

A RHETORICAL CONSIDERATION OF CHRISTIAN NATIONALISM, SECULAR
SOCIETY, AND THE NEED FOR A CIVIC RELIGIOUS PLURALISM

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ABSTRACT

This dissertation considers the place of religious argument in the public sphere. While deliberation about religion's place in the formal public sphere within the United States has often been seen as taking place in a two-dimensional space, with Christian nationalism and pure secularism representing the opposite deliberative positions, I argue that in reality, rhetorical engagements over the place of religion often are contested by arguments hewing to Christian Nationalism on one side, but a kind of civic religious pluralism on the other. This dissertation explores the tensions that exist within public discourse in the United States between Christian nationalism and larger secular society. Rather than seeing secularism as a counterweight to Christian nationalism, I argue that instead a civic religious pluralism that allows for religious thought to enter the domain of public deliberation is present in arguments about religion's role in the democratic process. I also argue that this problem is extended into the three-dimensional space through an added tension between religious citizens who wish to remain isolated from secular culture and the state which must maintain some sense of cultural participation among all of its citizens. Through rhetorical analyses of three cases, I develop a more nuanced perspective on this deliberative space and contend at the end that the civic religious pluralism I find in two of my cases represents a more effective response to nationalist rhetoric than a pure secularist opposition.

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DEDICATION

To Bennett and Hal – always remember, “The beginning of love is to let those we love be perfectly themselves.”

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CH. 1: RELIGIOUS DISCOURSE IN THE PUBLIC SPHERE: CHRISTIAN NATIONALISM, PURE SECULARISM, AND CIVIC RELIGIOUS PLURALISM

Grant that I may not so much seek to be consoled as to console; to be understood as to understand; to be loved as to love.

-Prayer for Peace, Commonly Attributed to St. Francis of Assisi

Introduction

When we reflect on the year 2019 in American civic life, considering issues ranging from the impeachment of President Trump to the Democratic Presidential primary, it is clear that we live in an era of increasing hyperpolarization. There is little appetite for engagement with those who are our ideological opposites, or with whom we have fundamental disagreements not only about opinions but about facts and the very nature of truth claims. A key issue that underlies this state of ideological separation is religion. Religious beliefs - and for many, belief in no religion at all - serve as an underlying schema that dictates how we feel about certain topics, how we engage politically, and perhaps most importantly, how we function alongside others in a civil society. This question of religious difference, the problems it causes for the functioning of modern democracy, and how to overcome it are the driving questions of this research project.

Religious difference is something that persists in any society; however, we are approaching a tipping point in the United States from which there may be no return. Between 2007 and 2014, the percentage of Americans who identified as Christian dropped 8 points; the percentage of Americans who identified as “religious none” raised by 7 points (*America’s Changing Religious Landscape*, 2015). These “religious nones” are also younger than their religious counterparts, meaning that this trend towards secularization may continue. The differences between older and younger Americans, then, are not merely generational; it is a

religious difference that separates these groups as much as any other factor. As these differences persist, the polarization continues: we isolate ourselves into our ideological echo chambers, hearing the voices that we agree with and failing to engage substantively with political or religious differences (Boutyline & Willer, 2017).

The Problem

The problem of religion's place in American civic life is complex. Debate about the place of Christianity as the dominant religion in American society has raged on since the founding of the country. Supporters of a Christian nationalist position argue that the Founding Fathers relied on a moral ethic rooted in Christian principles in devising the Constitution of the United States, and therefore we should continue to hew to those same Christian impulses. Opponents argue that the country's foundation has been built upon a specific freedom of religious expression that forbids the favoring of any religious principles over secular notions of moral ethics and values.

We commonly think of two extremes in the treatment of religion in the public sphere in the United States: Christian nationalism, on the one hand, and secularism, or the exclusion of religion from the public sphere completely, on the other. These two different treatments of religion exist on opposite ends of a two-dimensional deliberative space. Advocates of both sides draw on rhetorical strategies to stake out their space in the public square. The tension that exists between these two poles points towards the need for a reconceptualization of what purpose religion serves in our public discourse. Recent American history is rife with evidence of the failure to address the problem of religious difference within the deliberative spectrum between Christian Nationalism and secularism. In the Waco siege in 1993, religion and government collided in a conflict that ended with 76 people dead. Two years later, Timothy McVeigh bombed the Alfred P. Murrah Federal Building in Oklahoma City, killing 168 people. He cited

the government's actions in Waco as a motivator for his attack. In 2012, six people were killed in an Islamophobic attack on a Sikh temple in Wisconsin. Between 2014 and 2019, there were three separate shootings at Jewish synagogues or community centers in the United States which killed a total of 15 people. A shooter walked into the Emanuel African Methodist Episcopal Church in Charleston, South Carolina in 2015 and killed nine people who were participating in a Bible study. These religiously motivated attacks evidence a culture that has failed to grapple with how to engage effectively across religious and ideological differences.

It should be clear based on examples like these that the two extremes of placing religion in the public sphere result in conflict. Either a country can move towards theocracy, which violates many of the tenets of a civil democracy; or it can excise religious discourse from the realm of public discourse altogether, which marginalizes those whose civic values are closely linked to their religion. By looking at specific points where the rhetoric of Christian nationalism pushes itself into the fore of the political landscape, I argue we can not only better understand this tension, but gain a better understanding of the deliberative space within which the proper place of religion is contested, one in which religious discourse is neither excluded from the public sphere nor privileged over secular logics.

In this dissertation, I argue through three case studies that we can envision an alternative configuration of the deliberative space in which the place of religion is contested, with logics different than pure secularism standing opposite Christian Nationalism. This alternative --- a kind of civic religious pluralism, based on ideas by scholars like Charles Taylor and Robert Bellah, can replace pure secularism as the counterweight to Christian nationalism in the public sphere. These scholars argue that while no one religion can be promoted by the state, religious discourse has a place in civic affairs so long as it recognizes and celebrates the diversity of

religious and non-religious viewpoints within the populace. I also seek to add a third dimension to this discussion: building from rhetoric concerning Christian nationalism and civic religious pluralism to the role of the state in enforcing religious conformity to the social order. This brings in an additional consideration for this dissertation: how does the state reckon with religious individuals or groups that do not want to participate in civil society?

