Under God and Divisible:
Cultural Warfare and Civil Religion in Contemporary
American Political Rhetoric

by

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Table of Contents

Table of Contents ................................................................. 2
Acknowledgments ...................................................................... 4
Abstract .................................................................................. 5

Chapter 1: Introduction ................................................................ 6
Civil Religion and the Culture Wars ............................................ 6
How Can the Culture Wars Interact with Civil Religion? ............... 10
When and How do These Interactions Occur? ............................ 14
What are the Stakes of this Interaction? ..................................... 19
Significance of the Study ............................................................ 21
Methods and Case Selection ....................................................... 22
Brief Description of the Coming Chapters ................................... 28

Chapter 2: The Culture Wars in the 1988 Presidential Campaign ....... 30
Context for Cultural Warfare ..................................................... 30
The Culture Warriors ................................................................. 31
Circumstances ........................................................................... 31
Use of Civil Religion ................................................................. 33
Interpretation of Civil Religion ................................................. 39
The Nominees ........................................................................... 40
Use of Civil Religion ................................................................. 40
Interpretation of Civil Religion ................................................. 46
Divides? ...................................................................................... 48
Culture Warriors vs. Nominees .................................................. 48
Progressive vs. Orthodox .......................................................... 49
Implications ............................................................................... 50

Chapter 3: Campaign Oratory ..................................................... 52
Declarations of Candidacy .......................................................... 53
Use of Civil Religion ................................................................. 53
Interpretation of Civil Religion ................................................. 59
Acceptance of Party Nominations .............................................. 61
Use of Civil Religion ................................................................. 61
Interpretation of Civil Religion ................................................. 68
Implications ............................................................................... 71
Use of Civil Religion ................................................................. 71
Interpretation of Civil Religion ................................................. 73

Chapter 4: Issues ........................................................................ 74
Written Policy Rhetoric ............................................................. 74
Taxes .......................................................................................... 75
Family ........................................................................................ 78
Education ................................................................................... 82
Implications ............................................................................... 86

Chapter 5: Transitional Oratory .................................................. 88
Victory Speeches ....................................................................... 89
Use of Civil Religion ................................................................. 89
Interpretation of Civil Religion ................................................. 95
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Abstract

In this thesis, I examine the hypothesis that the culture wars are a battle over the meaning of civil religion between orthodox and progressive frames of understanding that occur within political campaign rhetoric. I argue, using the 1988 election as a preliminary case study, that the culture wars have evidenced themselves through the framing of civil religious themes in campaign rhetoric. In examining this finding in a more contemporary context, I examine the campaigns of George W. Bush in 2000 and Barack Obama in 2008 as case studies. In doing so, I find that the culture wars peak in intensity and division during campaigns, when civil religion is employed at times to unify, and at times to divide. In policy statements from within campaigns, civil religious meaning is uncontested and the culture wars are not evident – suggesting that the culture wars as a part of political campaigns may be confined to publicly delivered rhetoric. Outside of campaigns, the culture wars decrease in intensity, and civil religious language takes its assumed role in rhetoric – as a set of themes and narratives that unify Americans. I conclude that the culture wars are deeply intertwined with civil religion within campaign rhetoric.
Chapter 1: Introduction

We are one people, all of us pledging allegiance to the stars and stripes, all of us defending the United States of America.
-Barack Obama, 2004 Democratic National Convention Keynote Address

Civil Religion and the Culture Wars

The theory of the culture wars seems diametrically opposed to that of civil religion. Theoretically explained by James Davison Hunter in his *Culture Wars: the Struggle to Define America* (1991) and popularized by public figures like Pat Buchanan (1992), “culture wars” as a term is generally understood to refer to competitions between opposing sides of a cultural divide. These divides are thought to exhibit themselves through the political left and right in America, but also to pervade non-political aspects of life – from religious beliefs to economic practices and from family values to voting choices – none of which are necessarily separable from one another. It seems impossible that civil religion (Bellah 2005; Cherry 1971) – conceived as a national faith shared by American citizens – could possibly coexist with the culture wars, as the coexistence would require the presence of a cultural divide in the midst of cultural unity.

The coexistence of civil religion and the culture wars, however, does occur. I propose that the two regularly interact with one another within contemporary political rhetoric. I argue that the culture wars are a means of rhetorical conflict over the meaning of civil religious elements. More specifically, I suggest that the interests at play within the culture wars attempt to co-opt and reinterpret the values and
narratives encompassed by civil religion. These attempts are evident in the mythmaking (Lincoln 1989) and ideological development (Freeden 2004) that takes place within campaign rhetoric. This mythmaking and ideological development occurs through candidates’ framing of national ideals within the impulse provided by their side in the culture wars. The competition takes place through using these ideals to align oneself with the American public and one’s adversary in the culture wars in opposition. In order to understand how this process occurs, one must have a basic understanding of the two core theoretical concepts at play: culture wars and civil religion.

Many understand “culture wars” as referring to moral battles over social issues such as gay marriage and abortion – a contest between the religious right and the secular left. This is a serious oversimplification of the concept as Hunter (1991) proposes it. The simplest way to understand cultural conflict is through defining the two terms that compose the phrase “culture wars.” I use the term “culture” to represent any manifestation of values and beliefs. These are often associated with religion, but can be traced to other historical social roots as well. I use “wars or “conflicts” to refer to violent clashes among dueling parties. While in the culture wars physical violence does not always erupt, instances of verbal and psychological violence do arise. Thus, in the broadest possible sense, “culture war” refers to a clash among dueling parties that are divided by competing values and beliefs. The common

\[1\] For more specific information on these values and narratives, consult Table 1 in the Appendix.
understanding of the culture wars is only a portion of a much larger conflict of understanding.

The concept of “civil religion” refers to “a set of beliefs, symbols and rituals” (Bellah 2005, p. 42) that are used, practiced, and followed in the construction of culture. Scholars theorize civil religion as a national set of beliefs – accompanied by religious texts, symbols and rituals just as any religion would be – agreed upon by most (if not all) American citizens (Cherry 1971, p. 8) and evident in the public sphere as used by political leaders in rhetoric (Bellah 2005 p. 40; Cherry 1971 p. 21). American civil religion is separate from other mainstream religions, as is apparent through its use by otherwise unreligious leaders and the ambiguity with which political rhetoric refers core civil religious concepts such as “God” and “freedom” (Bellah 2005, p. 51; Cherry 1971, p. 3-6).

Essential to American civil religion is the belief in an abstract, unitary, active God who calls America to the “‘divine mission’ of preserving and dispensing freedom” (Cherry 1971, p. 6). Founding documents – particularly the Declaration of Independence, Constitution, and Bill of Rights serve as civil religious texts (Bellah 2005, p. 46; Cherry 1971, p. 12). Significant historical figures and narratives are equates to figures in major organized religions. America is equal to Israel as the new “Promised Land” and Europe to Egypt as imperial slaveholders. Washington is American civil religion’s Moses and Lincoln is its Jesus – these two significant in a much larger pool of “martyrs” who are given special meaning within the national faith (Bellah 2005, p. 45-47; Cherry 1971 p. 6). National holidays – Thanksgiving, Memorial Day, the Fourth of July, and the birthdays of Washington and Lincoln –
serve as “part of an American ceremonial calendar” (Cherry 1971, p. 2) and are celebrated as civil religious rituals. These rituals are supplemented by ceremonies such as inaugurations and funerals of significant national figures (Cherry 1971, p. 8). In each of the rituals, leaders emphasize America’s mission and ideals as articulate in our common American Creed (Huntington 1972) – a collection of common civil religious beliefs that unite the American citizenry.

It is important to distinguish civil religion from other, traditionally defined religions. It does take the form of these religions in that it incorporates both beliefs and actions. These beliefs are iterated in agreed upon national values, while the actions are evident through public several public rituals. It especially mirrors Christian Protestantism in its values and narratives (Eisenach 2000). Civil religion differs from these religions, however, in its lack of official organization and definition. As a scholarly defined belief system (Bellah 2005; Cherry 1971) as opposed to one presented in official statements of mission or belief, civil religion’s existence is a subtle one. One may even take part in civil religious beliefs and rituals without knowing that there is a religious aspect to their thoughts and actions. This allows American citizens to frequently engage in both civil religion and other organized religions. A Muslim-American may devoutly believe in and faithfully practice Islam, while still taking part in civil religious rituals – such as attending a presidential inauguration – and firmly believing in civil religious values – like American exceptionalism. In this way, civil religion can co-exist with other, more traditionally defined private religions – pulling an individual in multiple ideological and practical directions when the two faiths contradict one another.
In beginning my inquiry, I investigate several questions necessary to understanding this conception of co-constructing cultural conflict and civil religion. First: how can the culture wars interact with civil religion? Second: How and when do these interactions occur? Third: what are the stakes and implications of these interactions? Finally: Through what cases and methods are these interactions evident?

**How Can the Culture Wars Interact with Civil Religion?**

I argue that the culture wars and civil religion not only may interact, but that the existence of each requires the existence of the other. Both theories describe phenomena that leave certain processes unexplained. If the culture wars are to occur on a national level, then they require a specific medium over which to occur. If civil religion is to exist, it requires a force to drive its existence and development. In this section, I argue that American civil religion provides the necessary medium through which the culture wars compete, and that these conflicts perpetuate and develop civil religion.

James Davison Hunter (1991) – who popularized both the term and the theory of culture wars – describes a cultural dichotomy that manifests itself in cultural conflicts. The sides within this dichotomy are termed “the impulse toward orthodoxy” and “the impulse toward progressivism” (Hunter 1991, p. 43). He describes orthodoxy as “the commitment on the part of adherents to an external, definable, and transcendent (meaning unchanging) authority” and progressivism as “the tendency to resymbolize historic faiths according to the prevailing assumptions of contemporary life” (Hunter 1991, p. 44-45). Essentially, then, the culture wars boils down to a conflict between sides representing two temporal orientations: one towards the past
and one towards the future. The former attempts to perpetuate concepts’ meanings as they have always been understood, while the latter attempts to alter these meanings to fit changing conditions so that concepts carry new meanings in new times.

In the American political context, the existence of dichotomous strands of interests within the culture wars immediately brings to mind the American two party system. However, it is important not to conflate the competing interests of the culture wars with the competing interests of the American political parties because both have distinct purposes. While political party may determine which positions a candidate takes, the side or “impulse” that a political actor takes in the culture wars determines how these positions are understood and presented. Progressive and orthodox are frames of understanding more than policy beliefs – and while those who share a frame of understanding are likely to align in political positions within parties through a common ideological construction, it is not necessarily certain that this will happen. One cannot necessarily equate the sides in the culture war – as collections of political actors who interpret political meaning similarly – to the Democratic and Republican parties.

In the same way, there is a clear difference between ideology and side in the culture wars. While ideology in and of itself may be more similar to cultural warfare impulse than partisanship – in that it provides a set of beliefs through which policy positions are generated – it is distinctly different. Ideological beliefs, in this model, are generated through the impulse that one takes in the culture wars. If one is orthodox for example, they are likely to gravitate towards ideological beliefs that privilege a past temporal orientation. One who is progressive is likely to do the
opposite. In this way, ideological development serves as a step between impulse in the culture wars and partisan affiliation – something formed after temporal orientation is determined.

How, though, can this cultural dichotomy coexist with the nationally unifying civil religion? One might suggest that these two lines of scholarship are mutually exclusive – that one of the theories must be incorrect. I argue, however, that the relationship between the culture wars and civil religion is much more complex. Civil religion and the culture wars do not eliminate one another, as each forms an essential component of the other. To suggest that one theory is superior in order to justify ignoring the other is to not only avoid the dilemma presented by the existence of both, but to limit an understanding of either.

If the conflicts between these two impulses are carried out in national public discourse, a shared national religion is required. Hunter (1991) proposes the culture wars as intra-religious conflicts of understanding, which suggests that these conflicts require a common set of religious terms of which competing frames can offer differing interpretations. As no commonly conceived religion (Christianity, for example) serves as a national faith, a void exists for the terrain over which this binary of interpretive lenses can contest meaning. A national religion would provide conceptual scaffolding on which these interpretive lenses could layer ideological building materials – resulting in interpretive ideologies that battle one another to define understanding of shared terms and concepts.

Hunter’s (1991) use of the terms “transcendent authority” and “faith” in defining orthodoxy and progressivism suggests that religion serves an essential
function within the culture wars. One would be right to question whether his view of frame of understanding necessarily based on religious beliefs – as defining the cultural impulses within these conflicts – is overly narrow. Especially in a society that separates church from state, one may understand ideology and culture as motivated by factors other than religion. However while his study focuses on Judeo-Christian traditions as the media through which cultural divides manifest themselves, Hunter (1991) makes clear that his argument does not set the cultural divide up along religious lines. Instead of investigating a divide between the religious and non-religious (or between denominations of religions), he investigates the divides between individuals of the same religious categories. The divide between orthodoxy and progressivism is not determined by one’s religion, but by a divide in understandings within one’s religion.

Hunter (1991, p. 57) clarifies that his definition of religions – or “faiths” – is broader than one that applies strictly to traditional religions like Judaism or Christianity. He uses “faith” to encompass secular beliefs systems as well, arguing that:

“The American people have never provided very fertile soil for the growth of purely secular political ideologies…. Therefore, it is hardly surprising that when secular ideologies have taken root… they usually have had a certain sectarian cast. Thus, in the American context, the term “faith” – even with its religious and sectarian connotations – seems more appropriate in capturing the essence of almost everything that passes for belief in America.”

As Bellah (2003, p. 42) argues, “Separation of church and state has not denied the political realm a religious dimension.” Civil religion exists as an abstract national religion – which prevents the separation of church and state from excluding this
ideology from politics – composed of a zealous, faithful approach to patriotism. It is not only a religious tradition within which progressivism and orthodoxy can compete; it is the only faith that can serve as a foundation for a national context in which the culture wars can exist.

The culture wars also play an essential role in developing civil religion. Bellah (2005) and Cherry (1971) both suggest that development and change must occur in civil religion. Cherry (1971, p. 12), argues that “civil religion… supposes that the light of God’s revelation continually breaks forth in crucial events of American history,” while Bellah (2005, p. 55) suggests that civil religion “is in need – as is any living faith – of continual reformation.” The means through which these necessary revelations and reformations develop civil religion, however, are unspecified. The culture wars, through providing competition over civil religious meaning, fill this gap – serving as the determinant for how civil religion must develop, as well as the mechanism through which this development occurs in public discourse.

**When and How do These Interactions Occur?**

Both the culture wars and civil religion are phenomena that occur within the public sphere (Hunter 1991, p. 280; Bellah 2004, p. 40). The specific portions of public discourse in which these two phenomena are theorized to occur, however, do not always match up. Hunter (1991) and Fiorina (2006) conceive of the culture wars as waged by political elites on the battlegrounds of social institutions: family, education, media arts, law, and electoral politics (Hunter 1990, p. 173). Eldon Eisenach theorizes that these institutions are those through which national religious establishments take hold, and serve as platforms from which one is escalated to
achieve governing authority (2000) – which suggests that if the culture wars compete over civil religious meaning, that they do so through these institutions.

While these institutions do play significant roles in civil religion, Bellah (2005) and Cherry (1971) trace civil religion to a different location: political rhetoric. The common setting for both civil religion and the culture wars, then, is the rhetoric of electoral politics. In this arena, candidates frequently use culture to gain political advantages (Fowler et al. 2004; Wilcox and Larson 2006) – making it a likely arena in which cultural conflict can occur as an effort through which one can reap electoral benefits. It is certainly possible that civil religion is contested in the other institutions that Hunter (1991) traces the culture wars to. Nevertheless, in order to constrain my investigation’s scope to the common setting of the two theories (civil religion and the culture wars), I investigate the interactions between civil religion and the culture wars within the context of electoral campaign rhetoric.

Progressive and orthodox competition over civil religious meaning may not occur consciously. Since an individual’s understanding of ideals and issues is framed through their side’s impulse, that individual will logically attempt to advance their cultural impulse to advance other political interests. As Michael Freeden (2004, p. 8) states:

“The control of political language, through which the understanding of… contested political concepts is mediated, a cardinal and typical way of capturing the high ground of social meanings and interpretations available to a given society.”

Thus, even if political actors are only acting in their pragmatic interests – and therein trying to effectively win a campaign or advance their political interest through
increasing political capital, they will seek to frame things through their own understanding, and thus uniformly advance their side in the culture wars through public discourse.

The competition over civil religious meaning occurs through use and interpretation of civil religious language. Civil religion contains a number of narratives (which may be better described as national “myths”), rituals, symbols and the American Creed, which incorporates “traditional American ideals (such as) liberty, equality, individualism, (and) democracy” (Huntington 1972, p. 10). Each of these elements tends to present quite a bit of ambiguity of meaning (Cherry 1971, p. 18) – and therefore is open to interpretation. As “ideologies are by their very rationale public forms of language, intended to be disseminated and consumed by large groups of people, and to create shared understandings that can direct political practices” (Freeden 2004, p. 11), language plays an important role in determining how these elements should be interpreted. In seeking to control linguistic framing of the aforementioned civil religious elements, either side benefits from finding ways to promote their interpretations of these myths, rituals, symbols, and ideals – which in turn advances and spreads their impulse’s sense of understanding politics. This presents a two-fold goal for the competing frames of the culture wars: First, the gaining of control over the framing of civil religion in public discourse. This in turn would allow the second, the dissemination of interpretive impulse – the spreading of one’s temporal frame of understanding as determined by progressive or orthodox affiliation – throughout the American populous.
Candidates in particular are given the arena within campaigns in which to employ cultural warfare. These individuals, as Fowler et al. (2004) suggest, can appeal to cultural traditions – such as civil religion – to win over voters. Candidates, then, serve an important role within the culture wars as public representatives of their cultural impulse. These figures have the ability to publicly advance their understanding of civil religion through the tactics of the culture wars. Hunter (1990, p. 64) states, “Cultural warfare is always decided over the pragmatic problems of strategy, organization, and resources.” The prominent strategy of cultural warfare employs both negative and positive sides to argumentation. Negative tactics include the discreditation of one’s opponent, while the positive would simply include demonstrating the logic of one’s own side’s ideology (Hunter 1991, p. 136). The negative seems to have greater effects on society than the positive, according to Hunter (1991, p. 159-161), as he sees “public discourse (as) more polarized than the American public itself.”

