successfully regain their confidence.
how he was able to successfully regain their confidence. The project will include original archival research from the Ronald Reagan Presidential Library and first person interviews with key Evangelical leaders who will assist in helping to better understand the context in which these speeches were given. The primary question asked and answered will be: “What did President Reagan say to rouse the support and attention of Evangelicals as part of a rebuilt coalition for his 1984 reelection?”


delivered 8 March 1983, Orlando, Florida. Audio mp3 of Address. Whittaker Chambers, the man whose own religious conversion made him a witness to one of the terrible traumas of our time, the Hiss-Chambers case, wrote that the crisis of the Western world exists to the degree in which the West is indifferent to God, the degree to which it collaborates in communism's attempt to make man stand alone without God. Image Source: The Ronald Reagan Presidential Library. Video Note: Last two minutes of video missing from source. Page Updated: 2/26/17. First, Reagan was charismatic and an excellent orator. I remember saying, while hearing him speak, that even as a leftist I was persuaded by him, at least until I turned off the radio. In that way, he was fully Obama's equal as a speechifier. Reagan's strategically-decisive moment is described in a biography of Edward Teller, a federal nuclear-weapons physicist. In this account, Reagan met Teller during his tour of the DoD weapons lab where Teller worked. They formed a devil's pact with the Religious Right to turn the previously apolitical Evangelical voters into good little Republicans. They decided to pursue the Southern Strategy in order to claim the alienated white vote in the South, a vote which was gravitating away from the Democrats due to the party's embrace of racial minorities.