Religious Discourse in the Public Sphere

The concept of the public sphere, brought into form as a communication problem by Jurgen Habermas, describes the way that people come together and to communicate their needs effectively to the state apparatus. This model, while it has seen its share of revisions and critiques, nevertheless remains central to much rhetorical work, even in the spiritualist-adjacent tradition of religious communication studies. In the following section, I describe the public sphere and observe how it has been modified and appropriated for religious considerations.

In *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere* (1962), Habermas traces the history of the public sphere as it developed in response to revolution (both political and industrial) and the Enlightenment throughout Europe. This public sphere is conceptualized as the space where people can deliberate issues of importance and utilize public opinion to communicate their needs and desires to the state apparatus. The key to the public sphere is the development of equality of viewpoint where dialogue is key: people should feel able to express themselves to others within the public sphere in a deliberative and democratic fashion. Combined with Habermas's notion of communicative action as the building block for creating the life worlds that people exist within, it is clear that within this paradigm language is primarily not a method of survival but of connection with others through cooperative dialogue; whereas Heidegger and Kierkegaard (among others) see language as the revealing or concealing of the

self in interaction with the Other, for Habermas communication is a tool, the ultimate tool, for the maintenance of society in modernity.

The vision that Habermas lays out for his public sphere is not without critique and modification by contemporary scholars. Fraser (1990) points out many of the major issues with Habermas's vision of a public sphere, the primary being the notion of one unified public sphere wherein people can engage with one another. As Fraser notes, it is more realistic to see society as a collection of spheres that interact and engage with one another. This conception is particularly attuned to the minority public spheres that manage to wield a larger voice in public discourse and therefore can shape public opinion on issues of importance despite their minority status; in Habermas's public sphere, these minority voices are subsumed by the majority in public discourse. But even in Fraser's update to Habermas, dialogue still plays a critical role, both within these distinct spheres and particularly between spheres to shape public opinion. Dialogue remains front-and-center in Fraser's views of the public sphere and of communicative purpose.

Within the public sphere, the role that spirituality or religious belief plays in deliberations has been a special area of interest for communication scholars. While the distinctions between religion and spirituality are not minor, for the purposes of this section I am specifically exploring how religion has been conceptualized in research on the public sphere. The simple dichotomy of religion being organizational and spirituality being individual, one advanced by scholars from William James (1961) to David Feltmate (2017), has also found itself embedded as the dominant paradigm in research on religion's role in the public sphere. What is interesting is how this dichotomy is not further explored even when research turns to how individuals participate. The distinction for individuals between religion and spirituality seems faded at best; for many scholars, there seems to be no distinction at all.

Rawls and Habermas took similar perspectives on how to incorporate religion into public discourse, with some variations (Lafont 2007; 2009). For Rawls (1993), religion has no place in public deliberation; religious (and spiritual) individuals must restate their arguments on topics into secular terms that can be understood by all. While he was more secularist in his early writings, Habermas (2005) later takes a similar tack with a caveat meant to alleviate the burden of translation placed on religious individuals. Habermas suggests that there is an informal public sphere where religious arguments can be made if they are translated into secular arguments before being taken up by the state in the formal public sphere. Habermas also suggests that secular and religious citizens share an equal burden of translation: secular citizens must serve a role in translating arguments into secular terms.

There is a central problem that remains even given Habermas's attempts to smooth out the problems of religious translation. Audi and Wolterstorff (1997) bring the issue to light: for many religious individuals, they cannot translate their argument into secular terms. To do so would be to reject the very sanctity of their religious belief as something separate from the secular world. To borrow Durkheim's (1912/1995) terms, forcing someone to translate the sacred into the profane reduces the sacred to the profane. Therefore, when they cannot translate their arguments into secular terms, religious individuals are left unable to participate in the public sphere and to advocate for positions that are important to them, simply because their logic is resting on religious grounds.

Wolterstorff's argument, while insightful and accurate in dissecting the problems with Rawls and Habermas, only furthers the problem that I wish to explore here. Namely, for Rawls, Habermas, but also Wolterstorff, dialogue is the key to public existence. All three, and countless scholars along with them, are concerned primarily with how people can deliberate in the public

sphere. None stop to consider why public deliberation is the answer, or if one can even meaningfully exist without the ability to participate in the public sphere. Wolterstorff cries out that religious people cannot be excluded from public debate due to their religious arguments, as if denial from public deliberation is equivalent to death by communicative lack of action.

The problem that faces us when we rely on dialogue to solve our problems is that as Rawls and Habermas note, it must presuppose some outside standard by which all participants must partake to be fully understood and to reach true compromise or consensus. Unfortunately, every night our news programs show us the futility of expecting dialogue when there seems to be no common ground. We have countless examples of religious difference creating not only separation, but conflict, violence, and death. When religion serves as a cornerstone for one's entire mental and social world, challenges to that religion are perceived not just as challenges to the religion, but challenges to the very essence of the person who follows that religion. We do not take attacks on our religious beliefs lightly; they create wounds and scars that remain, and often they harden us even further against our opposition.

In short, there appears to be two options that we can take when considering religion's place in the public sphere. On one end is a theocratic perspective that would permit the favoring of one religion as the cornerstone of the moral life of the state. In this situation, religion has a place in the discussion of policy and law, but it is only the favored religion of the state that is considered; there is no room for the full expression of minority religious or non-religious viewpoints. At the other end of this spectrum is the secularism pointed to by Habermas, Rawls, and others, that permits individual religious thought but forces the translation of religious argument into secular reasoning in order to participate in the public sphere. This secularism maintains that the state be founded upon moral virtues that go beyond the bounds of religious

practice and can be considered by all, religious or not, to be universal values. The problem here is that, as Wolterstorff and others (including Habermas himself) note, for many religious citizens this is an unfair burden of translation. For religious citizens, religion serves as the foundation for all their moral and political views; without it, they cannot truly be active and engaged citizens.