In contesting civil religious meaning within the culture wars, these tactics serve an important function. Specifically, those engaging in cultural warfare through electoral rhetoric use civil religious themes to negatively frame opponents, as well as opposing cultural impulses, and positively frame their own ideology and impulses. These tactics allow electoral candidates to publicly advance their own interpretive lens through framing civil religion in either a progressive or an orthodox light. They can simultaneously advance their own campaigns through negatively framing opponents using civil religion and promote their campaign through the same rhetorical means.
While these tactics provide a basic explanation of the means through which candidates employ the tactics of cultural warfare and the goals they seek, the mechanism through which they affect civil religion is slightly different. How then, can political campaigners use the rhetoric of the culture wars to alter civil religious meaning? Freeden (2004, p. 13) states that when seeking to disseminate ideologies and understandings, a side can employ “both overt and coded messages” to mobilize behavior in a desired way. In his work on sociopolitical usage of myth, Bruce Lincoln (1989, p. 38) maintains, “Myths may well be contested territory as competing segments of society seek to appropriate them and turn them to their own interests”. He argues that “appropriating the past through myths can mobilize people to political ends” (Lincoln 1989, p. 27-28) – reinforcing that mythmaking as a tactic of rhetorical battle may be an effective means of disseminating impulses of interpretation through political mobilization. Furthermore, Lincoln suggests that political interests “can advance novel lines of interpretation for an established myth or modify details in its narration” (Lincoln 1989, p. 25) which may result in the reformulation of “social sentiments, borders, and, ultimately, society itself” (Lincoln 1989, p. 32). Through both overt and coded means, then, political campaigners employing the tactics of cultural warfare in campaign rhetoric may attempt to appropriate the meanings of civil religious values and narratives in order to alter society’s understanding of these unifying values in public discourse.

To summarize and clarify, I suggest that one of the goals of actors taking part in the culture wars is the reinterpretation of civil religion through one’s own side’s lens in political rhetoric. This technique works to win over voting members of the
populous within electoral battles through use of civil religious themes and language. In these battles, success is easily measurable: winning at the polls. To echo Hunter (1991) and apply his approach to this method, use of civil religion can take on both positive and negative forms. Positive uses of civil religion would include identifying oneself, one’s campaign, or one’s values with positive aspects of civil religion: celebrated narratives, individuals and values. Negative cultural warfare tactics use civil religion in campaign rhetoric as well: identifying opponents with negative figures, narratives, and/or values within civil religion; or setting up opponents – or the opponents’ cultural impulse – as in opposition to the agreed upon values within the creed of civil religion. Using these tactics properly allows candidates to not only advance their own electoral goals, but also to advance their side of the culture war through employing their side’s temporal influence in interpreting civil religion in public discourse.

**What are the Stakes of this Interaction?**

Hunter (1991, p. 52) argues that “cultural conflict is ultimately about the struggle for domination.” This domination is what Freeden (2004, p. 8-9) calls “‘domination’ in the gentle sense of ensuring that a particular set of values (or, as I propose, way of understanding values) secures political preference.” Hunter (1991, p. 55) argues that both sides in the culture war seek to define public culture, as it “embodies the symbols of national identity.” In making this argument, he suggests that the goal of the (most extreme) progressives is to create a “secular democratic experiment,” while that of the (most extreme) orthodox is to create a “Christian commonwealth, a city on a hill.” This dichotomy again appears religious in nature,
but it is not – it is about differences in cultural and political interpretations of faith. Progressivism does not downgrade religion while orthodoxy reifies it. Instead, progressives seek to separate politics from the external, definable, unchanging authority of historic, pre-existing beliefs, while orthodox individuals attempt to carry these beliefs – as they have always been understood – into the present.

Hunter (1991, p. 57) references Neuhaus in explaining that politics are an expression of culture, and quotes him, arguing, “At the heart of culture… is religion, or systems of faith. And at the heart of religion are its claims about the truth of the world.” If one accepts the claim that civil religion is the national faith of Americans, then at the heart of American culture is civil religion – through which claims about the truth of the world must be articulated. Bellah (2005, p. 42) supports this claim, stating that actions carried out in civil religious practices are “often indicative of deep-seated values of everyday life.” Thus, if one side were to win the culture war and gain the power to define American public culture, it would also be enabled to determine how that culture interprets the “truth of the world” – a tremendous political power.

The immediate benefits of this ability have to do with electoral victory. If one is able to convince the American public that he or she is the most in line with the “unifying” values of civil religion well enough to win a presidential election, for example, then that individual will be able to spread his or her interpretation of civil religion without challenge from any political equal until the subsequent election. By holding an office with a high degree of public attention, a progressive official can disseminate a progressive interpretation of civil religion without an orthodox
counterpart to balance it out. This provides an increased opportunity to determine the context and language of public discourse.

This type of opportunity may have several practical consequences. First, it may increase the ease with which the bully pulpit is used. If the American people come to a general agreement about civil religious terms with the president, these terms can easily be manipulated to advance policy initiatives. Second, and perhaps more importantly, the winning interpretation may be able to set the terms of civil religion for coming elections – privileging both one’s own reelection campaign(s) and, more broadly, a cultural impulse’s ability to continue to advance novel interpretations of civil religion. This, in turn, could result in a cycle of victory in cultural conflicts, continuously privileging one side’s interpretive impulse of civil religion – a hypothetically possible victory in the culture wars.

**Significance of the Study**

There are important implications of this phenomenon for contemporary scholars. Foremost is that scholars intending to investigate either the culture wars or civil religion must take both into account in order to fully understand either phenomenon. If one accepts that the divergent frames of understanding that compose the culture wars compete over and determine civil religious meaning, then there is also a historical implication: that these frames predate civil religion. Civil religion, then, must be thought of not only as a battleground for the culture wars, but as an effect of them. This contradicts the common conception that the culture wars are a new phenomenon. Understanding civil religion as both a byproduct and tactic of the culture wars also negates its existence as a solely unifying force. In fact, civil religion
not only fails, at times, to unite – it can be used as a tool in the most divisive possible conflict in the American public discourse: the culture wars.

**Methods and Case Selection**

In order to demonstrate the culture wars’ interaction with civil religion within contemporary American politics, I focus on recent political rhetoric from national campaigns. The two individuals I investigate – former President George W. Bush and current President Barack Obama – provide excellent cases to investigate for the following reasons: First, the two seem to embody the orthodox and progressive movements. Bush (while campaigning and currently) is a born again, socially and economically conservative Texan who seems to represent both cultural and political orthodoxy. Obama (while campaigning) was a member of a historically Black church in a progressive, mainline Protestant denomination whose minister was active in the Civil Rights movement. He had as history as an elite university law professor, professed the importance of change from Bush’s orthodox positions, and seems to represent both cultural and political progressivism. Second, the two were both politically victorious in their national campaigns. Thus, the two seem ideal choices to investigate winning efforts – at least in the short term – of battles within the culture wars. Finally, the two are the nation’s most recent presidents. As such, the two are the best lenses through which to examine the manifestation of the interaction between civil religion and the culture wars within politics today.

In my investigation, I turn to three types of rhetoric – both spoken and written – from a variety of sources in order to understand more specifically when and how the interaction between civil religion and the culture wars occurs in public discourse.
The first of the three types is spoken rhetoric from within presidential campaigns. The second is written rhetoric on issues and policies from presidential campaign websites. The third is spoken rhetoric from the months immediately following these campaigns, – the period of transition from candidacy to presidency. Hunter (1991, p. 285) states that in the culture wars, “words not only rival deeds, words become deeds; speeches become events.” Investigating these “deeds” and “events” is essential to investigating the culture wars in their contemporary expression.

As campaigns are means of direct competition in the culture wars, I find campaign rhetoric the most useful type of political rhetoric in studying behavior in the culture wars. That said, focusing the investigation only on rhetoric from within campaigns may provide an overly competitive frame for investigating the culture wars. In order to determine when the competition over civil religious meaning occurs, I look to speeches from the candidates both within the campaigns and after them. In order to determine whether both written and spoken rhetoric involves cultural warfare over civil religious meaning, I also investigate the political rhetoric found in issue pages of campaign websites, which involve both discussions of issues and policy proposals.

Within these sources, I examine the use and reinterpretation of American myths and ideals – as part of the content of civil religion. Lincoln (1989, p. 32) states “struggles about stories of the past may also be struggles over the proper shape of the society in the present.” As such, I investigate these struggles over interpretation of these myths and ideals as an essential element of the larger cultural conflict. Examining the mythmaking of Bush and Obama demonstrates the ways these two
actors frame and appropriate civil religion on behalf of their interpretive impulse from the culture wars as a method for furthering their cause within the culture wars.

I find that interpretive, qualitative content analysis is most useful in analyzing these passages. Hardy et al. (2004, p. 20) argue, “Discursive analysis involves the systematic study of texts to find evidence of their meanings and how this meaning translates into social reality.” While my analysis is interested in determining meanings within the texts I explore, I am unwilling to make the jump to abstractly assuming I understand how this meaning translates into social reality. Pure content analysis, on the other hand, involves “the study of the text itself and not its relation to context, to the intentions of the producer of the text, or of the reaction of the intended audience” (Hardy et al. 2004, p. 20). As I investigate rhetoric as a portion of a larger cultural conflict, and as a means of employing battle tactics within this conflict, content analysis on its own is also insufficient.

Freeden (2004, p. 32) argues that:

“Political idea systems are a product of interacting, even overlapping, human minds, and also exist within differentiated geographical, historical, and cultural spaces. The comparative study of ideologies has to address… problems of translation, when differences are often masked by ostensible dissimilarities of language, while similarities are disguised by disparate ways of expression.”

In discussing these problems, it is necessary to understand context and purpose to translate meanings. Nonetheless, understanding the content in and of itself is also essential. Particularly since the culture wars contain both overt and coded messages, I find it necessary to employ a hybrid strategy. Therefore, I choose to focus on the texts
themselves – not necessarily their impact on social reality – while seeking to interpret the coded meanings within each passage.

For that reason, instead of coding for specific words, I identify general themes to identify within the rhetoric. More specifically, I take two distinct approaches to examining the content of each piece of rhetoric. First, I investigate and describe the role that civil religion takes in each passage. This demonstrates whether civil religion is available to be interpreted and used as a tool in cultural warfare within political rhetoric. In order to identify instances of civil religious elements, I identify historical allusions to iconic people, events and unifying values of civil religion (Bellah 2005; Cherry 1971) and the “American Creed” (Huntington 1972). This approach allows observation of the way the available civil religious language is used. It allows me to observe civil religion as both a tool for unification and for division and competition.

As a set of values meant to unite the country, civil religion can be used both subconsciously and strategically as part of the culture wars. Subconsciously, civil religious language may appear without any strategic significance at all – providing the speaker with words and themes to iterate in order to make a speech sound poetic and appeal to an average American listener who recognizes and appreciates the terms in use. Strategically, it can serve as a means of direct opposition and campaign-based conflict. In order to examine these interests, I show how cultural warfare’s battle tactics (Hunter 1991) make use of civil religion – incorporating civil religion into both negative and positive tactics. These negative tactics take the form of rhetorically placing one’s opponent against civil religious ideals, while placing oneself in support of these values. In locating and determining the instances in which civil religion is
strategically employed as a means of cultural warfare, it is necessary to interpret both text and context. I find that the presence of negative tactics demonstrates how hotly contested the culture wars are. If only positive tactics are employed, it is possible that one is only advancing one’s interpretation of civil religion as a unifying measure, whereas negative attacks using civil religion demonstrate the presence of cultural conflict with an immediate opponent – and thus, division.

The second approach I take attempts to determine how the speaker interprets civil religion. I examine specific temporal interpretations and presentations of the myths and ideals encompassed by civil religion. This demonstrates whether or not progressive and orthodox impulses are used for interpreting civil religion within political rhetoric. It also determines whether a candidate is in line with progressivism or orthodoxy. If opposing candidates are found to take opposing views from the culture wars, there is some evidence of the culture wars within political campaigns. If there is no consistency of temporal orientation within rhetoric, however, there seems little evidence to suggest a particular passage is engaging in cultural warfare, as it does not focus on disseminating a novel interpretation of civil religious elements.

One may find oneself confused as to why the sides in the culture wars must correspond to temporal references – particularly when placed in the context of what are the most commonly conceived politically charged cultural issues – namely debates around marriage rights and abortion. The side in each issue, however, is demonstrably tied to temporal frame. In terms of marriage rights debate, the institution of marriage is defined traditionally. Those that seek to maintain traditional definitions of marriage take an orthodox approach, privileging past understanding of
the institution over alteration to fit developing societal standards. Those that seek to alter the institution of marriage take a progressive approach – seeking to perpetuate the institution, while altering it to fit new times – namely the increased prominence of non-heterosexual relationships in the public sphere. Thus, these progressives privilege present and future conditions over past understanding of existing institutions.

In terms of the Pro-Life versus Pro-Choice debate, the sides’ labels may cloud the existence of competing temporal frames. In opposing abortion, and naming oneself “Pro-Life,” one makes an orthodox move, accepting a traditional understanding of life as existing at the point of conception – making it obvious that ending this life is infanticide. In advocating the legality of abortion, one makes a progressive move – accepting newly developed measurements of life beginning after the point of conception, and thus privileging new contextual developments in the scientific community over traditional understandings of life. This allows one to see abortion in less harsh terms than Pro-Life advocates.

My methods are necessarily qualitative. Quantitative measurement of terms – even if context and audience were somehow accounted for quantitatively – is not thorough enough to determine the cultural implications of rhetorical use of certain terms. Within rhetoric, meaning can be just as – if not more – important than amount of words used, and quantitative analysis simply has no method of gauging meaning deeper than that provided on the texts’ surface. Instead of relying on numeric measurements, I approach the content qualitatively to demonstrate its place in the broader contexts of civil religious discourse and the culture wars.
Brief Description of the Coming Chapters

There are several components of this study to come in the following chapters. Hunter’s theory of culture wars was published in 1990 – suggesting that his observation of cultural warfare as a contemporary issue must come from around that time. In order to contextualize the theory and demonstrate how it meets my previously presented explanation and modification, I examine the political rhetoric from presidential candidates in the election immediately prior to this publication in Chapter Two. Specifically, I explore instances of rhetoric of prominent candidates in the 1988 Presidential campaign. This campaign involved two “culture warriors” – Jesse Jackson and Pat Robertson – vying for nomination, as well as less culturally extreme candidates – Michael Dukakis and George H. W. Bush. In determining the way each civil religion as a tool in cultural warfare in rhetoric, I provide an initial example of how I implement my methodology, as well as some recent historical context within which to examine George W. Bush and Barack Obama as actors within the culture wars.

In Chapter Three, I turn to the oratorical rhetoric of Bush from 2000 and Obama from their 2008. I investigate rhetoric from within the campaign: declarations of candidacy and acceptances of nomination from national party conventions. I look particularly to the ways in which civil religious language is used and interpreted by these two figures. The intra-campaign rhetoric provides insight into the electoral campaigns as the height of cultural conflict.

Chapter Four investigates written campaign rhetoric. More specifically, I look to the policy discussions and proposals from candidate websites – investigating both
those with clear moral frames and less obvious ones. This chapter adds texture to the overall argument of this paper, demonstrating the importance of civil religion in this rhetoric, while demonstrating that written policy rhetoric is not used as a means of cultural warfare. This information demonstrates that the culture wars’ interpretations of civil religion function more as pragmatic electoral tools of mass communication for candidates than as their own frames of understanding.

In Chapter Five, I return to the spoken rhetoric of Bush and Obama – examining its form immediately after the campaign: victory speeches and inaugural addresses. These instances of transitional period (between candidacy and presidency) rhetoric demonstrate the role that civil religion takes after campaigns, as well as the way interpretive lenses of civil religion are evident even without direct, electoral competition. It also demonstrates the way civil religious language changes in use after campaigns, with its use as a combative tool limited and as a unifying force emphasized. Chapter Six finally draws conclusions from and explores the implications of these findings.
Chapter 2: The Culture Wars in the 1988 Presidential Campaign

Context for Cultural Warfare

The American presidential election of 1988 presents an interesting case for investigation into the culture wars, as it saw the rise of national candidates from cultural ranks into the political world. Jesse Jackson and Pat Robertson, two religious figures, sought the nominations of the Democratic and Republican parties, respectively. While neither won their party’s nomination, the significant support each garnered (Biography.com; PatRobertson.com) suggested that each party could – or already were able to – potentially gain significant support from the cultural ranks. As both are rooted in the church, they are also intertwined with civil religion, as the church as a community institution plays a significant role within American civil religion (Cherry 1971; Eisenach 2000). Both parties sought to win over the supporters of Jackson and Robertson on behalf of their party’s more mainstream nominee in their National Conventions – enlisting the two culture warriors in public support of the nominees of the party from which they had sought nomination.

The speeches by these culture warriors – as well as the mainstream party nominees – at the Democratic and Republican National Conventions offers an ideal circumstance through which to investigate evidence of a progressive-orthodox dichotomy. It would stand to logic that Jackson and Robertson may exemplify the civil religious interpretations of progressivism and orthodoxy and the culture wars’ use of civil religion, but it is also important to note whether the parties’ nominees – Democrat Michael Dukakis and Republican George H. W. Bush – fit the dichotomy provided by culture war scholarship. Whether they do would seem to have
implications for whether national party nominees can truly take part in the culture wars and, if they can, whether they do.

In the following pages of this chapter, I observe the ways that both the culture warriors and party nominees use civil religion. I use these figures’ rhetoric from the parties’ conventions to determine whether the seemingly obvious culture warriors and the less-obvious nominees actually do take part in cultural division and conflict over the meaning of civil religious concepts and narratives. I then turn to the potential implications of the rhetoric of 1988 for my more in-depth study of the relationship between the culture wars and civil religion in the cases of more contemporary political figures – George W. Bush and Barack Obama. Throughout, this chapter sets a precedent for my qualitative method: focusing on the rhetorical use of civil religion as a tool for both unification and attack as well as the alternative means of interpretation of civil religious elements in the candidates’ rhetoric.

The Culture Warriors

Circumstances

Jesse Jackson and Pat Robertson both ran for president as ordained ministers and cultural leaders, but the two made their convention speeches with quite different backgrounds and circumstances. Jackson grew up poor in the segregated American South, eventually becoming a minister and civil rights leader alongside Martin Luther King Jr. in the Southern Christian Leadership Conference. His run for president in 1988 was his second, and his campaign drew major support from his organization: the Rainbow PUSH Coalition. In 1988, he finished second to Michael Dukakis in the Democratic primary, finishing either first or second in 46 of 54 Democratic primaries.
across the country. His speech comes after Dukakis has been chosen as the Democratic Party’s nominee (Biography.com).

Robertson, on the other hand, was a businessman-turned-minister. He claimed the Born Again tradition, and founded the Christian Broadcasting Network. Robertson lost the Republican primary, finishing in third place with substantial support from the Christian Right. His speech at the 1988 Republican National Convention served as both an official end to his campaign, and an endorsement of George H. W. Bush (PatRobertson.com).

While both candidates come from ministerial backgrounds, the two are rooted in very different Christian movements. The legacy of the black church within the civil rights movement inherits a history of progressivism through the prominence of the SCLC’s leader – Dr. King. This differs starkly from the orthodox, fundamentalist conservative wing of the Born Again movement – perhaps most notably represented by the Rev. Jerry Falwell. Aside from the different histories, the two differ in religious interpretative methods, which suggests that there may be a potential differentiation in civil religious interpretive methods between the two as well. While both candidates finished highly in their primaries, neither was selected as a Vice Presidential nominee, but both still pledged support for their party’s candidate.