A third way, however, remains possible. Robert Bellah (1967) argues for what he calls the recognition of a civil religion. This civil religion is pointed to by Bellah as a recognition that while no religion should be privileged over another, certainly there are religious principles that underly any civil democracy. When we consider national holidays, various forms of patriotism, and other ways that we affirm our belonging to our nation, all of this is a part of a national civil religion. Bellah argues that rather than excise religion completely from the public sphere, we should instead embrace the principles that underly all religions, without privileging any specific religion, in the public sphere. A similar argument is made by Charles Taylor (2011), who argues that contemporary secularism should not be about the exclusion of religion from public life, but about the promotion of the diversity of religious viewpoints as a way to both give religious and non-religious people a seat at the table and to encourage a wide diversity of viewpoint in policy and public governance. Taken together, I use the term *civic religious pluralism* to describe this alternative path that permits religious expression in the public sphere without allowing for the privileging of one religion over any other.

A Different Way: Civic Religious Pluralism

The term “civic religious pluralism” can be understood by examining each of its words in isolation before turning to how they come together. For the purposes of this dissertation, I define *civic* as the enduring participatory duty that citizens carry in a functioning democratic state. Because democracy is rule by the people, the people have an obligation to take part in their

governance through deliberation of issues of communal importance, voting on issues or, in a representative democracy such as the United States, voting on candidates who represent their constituents, and the like. By *religious*, I mean that this middle path is distinct from the secularism that has been a part of much contemporary research into religion's role in the public sphere. Whereas Taylor seeks to reclaim the term secularism, as we will see below, I believe that instead the term "religious" can be used as an affirmation that there is in fact a place for religious discourse in the public sphere. Secularism's traditional definition has been the removal of religion from the public square, and therefore I am reticent to use it due to the possibility of misunderstanding. Finally, *pluralism* refers to a wide variety of perspectives both from different religious practices and from non-religious sources as well. Taken together, I argue that *civic religious pluralism* is the acceptance and promotion of religious voices within the public sphere as a method of ensuring broader civic engagement by citizens. We should also take care to define what civic religious pluralism is not: it is not the use of religious language that is specific to only one religious tradition, and it is not the privileging of religious thought over secular thought. It is the promotion of a diversity of perspective and of equal voice to all religious practices and to the non-religious in the public sphere.

I base this civic religious pluralism on the work of two scholars, Robert Bellah and Charles Taylor. Bellah's work on civil religion, and Taylor's argument for a new conception of secularism, both touch on the place of religious thought in a modern democratic state while arguing against a theocracy or a singular religious worldview. Taken together, these scholars advocate for providing religious individuals a voice within governance that is missing from more traditional conceptions of secularism found in Habermas, Rawls, and others. They also reject the notion of a Christian nationalist state which has been promoted, albeit not necessarily in those

terms, by a wide variety of speakers and politicians in American history. By exploring the work of Bellah and Taylor, we can develop a deeper understanding of their alternative conceptualizations of religious ideology in the public sphere.

Robert Bellah wrote about the role of civic religion in American history (1967). Bellah saw that while America was not a Christian theocracy, it was indeed founded on religious ideals. He points to traditions like Memorial Day or Independence Day as national holidays that cement America as a form of religion to itself. As citizens of the state, we participate to some degree in the rituals of this civic religion: we pay taxes, we visit national parks or monuments, we learn our nation's history in schools, and more. For Bellah, this civil religion is the foundation of American law and our conception of common morality. In making this claim, Bellah argues that rather than attempting to excise religion completely from the public sphere, we should instead find ways to recognize our religious foundations without privileging any one religious tradition. This means that things like "under God" in our pledge and "In God We Trust" on our money are not inherently problematic, as both acknowledge a greater being without being specific to a religious practice. References to Christ, however, from politicians in the formal public sphere of deliberative democracy, would violate the tenet of civil religion because it would involve the privileging of Christianity within that space.

Charles Taylor, in a chapter written for *The Power of Religion in the Public Sphere* (2011), argues for a redefinition of secularism. Whereas other scholars such as Habermas and Rawls, among many others, have seen secularism as the removal of religious language from the public sphere, Taylor instead argues that secularism should be about encouraging the expression of a wide diversity of religious viewpoints. Like Bellah, Taylor recognizes the power of religion to connect people to their own sense of morality, and as long as equality is protected among

various religious traditions, and language is not used that privileges one religious tradition over others, then religious argumentation can play a significant role in the public sphere (Taylor, 2007). Taylor is also careful to note that this equality should apply equally to those who do not believe in religion; they should be given equal space to make their own arguments, as well. What Taylor emphasizes is the way that religious pluralism can help us find new solutions to community issues and can give us a better insight into the religious practices of our neighbor. Rather than enforcing a moratorium on religious language in the public sphere, by hearing a wide variety of religious perspectives, we may get a much better understanding of our fellow citizens and learn to find areas of commonality, rather than difference.

To be sure, there is still some element of bracketing happening here. While Bellah and Taylor both present a place for religion in public discourse, they both acknowledge that claims to a specific religious tradition violate the expectation of equality among religious perspectives. This can be a difficult barrier for religious citizens; for many of them, their religious tradition teaches them that only their religious tradition is right, and all others are false. When asked, then, to present their arguments in the public sphere, they may find it difficult to put aside that part of their religious tradition in the name of equality.

I am reminded of an intriguing question posed to Susanna Heschel, a prominent scholar of Jewish studies, at a conference of religious scholars. After giving a presentation on the importance of respect and equanimity between different religious perspectives, a man in the audience brought up this issue directly by asking how Heschel would respond to the Christian who believes it is part of their religious ideology that there is only one path to heaven, and that is through Jesus Christ. Heschel's answer highlighted the distinction between private conviction and public expression. The essence of her response was that we are all entitled to believe what

we want privately, but we do have an obligation to ensure that we are treating everyone equally. Sometimes, that means we must bracket that part of our religious belief in order to participate in public deliberation.