One might object that examining pastors’ use of civil religion is problematic, as both are rooted in religious backgrounds and occupations – which could potentially incline these two more than other candidates or “culture warriors” towards using civil religious language. While this is true, it seems counterintuitive that two devout Christians would abandon their religion’s language for that of civil religion without
motivation. If their occupations were to prompt religious language, it would make sense for the two to dwell on Christian themes, whereas instead they emphasize civil religious ones. This may suggest that religious language is a strategic tool as much as a naturally occurring rhetorical device.

*Use of Civil Religion*

In his speech from the Democratic National Convention, Jesse Jackson (1988) uses civil religion both to promote unity among listeners and as a means of attacking his opponent. Civil religious language appears from the beginning of Jackson’s speech to its end, blending Christian elements with civil religious ones. This is a logical combination, as civil religion borrows heavily from the Protestant tradition (Eisenach 2000). In the speech, Jackson alludes to Christian elements such as Providence, Jesus, and scripture. Despite the presence of these elements, though, Jackson places emphasis on civil religious language over the Christian language of his ministerial background. Although he mentions God, Jackson leaves God defined only in a civil religious context – as unitary and active, yet abstract in definition. Jackson does not orient this God towards Christians, but towards Democrats specifically and Americans more generally, stating, “When I look out at this room, I see the face of America…. We’re all precious in God’s sight.”

Jackson uses civil religion to argue for American unity while aligning his own Democratic Party with the national faith in order to portray the party as the best medium through which to achieve American unity. In doing so, he takes part in the positive battle tactics of cultural warfare (Hunter 1991) – associating his side with civil religious qualities that the audience is meant to perceive as positive. Through
this positive association, Jackson’s party framed as the obvious choice of speech observers. Jackson emphasizes American – rather than Christian – unity as an ideal for which to strive. He argues that Democrats and Americans “meet tonight at the crossroads, a point of decision” and must determine whether to “find unity and power; or suffer division and impotence.” Jackson suggests that the Democratic Party is that of unity – the party is “the face of America: Red, Yellow, Brown, Black and White… the real rainbow coalition.” He equates the setting of his speech – Atlanta – to other significant “crossroads” like New York and Jerusalem – both significant to the national faith (New York because it is a cultural icon of America and Jerusalem because America is sometimes referred to as “the new Jerusalem”).

Jackson continues to associate his side with civil religious ideals. He presents his own personal story as an example of the American dream – a key civil religious narrative. He also states that his party has begun to find “common ground” and forge unity – another important ideal. He names Democrats the party of unity – finding that when the party nominates presidential candidates that advocate unity – he uses Kennedy, Johnson and Carter as examples – the party wins and improves the nation. Jackson argues that his party inherits the legacy of the Civil Rights movement – which advanced the civil religious values of justice, equality, and common good of the nation. He even aligns his party’s current campaign with the Framers of the Constitution, stating, “We, the people, can win.” With this simple phrase, the Democratic Party’s “people” are equated to the “people” who put together the nation – the key figures in American civil religion’s creation myth.
Jesse Jackson also uses what Hunter calls negative battle tactics in framing his opponents, Republicans, as opposed to civil religious values. This occurs both implicitly and explicitly. In aligning Democratic Party with civil religious themes such as unity, common ground, the American People, and the nation’s founding, Jackson implies that his opponents in the Republican Party are opposed to these themes. He also explicitly argues that Republicans – Ronald Reagan in particular – are guilty of putting private interests over public ones, helping the rich over everyday Americans, economically dividing and exploiting the American people, and misunderstanding the roots of America’s problems. While Democrats are aligned with civil religion’s most celebrated figures (the founders), Republicans are placed in opposition to those who the founders (supposedly) empowered to rule the nation: the American people.

In his speech at the Republican National Convention, Pat Robertson (1988) also heavily relies on civil religious language. Despite his status as a Christian leader, Robertson avoids explicitly referencing Christianity, instead focusing on ideals and narratives more generally applicable to civil religion. Many of these linguistic elements are similar to Christian ones – mentioning God, praising existing religious establishments, and arguing for prayer in school – none of which are explicitly Christian causes, but many of which can be argued as such. Each of these maintains enough ambiguity, though, to fit better into civil religion than into Christianity. This, as well as other instances, of civil religious rhetoric occurs throughout Robertson’s speech – from his opening discussion of his party’s pursuit of “truth” to his closing discussion of “hope” and the “American spirit,” and his use of the civil religious
benediction, “Thank you and God bless America.” He makes clear his belief in American civil religion through suggesting that American morality is the root of American success, recommending that we “build the greatness of America through moral strength.” As was the case in Jackson’s (1988) use of civil religious language, Robertson also uses civil religious language to promote his own side and denigrate his opponents.

In using civil religion as a unifying force, Robertson (like Jackson) associates his own party with civil religious ideals and narratives – taking part in the positive cultural warfare tactics discussed by Hunter (1991). More specifically, he equates Republican vision for the nation to the “American spirit” that incorporates unifying civil religious values – framing his party as the obvious choice under which to unite Americans. Robertson declares Republicans the inheritors of America’s legacy “of an experiment in freedom that has given hope and promise to us all.” He also suggests that Republicans are the party that will promote American greatness and global leadership – setting his party up as one advocating and perpetuating American exceptionality through morality. In an extended metaphor, Robertson presents the Republican vision of the American “city on a hill” – a clear reference to the John Winthrop’s (1630) sermon predicting American greatness as a byproduct of a unique sense of morality – as supporting civil religious values such as God, family, and individual rights. The nation, then, according to Robertson, must empower Republicans in order to stay true to its traditional civil religious values. Through these rhetorical statements, Robertson explicitly associates his party with civil religious
themes, arguing that Republicans provide the best medium through which to reach American unity, morality, and greatness.

Robertson also uses civil religious association to attack his political opponents in the Democratic Party through what Hunter (1991) would deem negative tactics of the culture wars. As was observed in the case of Jackson (1988), this occurs both implicitly and explicitly. The implicit framing works exactly the same as it did with Jackson: through so clearly setting up the Republican Party as defenders and inheritors of civil religion, their political opponents – Democrats – are implicated as opposed to this “unifying” cultural strand. Robertson also takes this a step further in explicitly condemning his opponents in civil religious terms. He returns to the “city” metaphor in presenting his understanding of the anti-civil religious implications of the “city” Democrats seek to build: anarchy, Godlessness, a lack of security, and the destruction of family values. He also argues that Democratic policies trend in this direction: Democrats stand for welfare, new age progressive and ineffective education and the feminization of poverty and divorce – policies that denigrate the family and evidence anti-American exceptionalism. Meanwhile, he contrasts this with Republican support for disciplined, safe schools under local control, parental choice, traditional family structures and a better welfare system – policies that are framed as civil religious through strengthening the family and maintaining America as the global leader. Democrats, then, not only oppose Republicans’ support of civil religious values – they seek to work in opposition to these values that Americans hold dear.
In the 1988 Democratic and Republican National Convention speeches by obvious culture warriors, civil religion is used as a rhetorical tool of cultural warfare. Jackson and Robertson both positively associate themselves and their political affiliates with civil religion, while both implicitly and explicitly framing their political opponents as opposed to the ideals of the national faith. This may occur subconsciously, with each justifying his own party opposition and loyalty through his own understanding of civil religion. These instances – which Hunter (1991) calls positive and negative battle tactics – also may occur strategically in efforts to assist one’s party in political campaigns (Fowler et al. 2004), or one’s temporal impulse in the culture wars. This demonstrates some semblance of the culture wars occurring within campaign rhetoric through the use of civil religious language.

The existence of positive and negative framing in campaign speeches seems obvious: Of course one would promote one’s own political side and malign one’s opponents. The importance of the existence of this framing, however, is not in that it exists so much as the way in which it occurs: through civil religious themes and language. The existence of civil religion – frequently thought of as encompassing American themes and ideals that unite people – as a battle technique in divisive cultural warfare is a much less obvious idea. Within campaign speeches, then, it is apparent that civil religious rhetoric takes on a role different from that which it most commonly plays. Even when framed as unifying, civil religious language is used in campaign rhetoric – either subconsciously or intentionally and strategically – as a weapon within the culture wars.
Interpretation of Civil Religion

Jesse Jackson’s (1988) interpretation of civil religion stresses moving the nation forward towards equality. He emphasizes that the nation must commit “to new priorities to expansion and inclusion.” He argues that the nation must move in a new direction – to “higher ground” – something that he finds precedent for in American history. Jackson gives agency to the Democratic Party specifically, and the American people more broadly – stating “We sit here together… around a common table, to decide the direction of our party and our country.” This agency and call for a reinterpretation of the nation’s promise seems to suggest a progressive take on civil religion – the external authorities (American civil religious ideals) must be reinterpreted to fit the new times in order to move the country forward.

Pat Robertson, instead, stresses the eternal, unchanging values of America’s founding ideals. He argues that conservatives are “the heirs to a more enduring legacy than mere material progress… heirs of a legacy of (the) ideas” upon which America was founded. Robertson argues that these grand ideas ensure the nation’s success. Instead of finding a new direction, therefore, America must stay true to our understanding of these lasting ideas – the plan of his Republican Party – to remain exceptional. He argues that the nation must keep things the same as under Reagan – celebrating the marketplace and traditional family structure – in order to continue the “long journey to rescue this country from the ‘worst of times.’” This interpretation of civil religion emphasizes its values (including loyalty to God and religion) as definable, external, unchanging authorities. Instead of orienting his conception of these values towards the future, as Jackson does, Robertson argues that these values
must be kept the same as they have always been in the past. This demonstrates that the label of “orthodox” fits Robertson’s approach to American civil religious values.

The Nominees

If the culture wars are truly fought through the use of civil religion in political campaigns, though, there must be evidence from party nominees – not just from the obvious culture warriors that support them. Thus, it is essential to determine whether civil religion is treated similarly or differently in the rhetoric of nominees than it is in the case of the culture warriors. In investigating the speeches of these figures – Bush and Dukakis – I turn to the same occasions and factors as with the culture warriors for investigation: the parties’ national conventions serve as the occasions, while I continue investigating the use and interpretation of civil religion in each speech.

Use of Civil Religion

As in the cases of the culture warriors, Republican presidential nominee George H. W. Bush (1988) also features civil religious themes throughout his speech, and uses this language in important rhetorical tasks. He opens the speech by discussing the civil religious concepts of “mission” and “purpose,” ends the speech by iterating the civil religious equivalent of Christianity’s “Lord’s Prayer” – the Pledge of Allegiance – and discusses several civil religious ideals and concepts in between. He sets up the election he is taking part in on a moral plane, stating, “An election (is) about ideas and values.” He also confirms his belief in the central civil religious idea that American greatness comes from American values, arguing, “This has been called the American Century, because in it we were the dominant force for good in the world.” He argues that America’s prosperity requires a purpose – that
material success without moral benefit is useless. This vision demonstrates a view of American success not as coming from material gain, but as coming from morally beneficial practices.

Bush, like the culture warriors, uses civil religious concepts and allusions to support his own candidacy while denigrating that of his opponent, Michael Dukakis. He initially does this through the frame of American exceptionalism, placing Dukakis in opposition to this civil religious value by stating, “My opponent’s view of the world sees a long slow decline for our country, an inevitable fall mandated by impersonal historical forces…. He sees America as another pleasant country on the UN roll call, somewhere between Albania and Zimbabwe.” Meanwhile, he positively frames himself in a civil religious context by defending American exceptionalism, proposing, “America is not in decline. America is a rising nation…. And I see America as a leader – a unique nation with a special role in the world.”

Bush also uses the civil religious concepts he dwells on – mission and purpose – to suggest himself as the obvious choice to lead America under our unifying moral values. He proposes that it is the President’s job to provide the mission that gives purpose to prosperity and that since he can draw from his military and Vice-Presidential experience with missions, he must be the candidate to do this job. In doing so, Bush makes two strategic moves: first setting criteria for the presidency in limited civil religious terms, and second proposing these criteria as fitting him more than his opponent. This suggests that Bush must be the obvious choice (according to himself, or course) to lead the country, in civil religious terms. In furthering this suggestion, Bush aligns himself with the widely popular President Ronald Reagan
(since he was Reagan’s Vice-President) and the American people as having improved the nation already. He states “Eight years ago… I stood here with Ronald Reagan and we promised, together… to return America to her greatness. Eight years later look at what the American people have produced.” This statement suggests that American success results from Bush’s work with Reagan and – perhaps more importantly – the American people. Bush drives home this alignment with the Reagan administration and discusses, in the context of a quote from the popular historical President Franklin Delano Roosevelt, the importance of not “changing horses midstream” – which of course means he should be elected.

In choosing issues to mention in his speech, Bush emphasizes the ones that relate to morality and civil religion: He discusses abortion and adoption, which relate to the family. He addresses the Pledge of Allegiance, which is an important civil religious ritual. Bush mentions the death penalty and crime, which relate to the value of security. He even addresses school prayer, which is framed as a freedom and connected to the First Amendment of the Bill of Rights. For each of these, Bush suggests that he will solve them using “old fashioned common sense” – aligning himself with the traditional unifying ideas and values common to the American people.

This alignment allows the implication that as aligned as Bush is with civil religion, his opponent is not. He implies this – as Jackson (1988) and Robertson (1988) did in their circumstances – through his above statements, suggesting that he is on the side of civil religion and his opponent is not. He also does this in a unique way. Enabled by the fact that his speech comes after Dukakis’, Bush is able to juxtapose
rhetorical techniques to associate himself with civil religion and Dukakis against it. At the end of Dukakis’ (1988) DNC speech, invokes a pledge from Ancient Greece, continuing his take on the presidential campaign as a marathon, and referencing his immigrant-parents’ heritage. Bush (1988), in this speech a few weeks later, finds an excuse to end his speech with a different pledge – stating that it is customary for a candidate to do so. Instead of referencing his ethnic heritage, Bush recites the Pledge of Allegiance – asserting his own allegiance to America over all else. Through the reciting of the pledge that all schoolchildren learn, George H. W. Bush aligns himself with America and its civil religion, while leaving room for the implication that this alignment may not be the same for his Greek-pledge quoting opponent. Through explicitly and implicitly aligning himself with and his opponent against civil religious values, Bush uses Hunter’s (1991) positive and negative battle methods, employing civil religious language as a tool in the rhetorical battle tactics of cultural warfare.

Bush’s opponent, Michael Dukakis (1988) also uses civil religion in several important ways throughout his speech at the Democratic National Convention – particularly through employing civil religious language in positively framing his campaign and negatively framing his opponents – Hunter’s (1991) tactics again appearing through civil religious themes in campaign rhetoric. Although he rarely mentions “God,” the speech certainly contains quite a bit of civil religious language, emphasizing the rituals, ideals, and narratives of the national faith. He places particular emphasis on the American dream – emphasizing this civil religious concept from the very start of his speech. Dukakis, like his opponent, also emphasizes the key civil religious belief that American success comes not from might, but from values,
that “our greatest strength comes not from what we possess, but from what we believe.”

Dukakis aligns himself with these values from which America’s “greatest strength comes.” He frames himself as the defender of American exceptionalism, pledging to bring about “a new era of greatness in America.” He argues that “we are the party that believes in the American dream” and also uses the story of his life – as the son of immigrants turned major party’s presidential nominee – to very personally align himself with the civil religious American dream narrative. In this way, Dukakis aligns not only his beliefs with civil religious ones, but his personal story to values thought to unify Americans.

Dukakis also associates his party with civil religious themes, arguing that American values are demonstrated by the Democratic Party, and references popular Democratic Presidents – (Franklin) Roosevelt, Truman, and Kennedy as examples of individuals that advanced these values. These individuals, in Cherry’s (1971, p. 6) terms are “leaders who have been canonized in the national consciousness as exemplars of American ideals and as particular bearers of America’s destiny under God.” Dukakis proposes that he will fight for the value of community – an ideal proposed to unite Americans. He quotes “City upon a Hill” preacher John Winthrop (1630) in doing so to propose that the nation must find unity, and suggests that he will use the presidency to advance this value. Through all of this, Dukakis associates himself positively with civil religious ideals such as unity, community, the American dream and exceptionalism, as well as popular leaders from the American story.
Negatively, he presents a dark picture of the Reagan administration and Republican policies, arguing that “Reaganomics” challenges the civil religious values of family and equality. Dukakis presents the existing administration as unaware of real-world issues – those that affect “Main Street” – and seeking selfish material gains. He suggests that these practices are opposed to common good. He presents his potential presidency as one that will “restore” dignity to the White House and focus on advancing civil religious values through several goals: He promises to revive the emphasis on the value of justice in the Justice Department. He promises nominees who stay true to the Constitution – the civil religious scripture. He aims to enforce the law within his administration – practicing what he preaches. Each of these promises in and of themselves seems to be positive association with civil religious values, but each also doubles as an attack. Each promise alludes to specific failures of – and proposes positive policies as a change from – the Reagan/Bush administration, implying that Bush’s political allies have hindered the advancement of the civil religious ideals that the rest of Americans are united by. In all of these statements, Dukakis is able to frame himself positively and his opponent negatively. The positive and negative use of civil religion as a framing tool in Dukakis’ rhetoric confirms its existence as a weapon for battle tactics of cultural warfare (Hunter 1991) – just as it does is used by Jackson (1988), Robertson (1988), and Bush (1988).

The nominees’ use of civil religion as a means of framing oneself positively and one’s opponent negatively advances the idea that the rhetoric of political campaigns are media through which cultural warfare occurs. The fact that civil religious language in particular plays this role advances the idea that even among
mainstream public figures, civil religion can be used in a divisive context – particularly evident from its use in attacking opposition. The role of civil religious dialogue, however, is not confined to attacks – and thus may be more complicated than just that of a divider. Its use in positive framing demonstrates its potential power as a unifying force: if used properly, civil religion can frame individuals and positions as fitting the civil religious values shared by all Americans. Both Bush and Dukakis are able to do this through focusing on civil religious themes that present them as personally aligned with civil religious values: Bush with “mission” and Dukakis with the “American dream.”

Interpretation of Civil Religion

In interpreting civil religion, Bush (1988) emphasizes that the values with which he most identifies are rooted in tradition: God, family, and community. He suggests that the nation should stick to “old-fashioned Common Sense” – which is glorified as being time-tested. Bush suggests that America must constantly move forward “for an endless enduring dream and a thousand points of light.” While he recognizes the existence of necessary policies to fix and change certain things about America, he frames his presidential goals as a continuation of the past Reagan administration – of which he was a part. His overall interpretation of civil religious themes seems to fit with the orthodox tradition, as evidenced by his description of American values as traditional and endless. As these values are external, definable, and unchanging – and therefore temporally oriented towards the past, they suggest that Bush’ interpretation of civil religion can be accurately described as “orthodox.”
Dukakis (1988) also states that we must carry “old fashioned” values into the present. One might assume that this suggests an orthodox inclination, if taken out of context – but one would be wrong to do so. Instead, Dukakis’ intent for the “old fashioned” values is to be used to create new beginnings – the external, definable authority must be adapted to the times in order to do so – and is thus oriented towards the future. Dukakis gives American citizens (and his Democratic audience) agency, promising, “We’re going to forge greatness in America.” He argues that the United States must build into the future – not only continue with the past. He states that the time has come to meet the “new (emphasis added) frontier” of a new era, represented by new economic challenges. For Dukakis, the values may continue, but the times have changed and are changing enough that these values must be reinterpreted to meet the needs of the future. His take on civil religion, then, as evident in his speech at the Democratic National Convention, can be accurately deemed “progressive” as it is oriented more towards the future than the past.

Both candidates discuss the eternal status of American values. Both candidates see these values as external and definable. The clear difference lies in the two nominees’ takes on the transcendence of these values. Whereas Bush (1988) considers the values as they always have been good enough to continue with and keep constant in meaning, Dukakis (1988) clearly reinterprets these values to fit new times. Thus, while Bush and Dukakis us civil religious language for the same basic tactics of cultural warfare in their acceptances of party nominations, the two clearly have differing temporal interpretations of civil religious values. The two fall clearly into
the two categories laid out by Hunter (1991): Bush in orthodoxy and Dukakis in progressivism.

Divides?

Culture Warriors vs. Nominees

If one is to conclude that the differences in use of civil religion fall along culture war-determined lines, and are contested within campaigns, then it is important to investigate if there is a significant difference between the rhetoric of the culture warriors and that of the party nominees. In order to do so, I examine whether there are uniform approaches taken by the party nominees that differ from those uniformly taken by the culture warriors.

In terms of use of civil religion as a tool for both unification and attack, there is minimal difference in the approaches of the party nominees and the culture warriors. There is uniformity between culture warriors – both Jackson and Robertson employ civil religious language in positive and negative rhetorical battle tactics of cultural warfare. This uniformity also exists between the party nominees – Bush and Dukakis use civil religion similarly as well. As both culture warriors and nominees take part in this type of rhetorical battle within their cultural conflict, there is little to suggest that the presidential nominees of major parties are any less likely to engage in these rhetorical battles than the obvious culture warriors.

In terms of interpretation of civil religion, however, a dichotomy is definable. This dichotomy, however, does not fall between the category of culture warrior and the category of party nominee. It falls instead between Democrats and Republicans. Both Democratic speakers can be accurately termed “progressive” in their
interpretation and presentation of civil religious myths and values, while both Republican speakers can be adequately termed “orthodox.” This does not necessarily mean that all Democrats are necessarily progressive, and all Republicans orthodox, but it does suggest an interpretive tendency within each major American political party.

*Progressive vs. Orthodox*

Drawing from the available samples, there is no difference in whether or not progressives or adherents of orthodoxy engage in civil religious language-based rhetorical battles – they all do. In terms of interpretation, on the other hand, the divide between progressivism and orthodoxy is apparent. Both Republican speakers take a past-oriented, orthodox approach to interpreting civil religion. They see lasting American values as transcending issues and time. These values are traditional, and thus must be continuously applied the same ways. They are definable: the individual, freedom, American exceptionalism, and God serving as prominent ones. These values also serve as external authorities – they come from the Founders and the American people – not from political parties or interpretive strands that are involved in campaigns or the culture wars that contest their meanings. As these values are external, definable and transcendent authorities, the Republican speakers’ interpretation of civil religion falls squarely into the divide set up by James Davison Hunter, as orthodox (Hunter 1991).

The Democratic speakers, on the other hand, take a progressive approach to interpreting civil religion. They still believe and invoke lasting, old-fashioned values, but these values are taken to mean different things at different times. They are not
unchanging. This is demonstrated most clearly by Jackson’s (1988) discussion of a difference in eras between that in which slavery existed and one in which the descendents of both slave-owners and slaves sit together, and by Dukakis’ (1988) discussion of a new era calling for new understanding of values. These progressives do define their ideals, and give them quite a bit of authority as the sources of American greatness. They give much more agency to the American people, though, in emphasizing the need for these people to determine the future, and construct new beginnings. Thus, while the Democratic speakers believe in and invoke many of the same external, definable values as the orthodox Republicans, they do not accept these values’ transcendence – instead requiring the people to reinterpret them in new times. The Democratic speakers, then, fall squarely into one of Hunter’s (1991) culture wars’ categories as well: progressive.

Implications

From the speeches of culture warriors and party nominees in the 1988 Democratic and Republican National Conventions, one can see a clear divide between progressive and orthodox interpretation of civil religion. This divide, however, does not fall between the culture warriors and party nominees, suggesting that one need not come from the cultural ranks to contest the meaning of civil religion in the culture wars. Nominees of major parties, in their rhetorical interpretation and presentation of civil religion, may be taking part in the culture wars.

The case of 1988 sets precedents of progressivism among Democrats and orthodoxy among Republicans. While the universality of this suggestion is not investigable while using the available cases, this suggestion may merit future
investigation. The precedent, however, does have significance to the study in the coming pages: that it is likely – unless time has led to an alteration in trends – that Barack Obama might approach civil religious discourse through a progressive lens, while George W. Bush might do so through an orthodox one. Also significant about the 1988 case is that evidence of a progressive-orthodox divide is apparent as early as 1988. These sides, at that point, were already coming into direct confrontation through a national election. They were also actively contesting the meaning of American civil religion through public discourse. The divide also demonstrates that different interpretations of civil religion do exist. This means that the supposedly unifying, uncontested American tradition of Civil Religion may not be so unifying after all. In fact, this tradition may, when brought into campaign rhetoric, serve as the battleground for the most hotly contested American ideological battle possible: the culture wars.
Chapter 3: Campaign Oratory

In order to continue my investigation of whether the culture wars take place through the contestation of civil religious meaning within political campaign rhetoric, the speeches of candidates serves a central purpose. In the following pages within this chapter, I address a central question in this project: whether civil religious oratory within campaigns is the medium of the culture wars. In doing so, I employ the same methodology as in the previous chapters: assessing the way civil religious language is both used and interpreted within speeches.

I examine my two central cases – George W. Bush in 2000 and Barack Obama in 2008 – by placing speeches on similar occasions next to one another, and drawing comparative conclusions. The first occasion is the declaration of candidacy – in which both candidates explain their motivation to run and lay out preliminary ideological focuses (Bush 1999, Obama 2007). Next, I turn to the acceptance of nomination at a party’s national convention – speeches given towards the height of campaigns’ competition, in which ideology is more fully formed (Bush 2000, Obama 2008). After analyzing speeches on similar occasions by the different candidates, I seek to locate and discuss key themes within use and interpretation of civil religion. This demonstrates trends in presentation of civil religion by both Bush and Obama, which in turn helps determine thematic similarities and differences between the two candidates. These observations demonstrate whether the campaign rhetoric from the two candidates can truly be deemed part of the culture wars. Thus, this chapter serves as an essential piece of the puzzle in determining whether the culture wars are, in fact,
a contest over the meaning of American civil religion that take place primarily in electoral campaigns.

**Declarations of Candidacy**

**Use of Civil Religion**

In his declaration of candidacy from 1999, George W. Bush uses civil religious language prominently in his speech. The way he does so reflects many of the methods of the 1988 speakers discussed in the previous chapter. Specifically, Bush (1999) presents a key civil religious belief: that American greatness requires, and is based in, common morality and values – not materials. He refers to America as a “chosen nation” – an effect of the values that make the nation unique. He argues, “The success of America has never been proven by cities of gold, but by citizens of character.” Bush suggests that America’s “greatest export” is not material whatsoever – it “is, and always will be, freedom.” Bush argues that the American prosperity that these values have caused must have a purpose – not unlike the “prosperity with a purpose” demand of his father (Bush 1988). The purpose presented by George W. Bush (1999) revolves around a civil religious value: the American dream. Just as in the case of the 1988 speakers, Bush articulates this ideal among the themes he uses to both unify his audience behind his own campaign and to attack opponents – again showing that civil religious language can serve as both a unifying force and a weapon in cultural warfare (Hunter 1991).

In positively framing his own campaign in the context of civil religious values, Bush (1999) calls for unity. He envisions a unified – not ideologically dichotomous – America, and states that the societal change necessary to bring about
this vision must occur through hearts and minds – not just laws. He advances his own unique brand of ideology – “compassionate conservatism” – as both a means to unite the nation and provide purpose to prosperity. He discusses this philosophy as more than just a guide to his own practices – but “the calling of a nation.” Bush sees pursuing this philosophy – which calls for maintaining conservative beliefs while caring for the underprivileged in society – as a means to create an era of traditional American values, which Bush calls a “responsibility era.” He discusses each of his policy goals as promoting values that are civil religious in nature: reducing taxes and regulation to promote prosperity in the name of American exceptionalism; justifying increasing military might with the value of peace; and defending social security as a matter of national responsibility. Instead of offering material success, Bush offers hope, energy, and idealism as the road to American moral success. This focus on values displays a civil religious focus from Bush, but also displays positive battle tactics within the culture wars (Hunter 1991). Bush (1999) is advancing his own campaign in the terms of the national faith, promoting his own campaign by employing civil religious themes – with which the audience is meant to identify – in his campaign rhetoric.

Bush also uses civil religious language to go on the offensive against his political opponents, employing negative tactics of the culture wars (Hunter 1991) by framing these opponents as opposed to the uniting ideals of civil religion. Bush (1999) focuses these attacks on the Clinton/Gore administration, suggesting that the era in which this administration is in power is “a time of tarnished ideals.” He suggests that Clinton and Gore claim credit for American prosperity – something
Bush articulates as coming from the American people. In pointing this out, Bush sets the administration up as opposed to the American people, in that Clinton and Gore attempt dishonestly to take the credit that rightfully belongs to the American public. Bush uses a similar strategy to Dukakis’ (1988) – making promises to the audience that are clearly aimed to conjure up negative associations with the existing administration. He suggests that he will take part in a “new type of campaign” that “the country is hungry for” – a positive, unifying campaign. The description of this campaign as “new” suggests that the campaigning of the existing administration is one that is both negative and divisive. The negativity and division that Bush suggests the Clinton administration sows is in direct opposition to the central civil religious value of unity. He also states that his basis for decision-making will be his values, and not public opinion – a clear reference to the frequent opinion polling carried out by the Clinton administration. This rhetorical move simultaneously props him up and puts down political opponents: it insults the administration’s practices, while also suggesting that Bush will follow his values – values that Bush has already framed as reflecting the civil religious ideals that unite the nation. Since the audience by this point of the speech is aware of this positive value-association, Bush is able to imply that he will rule with values that we already hold, while also framing himself as moral, consistent, and value-driven. The coexistence of this set of approaches to positive and negative framing using civil religious language suggests that this speech reflects the rhetorical battles of the culture wars (Hunter 1991). Bush (1999) first demonstrates his belief in civil religion – something he shares with the American people – and then uses its terms to promote his campaign and attack his opponents.
Obama (2008) uses plenty of civil religious language in a similar fashion in his declaration of candidacy. He, too, believes in the civil religious doctrine that non-materially-tangible qualities of America – beliefs, values, will, and even words – are the means by which the nation is advanced. He uses Abraham Lincoln’s success as an example of this – arguing that Lincoln maintained the country’s unity “through his will and words” – not just through his military. Obama invokes a belief in American exceptionalism, referencing America as a global leader and advancer of its values, suggesting that America should “usher in a new birth of freedom on this Earth.” This evident belief in civil religion is demonstrable throughout Obama’s declaration of candidacy, which he uses similarly to Bush – positively associating himself with civil religion while negatively framing his opponents as against it.

Obama’s (2007) speech continues the precedent of promoting one’s own campaign while calling for national unity – suggesting that national unity can be best achieved through his own leadership. He proposes this national unity as a means to promote civil religious values, suggesting, “We… build a more hopeful America.” Obama frames his past as bipartisan – working even with those in an opposing party – in order to characterize himself as in support of American values – not just those of the Democratic Party. He sees the unity he aims to bring about as fulfilling a goal of America’s founding document – the Constitution – “(taking) up the unfinished business of perfecting our union.” Obama also places his campaign in the context of celebrated social and political movements of the American story: the Revolution, Civil War, New Deal, Manifest Destiny, and Civil Rights movements serve as
examples of generations rising up and demanding change – the exact aim of his own campaign.

Obama invokes the image of Abraham Lincoln – who in civil religion takes the position of a savior figure (Bellah 2005) – in arguing for unity under common American beliefs. He even seems to compare himself to Lincoln, calling him “a tall, gangly, self-made Springfield lawyer” and noting that Lincoln “called a house divided to stand together” – exactly what Obama now frames his campaign as aiming to do. He personally associates himself with other civil religious terms as well, fitting his own story of personal success into the values of hard work, patriotism, and community service. Obama associates his campaign with democracy – by the people, of the people, and for the people – telling his audience, the American people, “This campaign can’t only be about me. It must be about us – it must be about what we can do together.” In doing so, he both gives the American people ownership over his own campaign, and frames himself as the people’s candidate. He promises to battle “for justice and opportunity.” Through all of these statements, Obama is able to align himself with civil religious values – justice, opportunity, patriotism, community service, and hard work – as well as civil religious historical elements – Lincoln, popular historical movements and the Constitution – and with the goal of American unity more generally.

While he associates himself positively with these civil religious themes, Obama also frames the political forces he opposes as against them. He attacks the unpopular (George W.) Bush administration in particular, framing himself and the civil religious values he presents himself with as in opposition to this administration.
Each issue that Obama presents a plan for is presented as opposed to the practices of the Bush administration – which Obama calls “petty and trivial” and even rooted in division. Obama refers to these practices as “the ways of Washington (which) must change.” He associates the “last six years” – those in which Bush was in office – strictly with negative political topics – rising costs of health care, stagnant wages, climate change, war, and Hurricane Katrina – and accuses the administration of continually deferring blame for each of these things onto others. This accusation suggests that the Bush administration comes up short (to put it lightly) of the civil religious value of responsibility. Obama argues that society is ready to move beyond these practices – that “the time for that politics is over” – because they do not reflect society’s values. These negative attacks – both implicit and explicit – frame the ruling administration and party (which Obama is running against) as opposed to civil religious values. Through presenting the Republican Party as opposed to nationally uniting values while presenting himself as aligned with them, Obama positions himself on the side of the American people and American unity through engaging in rhetorical tactics of cultural warfare using civil religious terms.

Bush (1999) and Obama (2007) similarly participate in both positive and negative battle tactics of the culture wars through civil religious terms. While the two use these terms to justify different policy prescriptions and the rule of two different political parties, both employ the same tactics through the same medium. They both use and display beliefs in civil religious ideals and values, framing their own campaigns as promoting national unity through these ideals. Both also negatively frame opponents – particularly the existing administrations of the parties they run
against. This similarity in framing is logical between the two, as neither have a clear individual opponent in their campaigns, but are able to frame themselves as challenging administrations on shaky ground – either widely unpopular (as the Bush administration was in 2007) or mired in scandal (the Clinton administration in 1999). The evidence of both Bush and Obama taking part in the battle tactics of the culture wars through civil religious campaign rhetoric suggests that – if the two do correspond to progressive and orthodox sides – this rhetoric may indeed be a battleground in which the culture wars between progressivism and orthodoxy occur.

*Interpretation of Civil Religion*

One of the central goals of George W. Bush’s (1999) campaign, according to this speech, is the establishment of a new “responsibility era.” Arguing for the establishment of a new era might lead one to conclude hastily that Bush is future-oriented, concerned with changing times, and thus progressive. When investigated more thoroughly, however, this conclusion seems faulty, as the new era prescribed by Bush is aimed to return American society to traditional values – not to construct new meanings to values to fit changing times. Bush states, “We will give our country a fresh start after a season of cynicism.” This fresh start clearly does not represent a change in the meaning of values of civil religion, as it is meant to correct only “a time of tarnished ideals… a season of cynicism” – temporary misgivings, not permanent ones. Bush promises to hold true to the existing meaning of several principles: local trust, property, family, and personal responsibility. While he recognizes a cultural change having occurred within his own lifetime, Bush’s recommendation is not that another cultural change occurs on top of the one he has seen – as a means of progress
– but that we simply return to the values in place in America prior to the transition he observes. He recommends this happen through teaching the morals of responsibility, family, honesty, and work. He sees his most important goal as expanding the American dream. The goal of expansion here reflects a change, but not in the meaning of the value. Bush outlines his compassionate conservative ideology as fulfilling the eternal promise of a nation – not constructing a new promise for a new era. He interprets America civil religious values as unchanging, external and definable. In this speech, then, Bush’s understanding of civil religion can be accurately deemed “orthodox.”

Obama (2007), on the other hand, states that “the genius of our founders is that they designed a system of government that can be changed.” He relates the time of his campaign to other times in which change has been necessary. This suggests that Obama believes in only one perpetual value – that of change – while allowing the meaning of other values and institutions to be adjusted to new eras. Obama’s vision of his generation’s legacy is one that will make “future generations” proud – it is more concerned with meeting the demands of the future than those of the past. Obama also gives agency to American citizens by stating that he is running “to gather with you to transform a nation.” In this speech, Obama’s understanding of civil religion – oriented toward the future, emphasizing the potential of the nation to be fundamentally transformed, and emphasizing change as the symbol of American greatness – is clearly progressive.

In their declarations of candidacy, both Bush (1999) and Obama (2007) state a desire to usher in new eras of American values. The difference between the two is
apparent not in what the values are, so much as their temporal orientation. Bush
(1999) looks primarily to the past for constant, unchanging values. He only seeks to
move from the temporary, lapsed era through returning to a new era of old values.
Obama (2007), on the other hand, gets his values from the past, but states that they
must be used for fundamental change: the transformation of America – which
requires a reinterpretation of values. Based on the way that temporal interpretation of
values and vision for America differs between Bush and Obama, the two certainly fit
the categories of orthodox and progressive, respectively.

**Acceptance of Party Nominations**

*Use of Civil Religion*

In Bush’s (2000) acceptance of the Republican National Convention’s
nomination for president, the candidate again prominently features civil religious
language. The way in which he does echoes several of the themes introduced in his
declaration of candidacy – including the belief in American character as the root of
American exceptionality. He specifies essential elements of this American character:
hard work and perseverance in the face of adversity. He again focuses the language of
these civil religious beliefs on promoting his own campaign while attacking his
opponent’s. The promotion takes place through Bush centering on the previously
introduced theme of fulfilling the “promise of prosperity.” In calling for this
fulfillment, Bush uses various civil religious themes that support his run for
presidency and frames himself as having the unique ability to provide this promise.
He again sets up compassionate conservatism as the means through which to achieve
this goal, arguing that it is “the vision of America’s founders” – “renew(ing) our
values to restore our country.” Bush sees his philosophy of compassionate conservatism as a way to address inequality, which he calls “a challenge to the very heart and founding premise of our nation.” In setting his own ideology up as addressing this challenge, Bush not only demonstrates his agreement with civil religious values, but also presents himself as a defender of these values on behalf of the American people who share them. The motivation to do so, according to Bush, is national unity. He argues, “Each of us must share in (the) promise, or that promise is diminished for all” because we are united by our national moral strength. Bush’s values, then, are meant to encompass and defend civil religious values on behalf of society in efforts to promote national unity.