Even within civic religious pluralism, there is an element of bracketing of personal religious belief that must happen. I argue, however, that this bracketing is much smaller and less of a burden than the translation from religious to secular argumentation advocated by Habermas. The bracketing that occurs within civic religious pluralism concerns the individual's beliefs about the rightness of their own religious practice, or the wrong-ness of other religious practices. Religious viewpoints are still accepted, and religious argumentation can be used within the public sphere. The only thing that a person may not do in this space is advocate for their specific religious practice as above or superior to any other, or to non-religion. This is certainly a burden, but it is one shared equally by every citizen and it is less burdensome than translating from religious argumentation to a completely secular logic. It therefore provides a better way for us to understand the place of religious discourse in the public sphere.

This dissertation is focused specifically on the place of Christian nationalism in secular society within the formal public sphere. Habermas describes the public sphere in two terms: the informal, where citizens deliberate together about issues of importance, and the formal public sphere of government deliberation and policy. Throughout this dissertation, I use the term "secular society" to describe the liberal democratic state that seeks to function separate from religious language or ideology. In the United States specifically, secular society is often countered by Christian nationalism that seeks to privilege Christianity as the preferred religion of the state apparatus.

State Intervention and Religious Isolation

The key problem of religious discourse in the public sphere is its role in helping individuals to rationalize their ideological viewpoint. A pluralistic society made up of a wide variety of different religious and nonreligious views must determine how to give everyone a voice without letting that voice be privileged above anyone else. Two responses – a religious nationalism that promotes a unified state religion and leaves no room for dissent, and a secularism that excludes religious thought from the public sphere entirely – each have their own flaws. A second element of the problem is the tension between state intervention and religious isolation. In the face of secularism (or perceived secularism) in public discourse, some religious groups choose not to participate in any meaningful way in modern society. How does the state respond when religious individuals or groups display an unwillingness to participate in civic life?

As discussed earlier, the tension between Christian nationalism and secularism is a two-dimensional deliberative space, with the precise role of religion in civic matters negotiated through a constant discursive push and pull between the two poles. This space fails to account for the problem of religious individuals or groups who do not *want* to participate in the public sphere. This is vitally important because the state has some obligation to ensure that the basic tenets of civil society are followed; for example, murder cannot be excused as a part of one's religious beliefs. At the same time, people are free to practice their religion as they see fit within the confines of generally accepted social rules and national law. A tension arises when religious people are forced to conform to society in ways that violate central tenets of their religious faith. Religious people, thus, are caught in two distinct tensions: between religious conviction and secularism, and between religious expression and state intervention. Our two-dimensional pole now extends into three-dimensional space with the addition of this element of the problem.

We saw this issue arise in recent American history during the passage of the Affordable Care Act (ACA) in 2010. The new healthcare bill stipulated that employers would provide coverage for contraception for employees. This was challenged, however, by several different religious organizations on the grounds that it violates their religious tradition. The Catholic Church forbids the use of contraception among its followers, and other religious groups have similar beliefs. This raises a further question: if your organization is religious, does that mean you have to follow that same religion? And if not, then does the organization have an obligation to provide contraception coverage to employees who are not religious, but not those who follow certain religious traditions? These questions are complex, but they point to the central concern I am interested in here: how the state enforces law and engagement with contemporary civic life in the face of religious citizens or individuals who feel they cannot comply.

The case of the Affordable Care Act was eventually resolved by the Supreme Court, which ruled that certain companies could claim a religious exemption from providing contraceptive coverage to employees (*Hobby Lobby Stores, Inc. v. Sebelius*, 2013). However, this does not address the predicament it puts employees in; some employees who may need contraceptives, and who don't share the religious views of the organization that they work for, are left without the benefits of the ACA. The decision made by the Supreme Court did little to solve the problem of religion and social order coming into conflict.

There are other examples of religious groups maintaining a delicate place within American society. Amish communities are largely allowed to self-govern, running their own schools and businesses and even enforcing the law. The problems inherent in this separation were made clear by Sarah McClure (2020), who explored the devastating culture of sexual abuse that exists within Amish communities. The Hasidic Jewish community in New York also

separates itself from much of American public life, but it too has come under intense scrutiny (Ewing & Grady, 2017). MOVE, a black liberation movement that also incorporated its own singular religious elements, occupied a house in Philadelphia that was eventually bombed by the city, destroying 65 properties, and killing eleven members of the organization. We have yet to identify an appropriate way to balance the needs for religious freedom of expression and the maintenance of a certain expectation of civil engagement in America.

Preview of the Dissertation

In this dissertation, I use two case studies to illustrate the tension between Christian nationalism and secularism. A third case study then builds upon this polar model to include the added dimension of state intervention and religious isolation. Through the rhetorical analysis of the discourse involved in two different political controversies that have occurred in the last year - an anti-Muslim prayer given on the Pennsylvania State House floor and the conflict within the evangelical community about the impeachment of President Donald Trump - I bring to light the tensions that surround religion's place in the public sphere and even within Christian thought. I use a third case, the Waco siege in 1994, to expand upon religion's place in the public sphere to include the tension between state intervention and religious freedom of expression.

The first case study in this dissertation lays out in clear terms the dichotomy between the discursive potential of civic religious pluralism and the dangers of Christian nationalism. In early 2019, Stephanie Borowicz, a Pennsylvania state congresswoman, gave an anti-Muslim prayer before the swearing-in of the state's first Muslim congresswoman. This prayer was a direct invocation to God, and to Christ on the floor of the state congress, and portions of the prayer were blatant acknowledgement of Borowicz's desire for a Christian nationalist state. The prayer garnered special attention for its anti-Muslim sentiments and its call for forgiveness from God

(presumably for swearing in a Muslim congresswoman). Using the prayer itself and the responses by the Muslim congresswoman in question, Movita Johnson-Harrell, and by the Pennsylvania House Democratic Whip Jordan Harris, as my artifacts, I explore how we talk about the divide between church and state, and our response when that divide is significantly breached.

The use of prayer in the public sphere is complex, but Robert Bellah argues that prayer in and of itself is not problematic so long as it does not present one religion as being superior or above any other tradition. In this case, Borowicz sees the other – a Muslim congresswoman – as distinctly different and wrong, rather than beginning from a place of common humanity and progressing forward from there. Despite a long theological tradition of love being a central element of Christian teaching, Borowicz’s prayer eschews love in favor of condemnation - a violation of the practices of her religious tradition and of the proper place of religion in the public sphere. In short, I argue that Borowicz’s prayer was a call for a Christian nationalist movement and that Bellah provides a template for a better understanding of the place of religion in public invocations.

My second case study concerns the religious differences that can emerge within a religious tradition. This case study explores the Christian response to Donald Trump, who presents a clear break within the GOP in terms of the importance of religion and Christian creed to political viability as a conservative candidate. When Trump “takes his little cookie” at Communion or quotes from “Two Corinthians,” he betrays a lack of understanding of the language of religious discourse. Despite this seeming lack of religious sincerity, Trump has remained connected to and embraced by the Evangelical community. This connection was called into question when Donald Trump was impeached by the United States House of

Representatives. During the impeachment, support for Trump, and opposition to him, was laid bare, even among evangelical Christians.

This case study draws on an editorial written at the end of 2019 in *Christianity Today*, a news and opinion site for evangelical Christian leaders. In this editorial, Mark Galli argues for removing Trump from office, despite his high levels of support from much of the Evangelical community. In addition to the editorial itself, I also draw on a letter written in response to the editorial and signed by over 200 Evangelical leaders around the country, that excoriates *Christianity Today* and vehemently defends Donald Trump. In doing so, they make their own arguments for a Christian nationalist state, albeit more subtly than Borowicz. Despite claiming they are not seeking a theocracy, the evangelical response pointedly relies on Christian language to build their case for support of Donald Trump. In contrast, Galli's editorial is much more careful in its building of the case against Trump, hedging the argument in order to better connect with evangelicals who have previously supported Trump and pointing to Trump's violations of Christian tenets of morality and leadership. The rhetoric used by each makes their purpose clear and belies their persuasive intentions.

This chapter draws on Charles Taylor's (2007, 2011) redefined secularism as a theoretical lens through which we can understand the value of religious pluralism rather than religious intolerance. While Galli makes efforts to open his language to speak to not only evangelicals but to all who might read, the evangelical letter in response is clearly directed solely to evangelical Christians who support the President. The case study also relies on Toulmin's model of argumentation to build an understanding of how Galli carefully constructs the logic of his editorial, while the evangelical letter in response is more scattershot in its approach.

The final case study in this dissertation project focuses on the other dimension of the problem of religion in the public sphere: the conflict between religious freedom and state intervention. The Waco siege in the 1990s illustrates what happens when a religious group separates themselves from much of civic life. This case was chosen because it is an illustration of why this research is vital: it shows the dangers of what can happen if we do not work towards tolerance and communicative cooperation. Through a rhetorical analysis of the final transcript from negotiations between Koresh and the FBI/ATF during the Waco siege, I explore how each group frames the discussion in different ways. For Koresh and his followers, this is a theological discussion, couched largely in religious terms. For the FBI/ATF, it is a secular discussion, focused on legality. The inability of the two groups to truly communicate, I argue, stems from different ideologies coming into conflict, and neither being willing to accept the validity of the other.

This case study draws on Habermas and his work on the role of religion in the public sphere. While I argue that Habermas, in his model of religious dialogue in civic life, fails to provide religious citizens with equality to their secular neighbors, I use Habermas's work on the public sphere and communicative action to analyze the way that Koresh and the FBI/ATF talk (or fail to talk) to one another during the negotiations. There are also elements of Stuart Hall and his work on ideology that present themselves in this case of radically different ideologies coming into conflict with one another: When we don't share similarities in mental schemas, we often fail to communicate with one another in meaningful ways, instead focusing on our places of *difference* rather than commonality.

Taken together, these three case studies build a picture of religious discourse in America as it exists in two different tensions: on the one hand, between Christian nationalism and

secularism, and on the other, between state intervention and religious isolation. I argue that an alternative path which I term “civic religious pluralism”, built on the work of Robert Bellah and Charles Taylor, provides a new contrast to Christian nationalism in considering religious dialogue in the public sphere, one that, unlike traditional secularism, allows for a freedom of religious expression without the privileging of any one practice or tradition, or of religion in general, over any other.

Methodology

This dissertation is a rhetorical consideration of the place of religious discourse in the public sphere. Each of the three case studies that make up this dissertation rely on written or spoken artifacts that are rhetorically analyzed for their contextual meaning and persuasive intent. Each case study takes up a slightly different rhetorical methodology, but all are invested in the analysis of language and how the language used by different rhetors speaks to their motivations, their audience, and the context in which the artifact was produced.

The first case study analyzes a prayer given by Pennsylvania State Representative Stephanie Borowicz, along with responses to the prayer by fellow State Representative Movita Harrell-Johnson and by the Pennsylvania House Democratic Whip Jordan Harris, as the artifacts for rhetorical analysis. These artifacts are considered first for their contextual meaning; the prayer is given on the day of the swearing-in of the state’s first Muslim congresswoman (Harrell-Johnson), and the prayer is analyzed specifically in the light of this circumstance. This contextual analysis helps us to understand why Borowicz’s call for Christian nationalism is particularly problematic in this instance.

The prayer and responses to it are analyzed rhetorically, using Kenneth Burke’s comic and tragic frames to understand how the argument is built in the prayer and in the responses to it.

Kenneth Burke posits that we can understand rhetoric through frames that dictate how we understand and respond to an artifact. Comic frames emphasize the commonness of humanity and open pathways to redemption for all. Tragic frames, on the other hand, close out the possibility of redemption outside of the specific worldview of the rhetor. They emphasize not commonality, but division. Hayden White expands this theoretical framework by highlighting the transformative nature of tragic frames and the conservative nature of comic frames.

Borowicz's prayer relies on a tragic framing that focuses on separating herself and her fellow Christians from the rest of the world as superior, and explicitly arguing that Jesus Christ is the only path towards "saving" the world. The responses by Harrell-Johnson and Harris, on the other hand, rely on a comic framing that emphasize a multiplicity of religious viewpoints and appeals to love and unity, rather than conflict. By analyzing the artifacts through the lens of Burke's frames, we can better understand the motivations and intentions of the rhetor in question.