Bush also uses civil religious values to prescribe the means through which these goals must be achieved. He invokes responsibility in particular – a value that his campaign promises to restore an era of – of individuals, religious institutions, corporations, leaders, and the president as the value through which the purpose of prosperity can be achieved. He alludes to popular leaders from the American story – Lincoln, (Theodore) Roosevelt, Truman and Reagan – in describing the way he hopes to promote this national success, and discusses his plan to incorporate the best qualities of each of these figures into his own presidency. Bush argues that he will lead the generation in adding to the American story, predicting, “We will write not, footnotes, but chapters in the American story. We will add the work of our hands to the inheritance of our fathers and mothers.” The placement of Bush’s goals in the narrative of American history locates his campaign in the context of the American successes – the “greatest generation” (“our fathers and mothers” – celebrated in the
national faith for its promotion of civil religious values), and some of the most popular American leaders in history. Success, for Bush, is inevitable because America’s exceptional character is bound to bring exceptional results. He confidently states that his presidency will allow the nation to “renew its purpose and unite behind great goals” – specifically the civil religiously affiliated goals he sets forth.

Bush frames each policy prescription and statement of ideological development in his speech as reflecting the national values of civil religion – not just his own personal beliefs. He cites his governorship in Texas as a precedent for forging unity behind value-based agreement – discussing his ability to forge bipartisan agreement on issues that relate to morality – particularly education and charity. Bush also sees the civil religious ideals he has remained true to as favoring Republicans electorally. He offers that Republicans will win the presidential election because their party represents the values of “ideas and innovation… idealism and inclusion… (And) a simple and powerful hope.” These values, along with the others Bush aligns himself with work to promote his campaign, framing his election as an (almost) inevitable fulfillment of civil religious promise. In setting himself up as believing in, defending, and favored by civil religious values, Bush presents himself as the logical choice to lead the nation into unity forged through these values.

As he does in his declaration of candidacy, as well, Bush attacks his opponent – now specified as Vice-President Al Gore – through civil religious terms. He is able to maintain the previously set focus on the Clinton administration in his attacks because of Gore’s presence in and affiliation with this administration. He sets the administration up in opposition to the value of purpose to American prosperity,
accusing Clinton and Gore of having “coasted through prosperity.” Bush finds this “path of least resistance” in direct opposition to “America’s way” – that of “the rising road.” Bush provides specific examples of this history of opposition to the civil religious value of leadership, discussing the administration’s failure to lead in matters of education, the economy, and national service. Bush suggests that “greatness is found when American character and American courage overcome American challenges” – exactly what he sees the Clinton/Gore administration as failing to do in these matters. He describes the political atmosphere under the administration as one threatening American values – an era of “scandal… bitterness and broken faith.”

According to Bush, while he offers an optimistic view of America’s future through providing purpose to American prosperity, Gore offers only negativity – a “tunnel at the end of the light.” These negative attacks of Gore as opposing and threatening advancement of the nation, in contrast to Bush’s positive association of his own campaign with unity through civil religious value promotion further evidences the routine of Bush’s civil religious campaign rhetoric – in which civil religious language is used in the battle tactics of the culture wars (Hunter 1991).

Obama’s (2008) nomination acceptance speech from the Democratic National Convention also continues the trend of using civil religious language for self-promotion and attacking political opposition. He both implicitly and explicitly aligns himself with civil religion, again confirming his belief in the uniting values of the national faith. Obama reaffirms his conviction that values make America unique, arguing, “Promise has always set this country apart – that through hard work and sacrifice, each of us can pursue our individual dreams but still come together as one
American family, to ensure that the next generation can pursue their dreams as well.”

With this statement, Obama reaffirms that American exceptionalism is rooted in the values – specifically those of hard work, sacrifice, dreams, and family – of American civil religion. Obama sees national moral standing as a byproduct of this exceptionality. He argues that the nation should be recognized internationally as the best hope for “freedom,” “peace,” and “a better future.” He sees the nation as in need of restoring this moral standing, which requires maintaining and living up to the American promise – which he sets up as the overarching goal of his potential presidency. His promise to restore this moral standing implies that Obama intends, with his presidency, to take the necessary steps to reinforce American exceptionalism through promoting American moral values.

Obama sees his campaign as set in a period in which one must respond to a threat to American promise – a value he sees as having been present since the American founding. He defines this promise in his own terms as “the idea that we are responsible for ourselves, but that we also rise and fall as one nation.” This promise – presented as fundamental to the nation – is set up as requiring a change from the existing state of politics. Obama frames the policy prescriptions set forth in his speech as supporting his goal of defending this promise that is requisite to American greatness. Through setting himself up as the defender of this promise, Obama also puts himself forward as a defender of the civil religious values that allow the nation to maintain exceptionality. In placing himself in this role, Obama aligns himself with several popular historical leaders – Martin Luther King Jr., Abraham Lincoln, John F. Kennedy, and the nation’s founders – all of whom he sees as having led efforts to
respond to threats to and maintain America’s promise – as he now attempts to do. In alluding to these leaders of popular historical movements, Obama requests the American people allow him to continue the trend of bringing change to Washington. He prescribes his own election as a means through which the nation can carry its promise into the future, just as the others he mentioned have enabled America to do. This approach reflects that of his declaration of candidacy: Obama uses civil religious values and narratives to align himself a promoter and defender of civil religion – and thus as on the side of unity and the American people.

Obama also continues to attack political opposition through framing his opponent – Senator John McCain – as in opposition to these nationally uniting values. He does so by aligning McCain with the Bush administration, which Obama sees as presenting the threat to America’s promise. Obama points out that McCain has sided with the unpopular Bush administration on 90% of senatorial votes – linking the two. Obama sees the political atmosphere set by the Bush administration as unfavorable to American promise, thus implying – through his previously established connection – that a McCain administration would also threaten this civil religious value. Obama argues, “America, we are better than the last eight years” – explicitly suggesting that the America as a nation is now morally superior to the America the Republican Bush administration – also connected to McCain through political party – formed.

Obama – who has already in this speech demonstrated himself to be a defender of American exceptionalism – also explicitly attacks McCain as degrading the American people, citing one of McCain’s chief advisors who called America “a nation of whiners” as a prime example. This sets up the opposing campaign as
fundamentally opposed to and threatening American exceptionalism through negatively describing the American people. Obama specifies, “I don’t believe that Senator McCain doesn’t care what’s going on in the lives of Americans. I just think he doesn’t know” and accuses McCain of subscribing “to that old, discredited Republican philosophy.” He, in these suggestions, frames McCain as coming from a past, out-of-date perspective. His beliefs are unable to change with the changing conditions that the American people endure. Obama uses this accusation as a way to elevate his own campaign, declaring, “We need a President (himself) who can face the threats of the future, not keep grasping at the ideas of the past.” Through these statements, Obama attacks McCain as not aware of the reality of the American people’s lives, whereas he places himself as aligned with the people through shared civil religious values. McCain, then, is put forth as unable to identify with the American people in the way that Obama can, so much so that he is incapable of sharing, let alone leading a defense of, the uniting values of American civil religion. In using these concepts to promote his own candidacy and attack McCain, Obama again uses civil religion as a tool to promote his own electoral chances, while hurting McCain’s.

Both Bush (2000) and Obama (2008), then, in their acceptances of party nominations, continue the practice of using civil religious themes in the tactics of cultural warfare. The two do this in a relatively uniform way, aligning themselves with civil religious values while framing their political opponents as opposed to them. Each specifies the same fundamental belief in civil religion – that the nation’s greatness is drawn from its values. Since they identify themselves with these values,
each candidate is able to present themselves as on the side of the American people through invoking themes and narratives that the audience is familiar with from its prominence in American political rhetoric (Bellah 2005; Cherry 1971).

The two do differ, however, in the terms of their attacks. Both frame their opponents as against civil religion, but with different motivations. Whereas Bush (2000) attacks Clinton and Gore as unwilling to champion civil religious values, Obama (2008) attacks McCain as unable to do so. This variation may come about as a result of differing temporal perspectives. For one with a past-oriented, orthodox perspective who believes that American civil religious values must endure without change, not willingly living up to founding values and enduring American character is a nearly unforgivable sin. For a more future-oriented, progressive who believes values must change with changing circumstances, on the other hand, a much harsher critique is that an individual – in this case McCain – is unable to alter his beliefs as necessary to move into the future. The difference in negative attacks by Bush and Obama, then, may be dependent on their temporal perspectives as specified by their sides in the culture wars.

*Interpretation of Civil Religion*

The themes of Bush’s (2000) Republican National Convention speech echo many of those contained in his declaration of candidacy, and thus present a similar interpretation of civil religious meaning. He again portrays his campaign as seeking to bring about a new era of traditional, unchanging values. His goal is to “renew America’s purpose.” Each of Bush’s proposals for new beginnings comes from unchanging past values. For example, when addressing economic proposals, Bush
suggests, “our new economy must never forget the old, unfinished struggle for human dignity.” This sets up new circumstances as a continuation of a pre-existing, unchanging value-based struggle. Bush glorifies his father’s generation – the “greatest generation” – suggesting now is the time for his generation to take over, though not through making value-based alterations. In telling the story of his generation and his proposed goals for that generation, Bush narrates, “At times, we have lost our way. But we are coming home…. We have discovered that who we are is more important than what we have. And we know we must renew our values and restore our country. This is the vision of America’s founders.” Bush’s goal of change, then, is not oriented towards new beginnings altering the meaning of American values, but towards new beginnings that return founding values and visions to their original meanings. For Bush, the American character is constant – the same for those at the Founding, World War II, and the Civil Rights movement – and needs to be brought into the present. The chance recommended here is not an alteration of this character, but a continuation of it.

Thus, even Bush’s proposals for new beginnings cannot truly be deemed progressive. Instead of presenting a progressive reinterpretation of values and narratives, Bush suggests that American civil religious values are constant, unchanging, and only need to be reinforced and brought into the current era in the same form they originated in. This again suggests that Bush’s interpretation of the authority of American civil religious values is orthodox – that they are external, definable, and unchanging.
In his Democratic National Convention speech, Obama (2008) also references the American promise as enduring, stating that the “promise… has always set this country apart.” Obama also suggests that the American people are responsible for keeping the promise alive. He sets up the campaign as coming at a crossroads, in which the promise is in jeopardy, and demands, “It’s time for us to change America… (through using) a very different measure of what constitutes progress.” Thus, a reinterpretation of progress – a civil religious value – is the means through which the American promise can remain. Obama suggests that this measure of progress must correspond to the American people, meaning that it would change with changing circumstances. He specifically equates the American promise to change, arguing the promise that the nation must keep is the change it needs. In his policy prescriptions, Obama derides the Republican way of doing things as “outdated” and demands the nation address new, 21st Century problems with new solutions. Obama sees this as a shift from “the worn-out ideas and politics of the past” to a new “sense of common purpose.” Obama insists “on new ideas and new leadership, a new politics for a new time.”

Obama certainly references the past, even identifying enduring values in his speech. But even his idea of America’s enduring promise calls for a reinterpretation of values for the times. His use of past values is continuously future-oriented – his overarching goal bringing about a new way of doing things. The temporal orientation of his interpretation and use of civil religious elements demonstrates that again, Obama presents a progressive take on civil religion.
The dichotomous approaches to civil religion of George W. Bush (2000) and Barack Obama (2008) in their nomination-acceptance speeches are most clear through temporal orientation. Both certainly do reference an enduring American promise – which on the surface may be misleading. Bush recommends the renewing of values, while Obama cites these values – American promise in particular – as having led the nation to change throughout its history. The way the promise is maintained, though, is quite different for the two. While Bush sees bringing about a new, ideal era as requiring the restoration of unchanged, traditional values, Obama presents maintaining American promise as mandating perpetual change. While Obama attempts to adjust American values to fit the times – maybe most apparent in the above discussion of measuring progress – Bush attempts to adjust the times to enduring American values. This prescriptive difference reaffirms the dichotomous orientation within the culture wars described by Hunter (1991), with Bush as orthodox and Obama as progressive.

Implications

Use of Civil Religion

In the candidates’ speeches from within campaigns, both Bush and Obama – orthodox and progressive – use civil religion to positively frame their own campaigns and attack their opponents’. Through aligning themselves with civil religious values, these candidates are able to promote unity among Americans, and then to align themselves with the values that enable this unity. The candidates then take this alignment a step further – not only demonstrating their own belief in civil religious values, but discussing the ways in which their presidencies will defend and promote
these values – on behalf of the American people who share them. After this positive
association occurs, the candidates are able to attack their opponents as opposed to and
threatening the civil religious values, and therein opposed to the American people.
This sets up a fascinating dynamic – in which a candidate is able to unite him or
herself with the American people as sharing similar values, while setting up only their
political opponents in opposition not only to their own campaigns, but to civil
religious values and the voting public more generally. These attacks send a clear
message to the electorate: to protect your values, vote for me (or my political party)
and not my opponent.

These positive and negative associations are most likely explained by
circumstance: In any political campaign, it is in one’s best interest to self-promote
while hindering an opponent. The direct adherence of the tactics above to the positive
and negative battle tactics of the culture wars (Hunter 1991) is essential to note,
though. The presence of these tactics suggests that campaign rhetoric does, in fact,
serve as a medium through which the culture wars can occur in public discourse. The
presence of civil religious language as a weapon in these tactics even further
advances an understanding of how this occurs. This shared set of values serves as the
linguistic criteria through which these tactics of cultural warfare can take place. Civil
religion, in these instances, must be seen as taking multiple roles: both as a key tool in
divisive conflict, and as a tool to find commonality among and unite American
citizens in ideology and sense of morality.
Interpretation of Civil Religion

In their intra-campaign speeches, both Bush and Obama follow consistent interpretive patterns of civil religion. Bush tends to take an orthodox perspective, seeing fundamental American values as unchanging in meaning. Obama, on the other hand, takes a progressive view of civil religion, suggesting that even enduring values require change and reinterpretation to fit changing times. The sides in the culture wars, then, do manifest themselves within the perspectives of candidates in national, electoral campaigns. This occurs, seemingly through differing interpretations of civil religious elements in campaign rhetoric. Culture wars, then, as they manifest themselves within political campaigns seem to expose themselves within political rhetoric surrounding both use and interpretation of civil religious themes within oratory.
Chapter 4: Issues

Written Policy Rhetoric

To this point of the project, my discussion of political rhetoric has been limited to speeches – public political rhetoric produced for a mass audience – that mark significant occasions. Campaign rhetoric, however, is not limited to these instances. Another essential portion of campaign rhetoric is found in written texts, particularly in candidates’ discussions of issues and policy prescriptions that are readily available on campaign websites. These instances of written rhetoric have different audiences than widely televised campaign speeches. Instead of targeting the entire voting population, these policy discussions seem aimed more at the informed political elite – who are generally more partisan (Fiorina 2006). These individuals are more likely to approach rhetoric having determined a preference in a campaign. Through adding this type of rhetoric to my investigation, I observe whether the culture wars are present in their civil religious incarnation in campaign rhetoric that is not produced and displayed for the general public, but for political elites.

In doing so, I continue investigating the campaigns of Bush in 2000 and Obama in 2008. In particular, I investigate the discussions of issues and policy proposals from the two candidates’ original campaign websites (BarackObama.com 2008; 4president.us 2000). I have selected certain policies – two that have obvious civil religious implications – “family” and “education” – and one that is less moral and more technical in nature – “taxes.” In looking at the rhetoric involved in discussing each issue, I examine whether and how civil religious values are displayed in each webpage. I determine whether there are signs of the culture wars in this policy
rhetoric – whether the sides and battle tactics of cultural warfare are evident. I use this information to indicate whether these policies engage as part of the conflict between the temporal frames of the culture wars, and whether civil religion’s meaning is contested in policy-related, written campaign rhetoric in the same way it is in mass-displayed, spoken campaign rhetoric.

**Taxes**

Since tax policy rhetoric overwhelmingly relates to financial rates and economic conditions, it would seem to be less based in the morality of civil religious values than the other possible types of policy rhetoric. On the surface, at least, this seems to limit its potential to serve as a medium for the culture wars – at least in the way the culture wars manifest themselves in civil religion. Nevertheless, this less-than-obviously-moral issue is important to investigate in order to determine whether an issue that is not so overtly values-based can play a role in candidates’ contesting of the culture wars.

Bush frames his tax policy (Bush 2000) as representing the civil religious value of equality, as he promises to cut taxes for all. He specifically discusses the positive effect these cuts will have on “hard working families.” The focus on family and equality demonstrates that even in tax policy, Bush uses civil religious values as framing tools. He promotes the traditional American familial structure through proposing to increase the child credit on taxes and to cut the marriage penalty. He pledges to cut taxes the most for low income Americans, promoting equality. He promises to enable access to the middle class and to treat that middle class fairly – displaying civil religion’s celebration of the middle class, and the value of fairness.
Bush promotes charity and education by offering increased tax credits for charitable giving and educational saving. He also promises to encourage entrepreneurship in the name of the value of growth.

Bush’s temporal orientation is unclear – he does not frame his sense of values as coming from the past, as one might expect an orthodox politician to do. Although he invokes civil religious values to support his policies, he does not do so in a way that contests the temporal orientation of these values. Bush does negatively discuss the Clinton-Gore administration in this set of proposals, dismissing certain policies (such as the death tax and marriage penalty) while criticizing the administration for choosing not to refund the available tax surplus. He points out that the existing tax burden is at a record-high rate. These criticisms do reflect the attacking tactics of the culture wars. The lack of a clear orthodox or progressive interpretation of these values, though, suggests that this rhetoric is not taking part in a progressive vs. orthodox conflict – as it does not attempt to spread an interpretation of civil religious values – and thus that this passage does not serve as civil religious rhetoric that engages in the culture wars.

Obama (2008) also frames his tax proposals with civil religious values. He focuses on the impact of his taxes on savings for “middle class families” and job creation – which both fall under Obama’s broader goals of “restoring fairness to our tax code and returning to fiscal responsibility.” Obama also promises to help small businesses (the modern day Yeoman), health care and innovation (which enable American exceptionalism) through his tax policies. He frames these policies as cutting taxes more than Ronald Reagan did – quite the claim as Reagan is frequently
associated with tax cuts. Obama also presents a tax chart that demonstrates the share of tax cuts for Obama’s policies’ targets – families with single parents, children in college and/or multiple children, and seniors with modest incomes – which are chosen to represent the American people, as well as those most in need of tax cuts.

Again, despite the presence of some civil religious values, Obama’s tax policy rhetoric plays no role in the culture wars. The only attack on opposing forces levied by Obama is the inclusion of an independent report finding his policies would save families more than three times what his opponent – John McCain’s – would. This attack does more to frame Obama on the side of the American family than to frame McCain as opposed to it – making it not really fit Hunter’s (1991) criteria for negative attacks in the culture wars. Obama’s future orientation only exists in this section insofar as he provides a number of proposals for the future – just as any set of policy prescriptions would. He frames his taxes in the context of past Presidents, but does not frame his values temporally – as either coming from the past or changing for the future. This lack of cultural warfare-based attack and temporal orientation leads one to conclude that Obama’s tax policy rhetoric does not take part in the culture wars through use or interpretation of civil religion.

Tax policy rhetoric certainly is not an obvious battleground for the culture wars, and as one would expect, it does not function as one. Neither Bush nor Obama uses temporal framing of civil religion in the context of tax policy. Civil religious language is used in discussing taxes, but taxes do not serve as a means through which the contestation of civil religious meaning occurs. Obama and Bush allude to many of the same values – middle class, family, innovation – without a demonstrable
difference in understanding or framing of these values. One can safely conclude that the culture wars are absent from tax policy prescriptions in these cases.

**Family**

As in many religions, the family is an essential concept in American civil religion. It functions as a basic unit within society, and values related to the family are often deemed civil religious ideals – what is beneficial to “the family” is seen as beneficial to the nation. This is evident from its central role in many of the speeches before, in which a plan or statement is justified as positive to the entire nation because it benefits families. The family also plays a key role in the political ideologies of both Bush and Obama. In Obama’s (2006) pre-campaign book, *The Audacity of Hope: Thoughts on Reclaiming the American Dream*, and Bush’s (1999) mid-campaign book, *A Charge to Keep: My Journey to the White House*, both candidates dedicate entire chapters to discussing their personal family experiences and values, as well as some of their family-related ideas for policies. Morality plays a key role in political discussions of family-related issues, such as gay marriage, abortion and divorce. In candidates’ discussion of this morally contested set of issues, if the culture wars are contested through any issue discussion and policy prescription, one would logically expect to find evidence of hotly contested interpretation of the family’s value to civil religion. The findings, however, run contrary to this line of thought.

In George W. Bush’s discussion of “Child Welfare/Family Policy” (Bush 2000), he focuses on stabilizing homes for children and increasing the presence of fathers in every child’s life. These ideas fit into a traditional view of the American family: a two parent household with a married mother and father. He suggests that
these goals be advanced through community and faith-based organizations, to which the government must provide funding and goals. These ideas are grounded in civil religious concepts: The traditional family structure in itself is a value of civil religion, serving as a foundation for society. Fatherhood as a concept relates to the civil religious value of responsibility – as well as to the traditional family structure. The community institutions serve as a means through which to enact social change, representing the classical republican ethic of responsibility to one’s community and nation. Bush also advances some of his educational policy (on which more discussion can be found below) in this set of issues, too, recommending increased school choice for parents which relates to the value of individual freedom. All of these goals, as Bush suggests, work to promote the civil religious values of equality and opportunity for children.

While Bush’s discussion of family-related issues is grounded in civil religion, it does not reflect the pattern of the culture wars’ battle methods in the way that we have seen in the previously examined rhetoric. The most prominent evidence for this is the absence of a clear temporal orientation. The values discussed by Bush may intrinsically carry orthodox or progressive interpretations, but Bush does not frame any of them as means by which to perpetuate American values as they have always been understood, or as carrying with them new meanings to fit changing times. The family structure glorified by Bush relates to tradition (the past), but the overall goal of his policy is to help children move into the future. The balance of Bush’s “record” and his “proposals” also balances a past and a future orientation – not the clear back-
looking view one might expect to find in a candidate who has otherwise demonstrated an orthodox view of civil religion.

Also notable in this family-related policy rhetoric is the absence of clear cultural conflict. Bush’s discussion of family-related policy does not engage in the battle tactics of cultural warfare in that it does not engage in direct attack against any political opposition. Instead of ideological attacks as a basis for policy, Bush puts forth a relatively technically-oriented plan. While values play a role in these plans, it is generally only in setting societal goals for the plans – not determining how the plans will be executed. One might also be surprised to find the most hotly contested family-related cultural issues absent from Bush’s family-policy rhetoric. Nowhere in the discussion of this issue group does Bush mention gay marriage or abortion. Instead of addressing these issues that almost intrinsically relate to cultural conflict – and, for many Americans, to family – Bush keeps his policy focused on values meant to unite, and policies that seem agreeable in relation to these values.

Obama’s “Family” section of his policy page (Obama 2008) focuses on several issues that Bush (2000) does not discuss: He (2008) emphasizes decreasing taxes for hard workers who do not make a lot of money, and preventing those who work hard from falling into poverty. He also discusses helping those who work find balance between work and family. Obama ties strengthening schools into his family policy, and discusses health care, retirement and homeownership as significant issues to families. Obama, like Bush, discusses the importance of present fathers and good parenting techniques. Each of Obama’s government-provided solutions to these sub-issues is also tied deeply to civil religious values and concepts. Obama frames his
family tax policy prescriptions as “restoring fairness.” He recommends raising minimum wage as preventing the negative ideal of “poverty,” and protecting the positive ideal of “hard work.” The discussions of homeownership, health care, education, and retirement are all framed around promoting equality and enabling the American dream. Obama’s fatherhood initiatives seek, like Bush’s, “to strengthen families.”

This section, like Bush’s, does not directly engage in the culture wars. Obama’s goals – generally relatively specific and technical – are grounded in civil religious values, but there is no evidence of an obvious progressive frame in which these values are presented. The values are not offered in an especially future-oriented way, and there is no evidence that the meanings of these values must be altered to fit a changing world. Obama, like Bush, also refrains from using civil religion to directly attack opposition – framing his policies as agreeable to all. He does not bring up the most controversial family-related issues when discussing family values – an omission that exemplifies Obama’s avoidance of cultural warfare in his policy rhetoric. The lack of direct attack and clear temporal orientation from Obama’s side of the culture wars suggests that Obama, like Bush, does not use this excerpt of policy rhetoric within the culture wars.

While Bush and Obama use civil religious values to justify policy prescriptions, neither uses them to attack opponents. Both avoid divisive issues such as gay marriage and abortion, instead using civil religious ideals to justify their policy-related ideals as fitting all Americans – regardless of partisan ideology or temporal orientation. While the two focus on very different specific prescriptions – as
Obama’s is much more extensive and chooses to take on many more issues as part of his “Family” section – there is certainly some commonality in issue selection, particularly in terms of fatherhood. In the context of the issues they have in common, Bush and Obama rarely approach the issues differently, with both attempting to advance traditional family structures. Even in this clearly civil religious category of issue, then, the tactics and division of the culture wars are not evident in the candidates’ written family-policy rhetoric.

**Education**

Schools also serve as a civil religious institution. Education is a central value within civil religion, as it serves as a means through which the nation can achieve growth and thus perpetuate American hegemony and exceptionalism. Schools also serve as a training ground for society, preparing students for the civil religious world through teaching and encouraging patriotic acts such as the recitation of the “Pledge of Allegiance.” Education is frequently discussed as an important institution for families – as is evident in both Obama and Bush’s description of family issues – and for the broader ideal of advancing the values of equality and opportunity. That said, not all educational issues are moral – many are very technical and financial in nature. That there is some moral and civil religious value to education as an issue-category, though, would suggest that there may be a moral and cultural contest over education through policy prescription and issue discussion. Again, though, even this somewhat moral issue does not supply evidence of culture wars in policy rhetoric.

The goals of George W. Bush’s (2000) “Education” page are certainly civil religious in nature. The overall goal for Bush is to advance “equality of opportunity”
through narrowing the achievement gap between students from socio-economically advantaged and disadvantaged backgrounds. He does this through attempting to level the playing field for students through ensuring that all gain the basic skills of reading and simple math, as well as expanding funding to early childhood education, technological resources and math and science programs. Each of these offered solutions attempt to promote the civil religious values of equality and opportunity.

Bush also pushes for standard of accountability of the government’s education system to the American people, promoting annual standardized testing, as well as rewards for school improvement and punishment for decline as determined by clear, simple goals. This set of prescriptions functions to advance community authority. Bush promotes the civil religious ideals of freedom, choice, and family through promoting local control of schools and an increased set of school options for parents. He also recommends promoting “character development” in students through discipline, faith based and community organizations, and after-school programs. This demonstrates the value of education as promoting morality, and advocates community service as an essential function for advancing national interests. Bush’s goal to improve teacher quality promotes a sense of perpetual improvement and growth for American institutions.

As in the case of family-policy, Bush still does not seem to be taking part in the culture wars through the rhetoric used in his education policy discussion – even though civil religion maintains a key role in this portion of the campaign. Bush does not describe his proposals as a means of advancing unchanging values (or at least does not specify the values as unchanging). These values are neither framed as
perpetual nor as evolving – meaning there is no clear orthodox or progressive framing of civil religious concepts presented in the text.

The only attack that Bush makes is aimed at the Clinton-Gore administration, suggesting that it – an administration of Bush’s political opponents – have not worked enough to promote educational equality. While this attack does align Bush’s opponents against civil religion, it is the only attack in the entire discussion of education. As there is but one attack in the section, negative battle tactics of cultural warfare seem rare in Bush’s educational policy rhetoric. The rest of the content of Bush’s “Education” page is limited to concrete proposals and descriptions of issues. Despite the fact that this attack uses civil religion, it is in no way an attack on progressivism, as temporal orientation plays little role. Bush also avoids the hot-button issues related to education that are most frequently connected to cultural warfare: school prayer and evolution. Bush avoids these culturally divisive topics, just as he set a precedent for in his family policy. Again, although Bush’s education policy is framed in a civil religious way, civil religious meaning is not contested through culture wars-related tactics in this section of written policy rhetoric.

Obama approaches his “Education” page (Obama 2008) very technically. His description of the problems facing American education emphasizes a technical approach education over one that is values-based. Obama describes the Bush administration’s education policy – No Child Left Behind (NCLB) – as seeking a legitimate goal: equality of opportunity. Instead of attacking the goal, he criticizes the lack of funding and teacher retention of the school system, and addresses rising costs of higher education. Obama does not blame the Bush administration for the failure of
NCLB outright, focusing on how to solve problems over who to blame for them. In this way, Obama does not employ negative battle tactics from the culture wars in the way he does in spoken rhetoric. Instead of criticizing the Bush administration as opposed to unifying civil religious values in this policy rhetoric, Obama’s negative comments about the administration’s policies avoid moral and civil religious terms.

In proposing solutions to American educational problems, Obama outlines a plan to expand early childhood education, “reform No Child Left Behind,” “recruit, prepare, retain, and reward America’s teachers,” and increase citizens’ access to higher education. Each of these goals promotes Obama’s overall goal of tweaking and expanding existing programs to increase general equality among American citizens – particularly by constructing programs for children from low-income families. While his emphasis on education and equality is certainly civil religious in nature, Obama does not spend much time presenting these values in a progressive or orthodox frame. He does not present these values as in need of an alteration of meaning, nor does he call for these values to be understood as they always have been. Obama, again like Bush, avoids the culturally divisive educational battles of school prayer and evolution – instead focusing on unifying values. As there are few direct attacks, and little evidence of an overwhelmingly progressive approach to education, there is little evidence to suggest that Obama’s discussion of education and the policy prescriptions along with it takes part in the culture wars through contesting the meaning of civil religion.

There are certainly some differences in the education proposals of Bush (2000) and Obama (2008), but the two are similar in that each attempts to advance
their educational goals in the name of a uniting civil religious value: equality. Neither really uses their educational policy prescriptions as means by which to take part in the culture wars. Bush and Obama do not divulge their orthodox and progressive temporal interpretations of civil religious values in these passages. Neither uses much negativity as a means of directly attacking their opponents in civil religious terms. Both, instead, propose plans through technical policy prescriptions that seek to advance equality, without demonstrating a disagreement on the meaning of equality. The two also avoid culturally divisive issues – signaling avoidance of cultural warfare in policy rhetoric. It is safe to say, then, that campaign websites’ educational policy descriptions and prescriptions – at least as used by Bush and Obama – do not serve as a means through which to contest civil religious meaning within the culture wars.

Implications

The central question posed in this chapter is whether campaign policy rhetoric (as found on candidates’ websites) functions as part of the battling of the culture wars through civil religious language. In a word, the answer is, “no.” While civil religion is used to frame proposals, the attacks levied by both Bush (2000) and Obama (2008) within these texts tend (most of the time) not to be directly aimed framing their opponents as against civil religious values, and more frequently describing at technical or institutional failures. Neither candidate consistently adheres to their side of the culture wars’ temporal perspective in the context of issue discussions while interpreting civil religion. This implies at most a small degree of a direct contest over the interpretive frame through which civil religion is presented. Since there are no clear attacks within the culture wars, and no clear differentiation of side in the culture
wars within these passages, it is safe to conclude that online policy rhetoric on campaign websites do not function as means by which the culture wars contest civil religious meaning in American campaign politics.

This implies that policies in and of themselves do not provide rhetoric that serves as a battleground for the culture wars. Instead, in these instances of policy rhetoric, the candidates use civil religious values to frame their own policies as best for the American public. These passages frame the candidates whose websites they are drawn from positively, but do not take part in any sort of conflict – instead avoiding cultural conflict as much as possible. The existence of written policy rhetoric as outside of the culture wars’ battle to interpret and produce civil religious meaning suggests that culture wars-related framing of civil religion in rhetoric may be confined to campaign speeches – possibly even to certain occasions for speeches.

This may be a byproduct of the intended audience for these passages of rhetoric. As political elites – the target audience of policy rhetoric – are likely to have already determined a candidate, direct attack and battle methods would seemingly do little to sway their opinions and assist one’s own campaigns. While public, spoken campaign rhetoric’s audience – the American public – is more likely to be affected by rhetoric aimed to sway voters away from one’s opponent and towards oneself through civil religious rhetoric in the culture wars, policy rhetoric poses few of the same benefits. The culture wars’ manifestation in campaign rhetoric, then, seems to appear only where it assists candidates most in their campaigns.
Chapter 5: Transitional Oratory

In investigating the hypothesis that the culture wars take place primarily within the sphere of political campaigns, it is important to investigate rhetoric that occurs in circumstances other than in contested periods of campaigns. In addressing the central hypothesis of this project – that rhetoric within campaigns is the medium of the culture wars fought through civil religious language – then, I turn to rhetoric from key transitional points between campaign and governance. I look at the same two central figures – George W. Bush in 2000 and Barack Obama in 2008 – and again place speeches from similar occasions next to one another, hoping to draw comparative conclusions.

Speeches in transitional scenarios provide a seemingly fitting context for examples of temporal orientation, if the culture wars take place through the rhetoric of these speeches. I look to two landmark occasions – each open to multiple temporal focuses through which progressivism and orthodoxy are provided an opportunity to evidence themselves. The first type of occasion is the victory speech of each candidate (Bush 2000, Obama 2008) – in which the candidate declares victory and may either focus on reflecting on the election’s meaning in a historical context, or on its potential to affect the future. The second is the candidate-turned-President-elect’s inaugural address – a speech at a civil religious ceremony that serves as a mix of – and is therefore open to emphasis on – past, present, and future (Bush 2001, Obama 2009). In examining these excerpts, I employ the same methodology as in the other chapters examining spoken rhetoric: qualitative assessments of how civil religion is used and interpreted within the speeches.
After analyzing speeches on similar occasions by the different candidates, I again identify and discuss key themes within use and interpretation of civil religion and draw conclusions about rhetoric in these moments of transition, more generally. This adds to the knowledge of the alternative treatments of civil religion by both Bush and Obama, which continues to verify and expand upon the previously observed thematic similarities and differences between the two candidates. These observations should demonstrate whether or not the culture wars are confined to political rhetoric from within contested periods of campaigns, or whether they continue occurring during the period of transition between campaign and governance. This chapter aims to determine whether the contest over the meaning of civil religion is confined to contested settings in order to more thoroughly explain the interaction between civil religion and the culture wars in the context of contemporary political rhetoric.

Victory Speeches

Use of Civil Religion

Although Bush’s (2000) victory speech is a short one, it involves plenty of civil religious language, which generally takes the role of a unifying rhetorical force with which Bush positively frames himself. It is, differently from the speeches within Bush’s presidential campaign, not used as a tool to attack political opposition through the negative battle tactics of the culture wars. Bush frames the location of his speech in a civil religious context through the value of bipartisanship. He delivers his victory speech from the chamber of the Texas House of Representatives, in which he claims to have promoted bipartisan cooperation under unifying values to benefit the common good. This claim translates to Bush’s goals for his presidency, as he states that “the
spirit of cooperation I have seen in this hall is what is needed in Washington, D.C. It is the challenge of our moment.”

Bush sees unity through bipartisan cooperation as the means through which American exceptionalism is justified – a necessary approach to “make America a beacon of opportunity in the 21st century.” In promoting this approach, Bush calls for “reconciliation and unity,” to help find “common sense, common courtesy, and common goals” in improving the nation. Bush also invokes the God of civil religion found in the Pledge of Allegiance in support of these goals, suggesting “that with God’s help we as a nation will move forward together as one nation, indivisible.” The way to this goal, according to Bush, is through living out the nation’s civil religious values. To do so, Bush argues that we must not seek prosperity in and of itself, but “to make the promise of America available to every one of our citizens” – advancing the civil religious value of equality. This promise, for Bush, is the same as the “American dream,” as he later calls for “an America that is open, so every citizen has access to the American dream.

In calling for unity to promote these values, Bush aligns himself with positive civil religious themes. He relates himself to Thomas Jefferson – a key civil religious figure, as he was a central character in the American founding and the writer of one of our civil religious scriptures (the Declaration of Independence) – through comparing his own election to Jefferson’s in 1800. Bush notes the similarities of the election’s close results, resulting in a transfer of power from one party to another. Bush offers:
“Two hundred years ago, in the election of 1800, America faced another close presidential election…. The House of Representatives elected Thomas Jefferson the third president of the United States. That election brought the first transfer of power from one party to another in our new democracy.”

This statement provides historical context for Bush’s election in a central civil religious narrative of one of America’s most popular civil religious figures. He then quotes Jefferson about the nation’s character – which Jefferson calls “the steady character of our countrymen” and Bush calls “the steady character of America” – as a foundation for America’s greatness. In doing so, Bush adds weight to his own claim through confirmation by a civil religious figure, and aligns himself ideologically with this figure. This frames Bush as a leader to unify the nation under civil religious ideals, as he equates himself to an historical figure that has helped to unify the nation through his part in a civil religious narrative that Americans unite in celebrating.

Bush explicitly argues that he is this figure – one who will use his election as an opportunity to “unite and inspire the American citizens.” He notes that he “was not elected to serve one party, but to serve one nation…. The president of the United States is the president of every single American.” This frames Bush as not only a leader for those on his side in the campaign – or in the culture wars – but as a uniting leader. Bush invokes his sense of calling – “a charge to keep” – in discussing his mission to unite and lead the nation. He ends his speech with the phrase “God bless America” – the civil religious benediction that demonstrates his will to lead the united, chosen, exceptional nation. Through framing himself as one who will lead the country to unity through common American (civil religious) values, Bush does engage in the “positive” battle tactics of the culture wars (Hunter 1991). This speech,
however, does not attack an opponent at all – it engages in no negative tactics of the culture wars. This suggests that it is not a part of any direct cultural conflict.