The second case study analyzes an editorial written by Mark Galli for *Christianity Today*, an evangelical magazine, calling for Trump's removal from office, as well as a letter written by nearly 200 evangelical Christian leaders in response to Galli's editorial and in support of Trump. Each of these are written artifacts that highlight the contested place of Trump within Christian circles, particularly during his impeachment trial. While some, such as Galli, called for his removal, others vowed to support Trump through impeachment. This tension is evident in exploring how the editorial and the letter in response are situated contextually within the impeachment trial and the growing diversity of religious belief found increasingly within Christianity.

The editorial and letter in response are rhetorically analyzed using Stephen Toulmin's model of argumentation. Specifically, I draw on six questions, first proposed by Karbach (1987), to identify each artifact's claim, warrant, evidence, backing support, and qualifiers. These questions provide a window into how Galli carefully constructs his editorial to be backed up by sound argumentative structure, while the letter from evangelicals is vaguer and less logically coherent in its approach. This rhetorical mode of analysis allows us to identify which artifact relies on a stronger argument and can clarify what elements make the argument stronger. I also connect the editorial and the response to it to Taylor's understanding of secularism and point out how the editorial serves as an exemplar of civic religious pluralism in action.

Finally, the third case study considers the final negotiation transcript between David Koresh, the leader of a religious movement known as the Branch Davidians, and the FBI and ATF, who had surrounded the Branch Davidian compound. The transcript serves as the final point of contact in a 51-day standoff that would end in the death of 76 members of the religious movement. The transcript presents many connections to the events that had taken place leading up to and during the stand-off, including armed conflict, the surrounding of the compound by tanks and armed guards, and the continuing attempts by Koresh to spread his religious prophecies out to the world. Contextually, the transcript offers clues into the mindset of both Koresh and the FBI/ATF during the raid and speaks to why each made the rhetorical decisions that they did.

This final case study relies on a discourse analysis to consider the rhetorical moves made by each amid the conflict. Through discourse analysis, the transcript is broken up into sections that can be read together before the subject changes into the next section. In considering the transcript rhetorically, I argue that the conversation between the two illustrates two worldviews

that fail to consider the validity of different viewpoints. David Koresh and the FBI/ATF are entrenched in their ideologies, and neither has any interest in attempting to bridge the ideological gap, as evidenced by the language used and the rhetorical strategies drawn on by both during their dialogue.

Conclusion

This dissertation seeks to explore the place of religious language in the public sphere. The first two case studies approach a central element of the problem: the role of religious language and argument in secular society. The third case study explores the other side of the problem: how the state can interact with religious people or movements who do not have a desire to conform to contemporary society. These case studies all illustrate the ways that secularism, when seen as the removal of religion from the public sphere altogether, and theocracy, seen in this dissertation as a move towards Christian nationalism that has been prevalent in the history of the United States, are two extremes that both fail to provide an adequate solution to the problem. I conclude the dissertation by arguing for a civic religious pluralism, drawn from the work of Robert Bellah and Charles Taylor, that encourages religious dialogue in the public sphere so long as it does not privilege any one religious tradition, or religion in general, over others or over non-religious thought. This civic religious pluralism can provide us with a wide variety of perspectives to answer some of the problems that we face in our communities and can help us find areas of connection and commonality with those around us, rather than focusing on areas of difference.

Thomas Merton, a prominent Catholic monk whose writings emphasized a universal approach to religion centered on unity and love, expressed the goals of the civic religious pluralism presented by this dissertation. “The beginning of love is to let those we love be

perfectly themselves, not to twist them to fit our own image. Otherwise we love only the reflection of ourselves we find in them.” (Merton, 1955). This is also the beginning of an effective civic engagement. We must meet people where they are and allow them to express the full diversity of their worldview, without trying to twist them into our own perspective. This twisting that we must avoid is Christian nationalism, but it is also a secularism that prohibits religious dialogue completely from the public sphere. Let us instead find ways to celebrate religious diversity while ensuring that all citizens feel that they are seen and cared for in the public sphere.

**CH. 2: ‘PRAYER WAS WEAPONIZED FROM THE SPEAKER’S DAIS’: CIVIC
RELIGIOUS PLURALISM AS A RESPONSE TO CHRISTIAN NATIONALISM IN THE
PENNSYLVANIA STATE HOUSE**

Religious, patriotic, racial prejudices must disappear, for they are the destroyers of human society. We must become the cause of the unity of the human race.

-Abdu’l-Baha

Introduction

The first case study of this dissertation argues that a recent prayer given on the floor of a state congressional house illustrates Christian nationalist dialogue in the public sphere. Two responses given to this prayer, on the other hand, illustrate that the complete removal of religion is not the counterpoint to Christian nationalism. Rather, these responses still seek to recognize a place for religion in the public sphere so long as it does not privilege one religious practice over any other. I begin by using Burke’s notions of comic and tragic framing to understand how rhetors employ specific rhetorical strategies to build their argument and tailor it to specific audiences with specific intentions in mind. The prayer serves as a tragic framing that elevates Christianity to a privileged space and presents it as the only solution to the ills of the country. The responses to it are then connected to Charles Taylor’s new definition of secularism, which recognizes a role for religious discourse in the public sphere without falling into the dangers of theocracy.

In this chapter, I consider the case of Stephanie Borowicz, a state House representative in Pennsylvania who garnered national attention in early 2019 when she gave an explicitly Christian and hostile prayer on the floor of the State House. The prayer was given as a response to an event that was to happen later during that legislative day, the swearing in of the state’s first

Muslim congresswoman, Movita Johnson-Harrell. The prayer by Borowicz, given on the same day as the first swearing-in of a Muslim congresswoman in the Pennsylvania State House, promotes Christian nationalism as central to solving the “ills” of American social life at the expense of other religious traditions. I then analyze the responses to the prayer given by Johnson-Harrell and Pennsylvania State House Democratic Whip Jordan Harris. Their responses highlight the need for a new understanding of religion’s place in the public sphere, one that recognizes the value of religious thought while maintaining an equality among all religious and non-religious traditions.