Obama (2008) also uses civil religion to call for American unity under his leadership in his victory speech. In doing so, he too engages in positive framing using civil religious language, without directly attacking any person or party using civil religion. He uses civil religious language throughout his speech, blending his own campaign themes with civil religious ones. In doing so, he moves to align himself again with the American people, celebrating them as responsible for his own victory by declaring, “I will never forget who this campaign truly belongs to – it belongs to you.”

Obama suggests that his own election is evidence that America is ‘a place where all things are possible’ and where “the dream of the founders is alive in our time.” This not only aligns Obama with the civil religious values of American exceptionalism and founding promise, it presents himself, and his impending presidency, as evidence of these positive values. He takes this one step further, arguing that his election is more than a mere victory in a random campaign – it proves that America has “a government of the people, by the people, and for the people” – as was (supposedly) intended at founding. Obama cites the record turnout on Election Day as evidence of this aspect of American greatness. He also identifies his election as demonstrating that “America’s beacon still burns as bright” – that the nation has remained, through history, the “city upon a hill” (Winthrop 1630). Through American exceptionality, Obama guarantees success for the nation despite challenges, stating, “The road ahead will be long. Our climb will be steep. We may not get there in one
year or even one term, but America… we will get there. I promise you – we as a people will get there.”

Obama, like Bush, aligns himself and his potential presidency with key civil religious figures and narratives in calling for unity for the sake of progress. He invokes Lincoln – the civil religious figure – as setting a precedent for his administration through uniting the nation. Obama promises to do the same, declaring himself (again like Bush) a president both for those who did and did not vote for him. He discusses his election in the context of major occasions of the 20th Century – women’s suffrage, the New Deal, World War II, the Civil Rights movement, the moon landing, the fall of the Berlin Wall, and the internet’s creation – each of which have a role in the American story through demonstrating expansion or defense of American civil religious values. Obama presents his election, like each of these aforementioned movements, as a fulfillment of the American creed, which he equates to his key campaign mantra, “Yes we can.” The circumstances of his election, according to Obama, present an opportunity through which to continue the American trend of advancing and defending civil religious values. He declares his intention to do so by “summon(ing) a new spirit of patriotism; of service and responsibility.”

Obama presents his election as also representing a move towards national unity, noting that his supporters come from all different demographic groups that span race, class, age, sex, and party – suggesting his election is the result of the American people finding unity across otherwise divisive barriers. He argues that this presents a unique opportunity to defend American values together:
“This is our chance to answer that call. This is our moment. This is our time - to put our people back to work and open doors of opportunity for our kids; to restore prosperity and promote the cause of peace; to reclaim the American Dream and reaffirm that fundamental truth - that out of many, we are one; that while we breathe, we hope, and where we are met with cynicism, and doubt, and those who tell us that we can’t, we will respond with that timeless creed that sums up the spirit of a people: Yes we can.”

Within this statement, Obama incorporates several civil religious themes – opportunity for the future, hard work, prosperity, peace, the American Dream, truth, unity, hope, the American creed, and the American spirit – all in the context of his own election and as values that his administration will promote. The circumstances of the speech, for Obama, demonstrate that he has already begun moving the country towards unity under civil religious values – something he sets himself up as ready to continue doing as president. In doing so, continues the trend of his campaign: aligning himself with the American people through civil religious values while calling for unity under his own leadership. This is a positive rhetorical association, by Obama, of himself with civil religious values. It adequately fits the criteria of positive tactics of cultural warfare (Hunter 1991). However Obama’s speech does not contain any deployment of negative cultural warfare tactics, suggesting it, like Bush’s victory speech, is not engaged in any direct conflict through its use of civil religion.

The presence of civil religious language in these positive battle tactics in the transitional rhetoric of Bush (2000) and Obama’s (2008) victory speeches is logical. This practice is consistent with that of these two candidates’ campaign rhetoric, in which they employ the civil religious language and themes to associate themselves with the people and their values. To do so, these candidates-turned-President-Elects
invoke positive civil religious themes – bipartisanship, fulfillment of the American dream, American exceptionalism, founding, and God – to promote national unity under their own leadership. This makes sense strategically, in addition to as a practice of rhetorical habit, in that it is helpful for a president to have public support in advancing policy prescriptions – and suggesting prior to taking office that the president shares the values that unite the public may assist this goal.

The lack of negative tactics of cultural warfare using civil religious language to balance out these positive methods, however, is a phenomenon unseen in the intra-campaign rhetoric of these two candidates. Both Bush and Obama frequently made attacks on political opponents, as did the four speeches from the 1988 presidential campaign. The lack of any remaining individual opponent at the time of these speeches may explain this absence, as it is more helpful once an election is won for one to forge unity rather than to attack someone he or she has already beaten. In working to forge this sense of unity, both Bush and Obama not only refrain from attacking former opponents, they thank them and call for their assistance in uniting the nation. In these victory speeches – as the rhetorical instances that mark the beginning of transition from candidate to president – civil religion takes a purely unifying role, abandoning its place as a weapon in divisive cultural conflict from electoral campaign rhetoric.

Interpretation of Civil Religion

The temporal orientation of George W. Bush (2000) in his presentation of civil religion in the victory speech is less clear than in the speeches from within his presidential campaign. His speech is relatively future oriented, presenting plans for
the future and setting future-based goals (like expanding the American promise). That said, even the future plans are rooted in views of the past and pre-existing values. In this case, Bush roots his goals in the history of Thomas Jefferson – as advancing the founding goals through the enduring value of “American character.” He sees the presidency as presenting a “charge to keep” – which comes from its place in history more than through initiating a new era for American values. Bush does recommend moving beyond the “recent past” – but does not abandon the theme of renewing enduring American values in the current age in the same form as they existed at the American founding. Even in a very forward-looking speech, Bush’s use of civil religion is rooted in a past-looking temporal orientation, and still portrays a somewhat orthodox interpretation of civil religious elements.

Barack Obama (2008) also references enduring values from the past. He suggests these as the means that must be used to improve the nation – specifically emphasizing the hard work of the American people as important. His association of his election with major 20th century socio-political movements also places his election in the context of the past. That said, the emphasis on change and bringing new meaning to existing values still offers a future-oriented, progressive presentation of civil religion. Obama suggests that “the true genius of America (is) that America can change. Our union can be perfected. And what we have already achieved gives us hope for what we can and must achieve tomorrow.” This quote is telling of Obama’s temporal orientation – that historical narratives are useful only insofar as they present opportunity for the future.
Again, both candidates’ interpretation of civil religion falls into Hunter’s (1991) culture wars categories: progressive (Obama) and orthodox (Bush). Obama uses goals for the future to provide meaning to historical narratives and existing values, whereas Bush uses pre-existing values and history to root goals for the future. That said, the difference in temporal orientation between these two speeches is less stark than that of the campaign speeches. Neither makes any sort of attack using a particular temporal perspective of civil religion in this speech. Also, both Bush and Obama carefully place their victories within a historical context while professing future-based goals. While the two fit their categories in their rhetoric, the distinction is certainly less clear than in the speeches analyzed in the previous chapter.

**Inaugural Addresses**

*Use of Civil Religion*

The inaugural address is frequently found to be the type of speech in which civil religion is most apparent (Campbell and Jamieson 1990; Bellah 2005). The inauguration in and of itself is a civil religious ritual in that it names a new leader of the nation every four years (Bellah 2005). The format of the event is also civil religious – almost mirroring a church service – including oaths, pledges, music and a central speech by the key figure in the ceremony: the new President. This figure, now at the end of the transitional period between campaign and presidency and surrounded by civil religion on this occasion seems almost predetermined to use civil religious themes in his or her address, and in doing so to display the way in which his or her rhetoric employs and interprets civil religion. In such, this speech provides an excellent example through which to determine whether the rhetoric of the transitional
period fits the new model set forth in the victory speeches, or molds more to the campaign-style cultural warfare use of civil religious language.

Bush’s (2001) inaugural address follows the form of his other speech from the transitional era: his victory speech (2000). He (in the inaugural address) continues the trend of using civil religious language’s unifying power without using it to attack opposing cultural and political forces. This positive use of civil religious themes is executed again through Bush identifying himself and the citizens of the nation as associated with positive narratives in the American story. At the opening of his remarks, he places himself, his audience, and his speech all in this context, stating, “We have a place, all of us, in a long story – a story we continue.” He continues, “The peaceful transfer of authority is rare in history, yet common in our country” – aligning his inauguration with this story and American exceptionality by referring to his taking of office as a transfer of power. In explaining American exceptionalism first, he credits the American creed’s “grand and enduring ideals. The grandest of (which) is an unfolding American promise that everyone belongs, that everyone deserves a chance, and that no insignificant person was ever born” – again rooting American greatness in civil religious values such as that of promise and equality.

Bush argues that this creed also comes with a divine calling “to enact this promise” – which he then suggests that he intends to do through uniting the nation under civil religious values. Bush advocates the evangelism of non-Americans to “America’s faith in freedom and democracy,” for “more than the creed of our country, it is the inborn hope of our humanity, an ideal we carry but do not own, a
trust we bear and pass along.” This suggests that America must be united in its efforts to spread its exceptionally superior values to the world.

Bush’s implication of the United States as a “city upon a hill” is rooted – as it was in the famous Winthrop (1630) sermon – in the idea that God favors the nation, and thus prompts American exceptionality. Bush makes this move by arguing, “We are guided by a power larger than ourselves who creates us equal in His image and we are confident in the principles that unite and lead us onward.” He specifies the principles that unite Americans (and himself) with God: the civil religious values of “freedom,” “power,” “democracy,” “justice,” “trust,” “community,” and “liberty.” This ideological alignment with the abstract, unitary, God of civil religion proves divine advancement of American success, according to Bush, as he argues, “We are not this story’s author, who fills time and eternity with His purpose. Yet His purpose is achieved in our duty.” According to Bush, then, we must remain united under our shared morals to retain God’s favor, therein prompting success, which enables American exceptionalism. He ends his speech by requesting this divine favor for the nation now offered as united in values – under his leadership – through the civil religious benediction, “God bless you all, and God bless America.”

Bush not only favors these positive associations with civil religious values over direct attacks against opponents in civil religious terms in his inaugural address, he makes it a point to explicitly avoid language that alienates former political opponents. He notes that “sometimes differences run so deep, it seems we share a continent but not a country” but that “we do not accept this, and we will not allow it.” This call for unity, along with the rooting of the sense of unity in the values of civil
religion that are common to all Americans reinforces the rhetorical positioning of Bush as the leader who is capable of uniting the nation under his leadership. In avoiding attacks, Bush manages to not disrupt his emphasis on the value of unity and commonality, again not needing to attack anyone because of the lack of a direct political competitor.

Obama (2009) also uses civil religious themes mainly to unify in many of the same ways as Bush, but does differ in that he takes part in civil religious attacks. While Obama does not attack any direct political competitor, he does criticize the circumstances in which his administration comes to power as a byproduct of failures of the Bush administration that precedes him. Obama directly ties this administration to the negative state of affairs. He refers to a weak economy not as evidence of incorrect policies – but of values antithetical to the American creed: “greed and irresponsibility on the part of some (and the) collective failure to make hard choices and prepare the nation for a new age.” He adds on that “Our health care is too costly, our schools fail too many, and each day brings further evidence that the ways we use energy strengthen our adversaries and threaten our planet.” While these apparent policy failures demonstrate a lack of stewardship over civil religious values, President Obama finds the decline of these values the most severe circumstance, stating, “Less measurable, but no less profound (than material decline), is a sapping of confidence across our land; a nagging fear that America’s decline is inevitable, that the next generation must lower its sights.” This loss of confidence in American exceptionalism, as it threatens civil religion and America’s promise and as it is
associated with policy failures attributable to a past regime that Obama campaigned in opposition of, is a severe negative framing of the past orthodox administration.

This use of negative civil religious rhetoric, however, is only used to provide a contrast with which Obama can frame himself to unify the American people under civil religious values during presidency. In this way, he focuses his address on similar rhetorical moves to Bush, enabled to do so in the midst of a national economic crisis through blaming these conditions on others and offering solutions to them with his impending presidency. Obama is able to use the negative context these statements create to frame his mission positively, remarking, “Today I say to you that the challenges we face are real, they are serious and they are many. They will not be met easily or in a short span of time. But know this America: They will be met.” He uses this statement to demonstrate faith in American exceptionalism, which determines success to be inevitable. Obama sets his own mission up as pursuing these goals, arguing, “We gather because we have chosen hope over fear, unity of purpose over conflict and discord…. On this day we proclaim an end to the petty grievances and false promises, the recriminations and worn-out dogmas that for far too long have strangled our politics.” He argues that this inauguration is the occasion on which these failures can end, and new successes can begin, proclaiming:

“We remain a young nation, but in the words of Scripture, the time has come to set aside childish things. The time has come to reaffirm our enduring spirit; to choose our better history; to carry forward that precious gift, that noble idea, passed on from generation to generation: the God-given promise that all are equal, all are free, and all deserve a chance to pursue their full measure of happiness.”
Aside from providing this promise to use civil religious values to unite and move America forward, Obama also aligns and associates himself with these values very clearly. He begins his address on a civil religious note – aligning himself with the people as a citizen, and with significant leaders of the American story. He also positions himself as a defender of the American creed: “the God-given promise that all are equal, all are free, and all deserve a chance to pursue their full measure of happiness.” Obama references this value as existing along other civil religious values – among them “generosity,” opposition to “violence and hatred,” “sacrifice,” “action,” “safety,” “justness,” “peace,” “faith,” and “liberty” – and coming from founding, citing them as “ideals (that) still light the world.” In doing so, he again positions himself as a defender of the civil religious values that perform two essential tasks: uniting the American people, and promoting our exceptionality.

Obama sees his own election as evidence of fulfillment of many of these values. He marks the circumstance as “the meaning of our liberty and creed, why men and women and children of every race and every faith can join in celebration… and why a man whose father… might not have been served at a local restaurant can now stand before you to take a most sacred oath.” Obama, again having positioned himself as a promoter and defender of these uniting civil religious values ends his speech similarly to Bush (2001) – calling for God’s favor through the civil religious benediction: “God bless you. And God bless the United States of America.”

The presence of civil religion in these speeches is unsurprising – both in that it continues the previously observed trend of use of civil religious language and that it occurs in a civil religious ceremony. The differences in presence of negative framing
using civil religious themes, however, suggests that similar circumstances may not be
the only force determining how civil religion is used. One explanation is, still,
contextual. As Bush (2001) clearly states, his election and inauguration occurs at a
time of general prosperity, while Obama (2009) demonstrates that he is inaugurated
in an era of challenge – one in which he was elected over an unpopular ruling party.
These circumstances may lend themselves to a greater ease of use for negative
framing by Obama. The other possibility is that differences in side of the culture wars
explain the differences in tactics. The culture wars affiliations of either candidate –
Bush as orthodox, Obama as progressive – are discussed in the following section, and
may determine the way either uses rhetoric. As Bush’s orthodox impulse lends itself
to bringing a celebrated past into the present, it would make little strategic sense to
present himself as a change from the past. Obama on the other hand, as a progressive
whose impulse is to alter existing legacies based on circumstances, stands to gain
more by framing himself positively and the past negatively. In defining his
inauguration as a turning point for America, Obama advances the idea of progress
determined by context –not only increasing his political capital in opposition to an
unpopular prior regime, but also lending weight to his interpretive impulse from
within the culture wars.

The similarity of Bush (2000) and Obama’s (2008) use of civil religious
rhetoric for positive framing is very logical. While there may be differences in
negative use, Obama’s framing is also mostly implicit – lacking explicit attacks
against political opposition. His attacks, in that they are indirect, hardly fit the
negative battle tactics of cultural warfare set forth by Hunter (1991).He, using of
negative framing, only allows himself to address a similarly possibility-full context to Bush’s (2001) inaugural address by explaining the negative conditions that his administration must work through to achieve success. After this, both Bush and Obama carry out positive framing in very similar ways. Both largely focus, again, on civil religion as a unifying force and attempt to pull together the nation behind their prospective regimes, positively framing their coming regimes in the context of civil religious themes. Pragmatically, if this were to gain popular support, it would lend political capital to either President’s governing efforts. The similarity between the orthodox Bush and progressive Obama seems to suggest that positive framing works in the same way for leaders on both sides of the culture wars. Both speakers use civil religious language in a positive manner in attempts to rhetorically unite the nation behind their leadership through using civil religious language.

Interpretation of Civil Religion

Bush’s (2001) inaugural address shows clear evidence of an orthodox interpretive style of civil religion. Bush intends to promote historical values in the present – as he sees these values as transcendent and unchanging. Bush alludes to history, claiming, “Much time has passed since Jefferson arrived for his inauguration. The years and changes accumulate, but the themes of this day he would know.” This claim demonstrates Bush’s commitment to American values as unchanging themes throughout history. His description of present-day America is grounded in conceptions of past America – not in presenting new challenges as in need of new values, but in presenting new challenges in need of the original interpretations of original values. His message, in explaining past narratives, is one of continuity –
America is “united across generations by grand and enduring ideals.” The American myth is not a story that must be altered, but “a story we continue.” Even when President Bush introduces what he calls his “new commitment,” this commitment is to “live out our nation’s promise” – which is unchanging. His commitment to reform is motivated by the intent “that a new century is spared new horrors”– a motivation to avoid new things, as they may be threatening. After discussing his “new commitment,” – of expanding “civility, courage, compassion, and character,” he states that this new commitment is simply a way in which he seeks to “bring the values of our history to the care of our times.” In his framing of American civil religion – particularly the values and narratives it encompasses, then, Bush certainly takes an orthodox approach. This is evident from his framing of values as unchanging in public discourse. Bush clearly presents civil religious values as bearing an external, definable, and transcendent authority.

Obama (2009), on the other hand, advances a progressive interpretation of the values and narratives encompassed by civil religion. He begins his speech with a seemingly orthodox tone – arguing that American exceptionalism has arisen because “We the People have remained faithful to the ideals of our forebears, and true to our founding documents,” and orders, “So it has been. So it must be with this generation of Americans.” These quotes seem to suggest that Obama accepts and means to spread the acceptance of external, definable, transcendent authority through civil religious values – but soon it becomes clear that Obama means to resymbolize these values for the changing world through his own interpretations of narratives and values. In his negative framing of contemporary circumstances, for example, Obama
addresses the need to change behavior and move on from past ways of doing things. He identifies the historical narratives to celebrate as those succeeding in the face of adversity, and states that the story we continue calls us to “begin again the work of remaking America.”