I use Burke’s comic and tragic framing to analyze the prayer and the responses to it. Burke’s frames allow us to analyze how rhetors use language to stiffen the parameters of their argument, leaving little room for alternative positions (the tragic frame), while others use language to broaden their argument and expand the boundaries of potential pathways towards acceptance (the comic frame). This analysis finds Borowicz leaning on tropes of the tragic drama, employing language that limits the agency of her audience and provides only one path to redemption. This path is presented as the only solution, and it is often (if not exclusively) presented as a radical departure from the status quo. The responses, on the other hand, illustrate a comic response that emphasizes equality among all persons and a diverse array of solutions to the scene at hand.

Burke’s Comic and Tragic Frames

In *Attitudes Towards History*, Kenneth Burke (1937/1984) outlines his dramatisitic theory of action. In viewing the human world as drama, Burke notes that situations play themselves out in ways that help us to make sense of them. Burke identifies two different types of frame: the comic and tragic frames. Each frame presents rhetorical scenes in a different way and for

different purposes. By understanding the framing used in different contexts, we can better understand the rhetor's motives and respond accordingly.

Tragic Frames

Tragic dramas are those which ask us to accept the status quo, but do not present a window to redemption for the actors involved and which instead seek to identify a scapegoat to take the blame for potential failings. Tragic frameworks help us see movements that seek to overthrow the social order and replace it with an entirely new system disconnected from the original. While the comic frame may see incremental change as beneficial and recognizes the fallibility of humans, the tragic frame instead seeks out those that can be blamed for society's ills and given the appropriate punishment. In a tragic worldview, movements are not about commonalities but about pointing to differences as dangerous and problematic, and using these differences as a tool for some marginalized groups carrying the burden of blame for the whole of society.

Butterworth (2013) draws on sports media coverage of quarterback Tim Tebow to illustrate the way that tragic framing can be analyzed. In coverage of Tebow, there is a symbolic division that occurs between Tebow and other athletes as Tebow is elevated to a higher plane of admiration due to his outspoken Christian beliefs. The media coverage of Tebow focused on his wholesome character and his humility; ironically, the tragic framing of Tebow as a "savior" to football points out his humility to show how he is different from (and implicitly better than) other athletes. There are a multitude of angles from which the Tebow story can be considered, including the racial, socio-economic, and religious dimensions that Tebow intersects. What Butterworth focuses on is how all of these are at play due to a tragic framing of Tebow as a new and better athlete, the new standard-bearer for the NFL. Where a comic frame would focus more

on Tebow's connection to other athletes or a more humble-minded reporting approach to the story, this tragic framing paints Tebow as the hero of his own story, identifies other athletes as the scapegoats for Tebow's occasional failings, and does not offer these others a pathway to narrative redemption.

The tragic frame can be seen particularly in movements that have relied on the scapegoating of others as a tool for social upheaval. In 1930s Germany, Adolf Hitler explicitly made the Jewish people the scapegoat for all of Germany's problems, giving German citizens perceived relief from responsibility for the country's struggles. By pinning all the trouble on the Jewish people, the social upheaval that placed him atop the country as its authoritarian leader was made possible. Seen through the lens of a tragic drama, Jewish people were denied opportunities for redemption or to express their shared humanity.

The tragic frame can also be seen in contemporary movements towards Christian nationalism or theocracy, as we will see in an analysis of Borowicz's prayer. This movement seeks to place the blame for society's ills on non-believers, those who have supposedly turned their back on God and engaged in sinful behavior. These others are seen as the reason for God's punishment of the country whenever something negative happens. There is no pathway to redemption offered outside of a strict acceptance of the Christian faith. The move towards Christian theocracy is an attempt at social upheaval using scapegoating to give believers a subject upon which to displace their own burden of blame. As we will see, Borowicz's prayer connects to the broader Christian theocratic movement in the United States that can be seen as an unfolding tragic drama.

In his seminal work *Metahistory* (1973), Hayden White considers the ways that historical movements have been described by historians and scholars in ways that suit their particular

needs. He argues that tragic frames are always seen as radical or revolutionary; they call forth a change in the status quo and refuse to accept the way things are, seeing instead only one ultimate vision for the way things should be. This framing often occurs in a form of tunnel vision in which rhetors provide only one path forward for their audience, and this path consists of overturning the current social order. White writes that comic frames, on the other hand, are conservative by nature, emphasizing the value of harmony and progress through incremental change rather than revolution.

In another work (2002), White also notes the way that both tragic and comic frames are used by rhetors to suit their purposes of interpretation for their audience: “historical situations are not *inherently* tragic, comic, or romantic” (195). White argues that the critic, in considering a situation, frames the facts of the case in a way so as to fit into a tragic or comic frame, and notes that these choices are made intentionally. Thus, when Borowicz stands to deliver her prayer, she has carefully chosen her words to convey a precise meaning and to tragically frame the rhetoric of Christian nationalism that she espouses as the one transformative path to redemption for America. The responses given to the prayer, however, intentionally take up a comic frame of redemption, human fallibility, and the common good.

Comic Frames

While tragic frames focus on scapegoats and victimage, comic frames are those frames that help move us towards equality and egalitarianism. Rather than a frame of action, comic frames are frames of acceptance. In comic interpretations, all beings are redeemable; we make mistakes, but those mistakes are correctable and the one who commits the error can make amends and move forward. The comic frame emphasizes the nature of common humanity and has a focus on redemption in a narrative arc. The primary mode through which this redemption

occurs is in dialogue and learning with others in the community; through this learning, progress is made, and violations of the social order are corrected without the exile or scapegoating of the perpetrator.

Carlson (1986) illustrates the comic frame in the social movement of Gandhi in working towards the national independence of India. Through nonviolent resistance, Gandhi and his followers were able to create political dissent that became noticeable to the broader public and garnered their support. Rather than engaging in violence or conflict, Gandhi encouraged his followers to protest unjust laws *but continue to follow other laws* to reify their faith in social order. By protesting the laws that were unfair but following the procedure for getting arrested and jailed, for example, Gandhi and his followers were able to create significant pressure on the British prison system in India. This pressure, combined with mounting public support for the nonviolent protests, was significant in the fight for India's independence from Britain. Gandhi's movement relied on certain elements of the comic frame to make their case.