The idea of “remaking America” is pivotal to understanding Obama’s progressive frame, as it demonstrates a desire to alter the fabric that currently composes the nation. Furthermore, Obama argues that “the stale political arguments that have consumed us for so long no longer apply” – that the questions and goals of politics have shifted to meet new demands. He suggests that the founding “charter (has been) expanded by the blood of generations” – its meaning, then, must not remain the same. This alteration in the face of new challenges suggests progressive impulses. While Obama certainly does not argue that we must dismantle the founding ideals, he does suggest that new challenges call for “a new era of responsibility.” This is a call for an old value to be redefined in a new way – the old values of civil religion in which Americans place their faith require resymbolization. Obama interprets his election as a sign of “how far we have traveled.” While this is almost certainly an allusion to progress in meeting the promise of equality that carried racial overtones, this remark demonstrates a belief in the President that America today is different than it has been in the past. Most clearly, Obama states that “God calls on us to shape an uncertain destiny” – confirming the agency of contemporary actors who are called not only to accept the values of the American creed, but also to actively engage in reinterpreting and working to advance morality to spur their nation’s progress.
Obama (2009) and Bush (2001) present divergent interpretations of civil religion and the meaning of the American creed. That said, both Bush and Obama’s speeches contain a mix of temporal perspectives: a desire to move on from the immediately preceding administration’s way of doing things, to unite for the future, and to stay true to pre-existing values. However while both remark on the ideals that present-day America inherits from past America, their approaches to and framing of these values do differ along the lines described by Hunter (1991). While Bush presents an interpretation of the values and narratives within civil religion and maintaining meaning and authority, Obama advocates and discusses the resymbolization of these values. Circumstances again may explain this differentiation in rhetoric, as Obama may have more to gain from arguing for a change in approach to values in the midst of hard times whereas Bush may have more to gain from arguing for continuation of values in prosperous times. Nevertheless, the predictable variance of civil religious interpretation based on affiliation of side within the culture wars is difficult to ignore.

**Implications**

*Use of Civil Religion*

Civil religious language is used in both of these instances of transitional rhetoric prominently to promote unity under presidential leadership through commonality of civil religious values. Although there are slight differences in use of negativity based on differences in circumstance and speaker, this negativity takes a much less prominent and targeted role than the attacks of the intra-campaign rhetoric. The use of civil religious language in these pieces of oratory, then, hardly seems like
rhetorical battle. Instead, both candidates use civil religion to unite the nation after these battles – employing it as a healing tool after the wounds of cultural conflict are inflicted.

*Interpretation of Civil Religion*

The interpretations of civil religion in the post-campaign rhetoric of Bush and Obama also are not sharply divided. While the two stay true to their progressive and orthodox labels in their presentation and interpretation of civil religion, there is much more crossover and lack of clarity in temporal orientation. While this may be a byproduct of occasions having unique temporal demands, it does seem to suggest that candidates and their speechwriters place less importance on their culture wars-based perspectives after the end of their campaigns. While Hunter’s (1991) dichotomous sides of the culture wars do manifest themselves in post-campaign transitional rhetoric, then, the conflict between these sides is certainly scaled down in these instances.
Conclusion

In concluding this project, it is helpful to focus on a few central questions: First is the fundamental question of this project: How do the culture wars interact with civil religion? Now that specific evidence of the interaction is available in the preceding pages, this question can be answered concisely and concretely. Second, how does this information affect our understanding of the phenomena that are civil religion and the culture wars? Third, what future research could this study spark that would further the understanding of the culture wars-civil religion interaction?

How Do the Culture Wars Interact with Civil Religion?

In the previous pages, there is plenty of evidence of interaction between civil religion and the culture wars. The interaction is evident at least since 1988 – but may have historical ties that go further back. Civil religion serves as a national faith over which temporal frames wage a battle of interpretation. While these sides of the culture wars contest the meaning of civil religious elements, the meanings of civil religious elements are developed. This is particularly evident in political rhetoric. Civil religious meaning is most hotly contested within the context of spoken rhetoric from electoral campaigns – in which the tactics of cultural warfare can be used to promote one candidate and denigrate his or her opponent. Within written rhetoric – such as that contained within policy proposals aimed at politically elite audiences – however, the tactics of cultural warfare are less evident – suggesting that the more partisan voting political elite are not the targets of cultural warfare: the general voting public is. After campaigns, the former-candidates maintain their temporal frames of understanding in public rhetoric – continuing to disseminate their own ideology –
while ceasing to use civil religion as a means of attack. Instead, civil religion takes its oft-understood role as a unifying rhetorical tool. Despite the fact that the speakers continue to engage in exercises of interpretation of civil religion, it now becomes a tool of ideological justification and development instead of one of negative framing of opponents.

**Effects on Understanding Civil Religion and the Culture Wars?**

The above presents a narrative of the changing nature of the culture wars within electoral cycles, as well as an illustration of civil religion’s ever-developing function within American political rhetoric. The culture wars go through periods of more and less contestation – peaking within electoral campaigns. Candidates from competing frames go head to head in these campaigns, enabling the culture wars to manifest within the directly competing individuals. These candidates cast one another within their own temporal frames of understanding, and frame one another using civil religion – positively associating themselves while negatively associating their opponents with a variety of civil religious narratives and values. The battles end on Election Day, when the American people ultimately choose which candidate will hold office, essentially determining which frame of understanding will dominate civil religious rhetoric in public discourse for years to come. The culture wars decline in intensity after this election while the winner disseminates his or her interpretation of civil religious themes and develops civil religious meaning, only to return to a state of contest and conflict in subsequent campaigns.

This information confirms some of Hunter’s (1991) claims regarding the culture wars’ place in electoral politics, and contradicts others. The culture wars, in
determining the framing of the language of American morality – civil religion – do manage to, as Hunter (1991, p. 286) suggests, “(establish) many of the parameters of campaign debate within which opposing candidates and parties must maneuver.”

Both the progressive and orthodox sides take part within this debate in public discourse – limiting themselves to their side’s temporal frame of understanding while using the agreed upon terms of the culture wars: civil religious themes. While this occurs, Hunter’s (1991, p. 287) promise that, in electoral campaigns, “the fissures that divide America only grow deeper” finds little support in the observed use of civil religious language. In fact, because civil religious themes – which describe uniting American principles – are used in cultural warfare, and then maintained for unifying purposes after the end of campaigns, the elected candidate can abate some of the division that occurs within the campaign after its end. In doing so, while fissures may occur during campaign, if unification is properly executed – even to a small extent – after these campaigns, the newly elected president may (at least rhetorically) narrow or close these fissures. This may be why, while there is evidence of polarized rhetoric of political leaders, there is little evidence of polarization among the American public (Fiorina 2006).

The use of civil religion also changes throughout the campaign cycle. During campaigns, it functions as a weapon within cultural warfare, fired by either side. It serves as both a defensive and an offensive tool. Defensively, civil religion can insulate and promote one’s own campaign, providing associations within rhetoric that carry positive connotations to audiences. Offensively, it can be used to bring down an opponent’s campaign through framing opponents with negative civil religious
narratives, concepts and figures, or as in opposition to positive American values. Outside of campaigns, however, civil religion serves as a unifying force. It can be used to justify policies without any necessary competition over civil religious interpretation. It can be used to argue for American unity in order to rouse support for governance within transitional (or, most likely, presidential) oratory. Civil religion also changes in its own meaning as the circumstances within which it is employed change: its meaning is altered through the culture wars’ frames of understanding, and as the public becomes accustomed to a certain framing of a certain value, may accept a specific line of interpretation until another comes along. This information all suggests that a strand of culture generally accepted to unite the American people only does so sometimes – when the true ambiguity of civil religious elements are swept under the rug to avoid the culture wars’ impulse to reinterpret.

This claim – of variance in meaning and use of civil religious rhetoric – poses a challenge to some strands of civil religious scholarship. This scholarship suggests that civil religion appears most strongly in moments of rhetorical calls for unification – particularly inaugural addresses (Campbell and Jamieson, 1990). In fact, the previous chapters have demonstrated that civil religion is relevant as a rhetorical tool in many more instances than these. It is not only incorporated in uniting terms – but also in divisive terms that divide based on political and ideological affiliation. In criticizing political opposition as against civil religious values (as framed by the speaker), these civil religious values – while assumed to be uniting – work to divide in rhetoric.
This may be the key insight of the previous pages: that civil religion resides in moments other than uniting rituals. While it certainly does present itself in these rituals, to limit every examination of civil religion to these moments restricts our view of its total purpose. Civil religion in and of itself is commonly understood to unite Americans, but in fact only does so when employed properly by the speaker. It also, resides in the most divisive sphere of American politics possible: the culture wars.

**What Avenues of Research Should this Project Spark?**

These findings provide several potential directions for future research into civil religion and the culture wars. The most obvious direction that this could take would be to investigate the cases brought up in this project more thoroughly. There is infinitely more campaign oratory to study from Bush and Obama alone. Analysis of debate transcripts could be productive. The culture wars may come to a head when candidates speak publicly in the same room, or the debates may see one interpretive frame dominating the other among both candidates – with one drawn into the other’s temporal frame. An investigation of all of the policy prescriptions may also be helpful, as there may be some in which the culture wars manifest themselves more prominently. A great many more speech-occasions could be analyzed, as certain occasions may provide more or less fertile soil for cultural warfare that uses civil religion. One might examine more variables for the rhetoric: whether intra-campaign factors, such as which speechwriters contribute to a given piece of oratory, lead to differences in the way civil religion is framed and interpreted. One might investigate the rhetoric of non-candidates, in order to determine which individuals take part most intensely in the culture wars. Finally, one may benefit from examining the rhetoric of
the losing candidates in the 2000 and 2008 elections, to determine how and how much losing candidates take part in the culture wars’ battle to mold and interpret civil religion.

Another direction that one could take would be to investigate my conclusions in a larger frame of public discourse. This study has a limited scope: political rhetoric from in and around campaigns. Hunter (1991), though, conceives of public discourse more broadly – as occurring through a variety of social institutions, in all of which the culture wars arise. One may investigate whether these institutions play host to the culture wars’ exercise in interpretation of civil religion. Might this happen through familial, educational or legal institutions? This type of question would be essential to answer in determining whether civil religion serves as a rhetorical tactic within the culture wars in all spheres of public discourse. This might also determine whether the culture wars really are carried out in these spheres, or whether they are solely confined to political campaign rhetoric.

It may be informative to further investigate political rhetoric outside of presidential campaigns. While presidents have no direct electoral opponents during most periods of governance, it is certainly possible that the culture wars may remain in these times. The culture wars could manifest themselves within the legislative process for examples – framing debates on bills that come before Congress. The battle to reinterpret civil religion could occur between congressional leaders and the president. It could also occur in campaigns and elections other than national ones. The question of whether state and local elections carry the same cultural processes as national ones may be fascinating to investigate: whether local tropes play important
roles in civil religion as used in local elections, or whether civil religion does not vary regionally.

Possibly the most controversial (and interesting) direction to take this research would be to investigate the culture wars historically. The culture wars may not be solely modern phenomena – as Hunter (1991) suggests they are. One may suggest that progressive and orthodox temporal frames pre-date founding, and thus civil religion. It is also possible that the culture wars arise as an interpretive battle after an initial civil religion is established. The historical investigation could seek to explain how progressive and orthodox frames have functioned to develop civil religion over time, as well as how civil religious development has affected the form, sides, and tactics of the culture wars.

**Final Thoughts**

Regardless of any of these possibilities, the significance of civil religion and its interaction with the culture wars is unquestionable in contemporary American politics as it functions prominently in the rhetoric of our nation’s leaders. The culture wars and civil religion both exist and are deeply intertwined – even perpetuating one another. Both are temporally located and constantly fluctuating in significance and meaning. The two generally misunderstood phenomena have the potential to affect deeply how we see the shape of both contemporary electoral politics, and American society more broadly. Even in the context of the most uniting cultural principles that Americans can conceive of – those within civil religion – there is a schism. Even within this supposedly uniting force, there exist divergent interpretations, frames of understanding, and means of using these principles to one’s own political advantage.
## Appendix: Table 1 – Civil Religious Elements

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>How it relates to civil religion</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Unity/Consensus</td>
<td>Idea of unification through values</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Common Sense/Hopes/Dreams</td>
<td>rooted in unity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>American Creed</td>
<td>Unifying beliefs in freedom/liberty/opportunity etc.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>American Spirit</td>
<td>Idea that we are united in our spirit/approach to life and work</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Values as root of greatness</td>
<td>Idea that national success comes from unique values/American creed etc.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>God</td>
<td>Ambiguous, unitary, non-religiously aligned, but similar to Judeo-Christian God</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>American Story/Journey</td>
<td>Idea in a unitary narrative/myth of American progress</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>American Dream</td>
<td>Root of Greatness: Ability to elevate oneself and make progress as an individual</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>American exceptionalism</td>
<td>Idea that we are world leaders, unique - rooted in values</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Historical Accomplishments</td>
<td>Narratives of success, feeds exceptionalism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Founding/Founders</td>
<td>Creation narrative: overcomes tyranny - exemplify values</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Declaration of Independence</td>
<td>Civil Religious scripture: codifies values</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Constitution</td>
<td>Civil Religious scripture: codifies values</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Law</td>
<td>Codification of national values etc.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The People</td>
<td>Figure of authority - rules through democracy; reference to Constitution</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Government</td>
<td>By the People, Of the People, For the People</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Individual</td>
<td>Essential unit of society - rights revolve around individual</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family</td>
<td>Celebrated unit within society - valued as moral</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community</td>
<td>larger unit - responsibility is to community also</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Morality</td>
<td>Root of American greatness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Equality</td>
<td>Value of CR: codified in Declaration of Independence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Freedom/Liberty</td>
<td>Founding value: anti-tyranny; part of American Creed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Justice</td>
<td>The American cause: what we pursue and fight for</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Opportunity</td>
<td>Value that enables equality/success etc.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Service</strong></td>
<td>Classical republican ethic - founding value: benefits community, family, etc. mirrors Christian ideal of service to God</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---------------------</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Responsibility</strong></td>
<td>How morality is frequently measured: responsibility to people, family, community, nation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Charity</strong></td>
<td>One way to pursue justice and equality; fulfill service</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Truth</strong></td>
<td>A pursuit of the nation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Honor/Virtue</strong></td>
<td>Individual values/features that we strive for</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Accountability/Transparency</strong></td>
<td>Value of government reporting to the People's authority</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Patriotism/Loyalty</strong></td>
<td>Faith in America, civil religious values etc.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Tradition</strong></td>
<td>Staying true to history, values</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Victory/Success</strong></td>
<td>Evidence of American exceptionalism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Loss/Failure</strong></td>
<td>Antithetical to American exceptionalism, progress</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Progress/Growth</strong></td>
<td>National pursuit rooted in need for exceptionalism - rooted in Constitution &quot;more perfect union&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Efficiency/Effectiveness</strong></td>
<td>Means of achieving progress and growth</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Reform/Change/Transformation</strong></td>
<td>Way of making progress - mainly through purifying values</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Grassroots</strong></td>
<td>The People working to make reform/change etc.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Legacy</strong></td>
<td>We must make progress to add to the American story</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Soul/Conscience</strong></td>
<td>Root location for values deeper than material needs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Faith</strong></td>
<td>In country (OR in religion): reflects patriotism, support for American values</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Promise</strong></td>
<td>What the nation inherits from God and founding - must be fulfilled through obedience to values</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Purpose/Mission/Calling</strong></td>
<td>From values (including God): what must be done according to external authority</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Destiny</strong></td>
<td>Promise: inevitable, just like &quot;Manifest Destiny&quot; historically</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Optimism</strong></td>
<td>Belief in this destiny, faith in American promise etc.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Hard Work</strong></td>
<td>Means through which individual achieves American Dream</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Sacrifice</strong></td>
<td>Through hard work or service, Messianic in</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Topic</td>
<td>Nature</td>
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<td>-----------------------------------</td>
<td>------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leadership</td>
<td>Individual: type of service/responsibility; National: supported by American exceptionalism: US must be global leader</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Evil/Fear/Temptation/Demagoguery</td>
<td>The value America must combat domestically and globally</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Compassion</td>
<td>Sense of responsibility and comradery toward one another</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diversity/Bipartisanship</td>
<td>Ability to find unity in the midst of difference through shared values</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peace</td>
<td>Goal of foreign policy - allows progress, good values</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vision</td>
<td>Tool for leadership; ties into optimism, view for future etc.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Children</td>
<td>Represent the future, therein: progress/promise</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public officials</td>
<td>Represent service; community; leadership</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Christianity</td>
<td>An essential aspect of civil society, community - civil religion mirrors format of Protestant Christianity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Schools/Education</td>
<td>Present opportunity, also teach civil religious/national values</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Foreign Policy</td>
<td>Guided by American values - evangelism to some extent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Human Rights</td>
<td>About strengthening values, freedom etc.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Guns</td>
<td>Related to the Second Amendment to Constitution</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Military/Veterans</td>
<td>References service, sacrifice, responsibility; American power/exceptionalism; Foreign Policy and values</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Middle America/Middle Class/Main Street</td>
<td>Reflect most &quot;common&quot; Americans: the people who are compose &quot;The People&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poverty</td>
<td>A failure: antithetical to opportunity, American exceptionalism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Market, Capitalism</td>
<td>Private institution that helps make America unique, economic institutions that reflect American values</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Small business</td>
<td>Represents opportunity, the American dream</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pledge of Allegiance/National Anthem</td>
<td>Civil Religious prayer/sacred music</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Presidential Campaign</td>
<td>Determines American leader; enables civil religious sermons</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hearts and Minds campaigns</td>
<td>Idea that change can occur through value change</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inauguration</td>
<td>Civil Religious Ceremony: bible used, oath made, songs and speeches occur</td>
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<tr>
<td>Jerusalem/Israel</td>
<td>Judeo-Christian &quot;Promised Land&quot; - equated to America, the new promised land</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot;God Bless America&quot;</td>
<td>Civil religious benediction - demonstrates God as siding with America, reminds speech-listeners of God's importance to America</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New Birth/New beginnings</td>
<td>National Resurrection</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>City Upon A Hill</td>
<td>Colonist quote (Winthrop) invoking American exceptionalism as a byproduct of God's will</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lincoln/Civil War narrative</td>
<td>Savior figure (Lincoln); advances Freedom and Unity of nation; sacrifices himself for such - mirrors Christian crucifixion narrative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kennedy/Roosevelt/Truman/Reagan etc.</td>
<td>Popular presidents with significant accomplishments: part of the American story</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Martin Luther King, Jr.</td>
<td>Advanced freedom, showed the power of civil society, served in a religious capacity and spoke with both Christian and civil religious rhetoric - part of American story</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Greatest Generation</td>
<td>WWII generation; successful in defeating Anti-American evil (fascism)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cold War</td>
<td>Narrative of defeating anti-American political and economic state (USSR) - also narrative of American victory (exceptionalism)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vietnam/Negative narratives</td>
<td>Set up as part of the American story that we learn and grow from</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Works Cited

Obama for America. 2008. Issues


http://www.4president.org/speeches/mikedukakis1988acceptance.htm