First, Gandhi did not encourage violence towards the British leaders or military guard. This suggested that there was a goodness in the *people*, even if there were significant problems with the *system* of governance. Second, Gandhi encouraged his followers to only protest unjust laws, not the concept of law altogether. This confirmed the group's belief in a system of social order and made a vision of future rectification of the social order possible. Gandhi explicitly created a space for dialogue about certain laws by drawing attention to them through nonviolent means. Nonviolence also makes the protestors more difficult to handle, as violence against nonviolent protestors is poorly received by the broader public.

The comic frame is seen in movements such as the fight for Indian independence, the Civil Rights movements of the 1960s, and in the fight for LGBTQ+ equality in the United States.

In this chapter, I argue that Rep. Johnson-Harrell's and others' responses to the anti-Muslim prayer in the Pennsylvania state house plays into the comic framing employed by the broader movement on the political left to encourage a plurality of cultural and religious voices. This comic frame emphasizes the need for dialogue across difference and the common humanity shared by all, regardless of creed or cultural origin. Taylor's new definition of secularism is also framed comically as a tool for the state to encourage a broader discussion of religion and its place in the public sphere. Rather than seeing secularism in a tragic light as the cutting off of religion from the public square, Taylor instead frames secularism in a comic approach that sees the state playing a role in protecting the diversity of religious viewpoints, including nonreligious views, and in ensuring their equal access to places of public argumentation and debate. In this way, the responses to Borowicz's prayer are a furthering of this comic framing of a new definition for secularism in the United States.

Analysis

Contextual Analysis of Artifacts

In situating Borowicz's prayer within the broader context of the move towards more political power given to Christian teaching, it is important first to consider the context in which the prayer takes place and the overall argument that it makes. After evaluating the prayer, I turn to also examine Rep. Johnson-Harrell's response and the response of Pennsylvania House Democratic Whip Jordan Harris, both of whom make arguments that speak to the feeling of Democrats who were present in regard to the prayer. I argue that their responses are a push back against the theocratic arguments found in Borowicz's prayer while affirming the right of individuals to freely practice their own religious beliefs.

Stephanie Borowicz is a representative in the Pennsylvania State House of Representatives. On March 25, 2019, she was asked to give the opening invocation. This day was significant because the legislature was set to swear in the first Muslim woman in Pennsylvania's state house history, Movita Johnson-Harrell. Given this context, Borowicz stepped up to the dais and gave a prayer that was condemned by many as anti-Muslim and veering towards Christian theocracy. Through examination of her prayer, we can identify why these claims were made and consider what role Borowicz believed she was playing in delivering the prayer shortly before Johnson-Harrell became her colleague in the state house.

The first words that Borowicz uses to begin her prayer immediately set the tone for the rest of her remarks: "Jesus, I thank you for the privilege, Lord, of letting me pray, God, that I, Jesus, am your ambassador here today." Throughout the prayer, Borowicz uses asides to address who she is praying to: Jesus, Lord, and God. It is worth mentioning that while God is seen as a religiously inclusive term - hence its presence on our money and in our prayer - and Lord may be seen in a similar light, there is no such argument that can be made for the use of Jesus. Jesus Christ serves as a central figure in Christianity, and there can be no ambiguity in noticing Borowicz's use of Jesus as an object of her prayer. In fact, during the prayer, Borowicz uses asides to address the object of her prayer 20 times; more than half (11) are "Jesus," six are "God", and three are "Lord." In short, these asides throughout the prayer affirm Borowicz's prayer as an explicitly Christian one.

In the opening of the prayer, Borowicz identifies herself as "your [Jesus's] ambassador here today, standing here representing you, the King of Kings and Lord of Lords, the great I am, the one who is coming back again, the one who came, died, and rose again on the third day." Borowicz identifies herself as a representative of the Christian faith and lays out articles of

theology that are exclusive to the Christian faith, including the death and resurrection of Christ and his future return. Once again, Borowicz connects her prayer explicitly to the Christian movement.

Borowicz then turns briefly to American history to connect past leaders of the country to Christian ideals:

God, for those that came before us like George Washington at Valley Forge, and Abraham Lincoln, who sought after you in Gettysburg, Jesus, and the Founding Fathers in Independence Hall, Jesus, that sought after you and fasted and prayed for this nation to be founded on your principles and your words and your truth.

These connections are tenuous at best. George Washington and Abraham Lincoln both had some connection to the Christian church, but both also made it explicitly clear that religious toleration was a key element of American public service. While both acknowledged the role of religion and its connection to human morality, both also recognized that America was a nation founded upon ideals of religious freedom of expression and diversity. Many of the Founding Fathers were in fact not Christian but were deists; they believed in a Creator but were more ambiguous as it relates to the place of Jesus Christ in their religious beliefs. Borowicz connects these historical threads together in a way that makes it seem to the listener that America was founded on Christianity in an effort to narrow the scope of her argument and provide less agency for her audience to feel that there are alternative perspectives. Borowicz's argument can be boiled down to: If you are American, you are a part of our Christian heritage, a tragic frame that hems in her audience and cordons off all other options.

It is only after connecting American history briefly to Christianity that Borowicz then turns towards a critique of secular society. "God forgive us, Jesus we have lost sight of you.

We've forgotten you, God, in our country. And we're asking you to forgive us, Jesus." Borowicz brings up Christian ideas about the ills of secular society and asks for the forgiveness not only of God, again a figure that can be mentioned without reference to a specific religion, but to Jesus as well, an explicitly Christian reference. She then quotes the Bible passage calling for people to humble themselves, turn from their wicked ways and seek the face of God so that God may save our land. She closes this section of the prayer with, "Jesus, you are our only hope." The word "only" is an explicitly tragic device, serving to highlight the futility of outsiders and to provide only one path towards "redemption" in the narrative arc of American history. Giving the prayer before the swearing-in of a Muslim congresswoman brings this section into question, as it seems clear Borowicz believes this to be a part of the "wicked ways" from which we need to be forgiven. By invoking Jesus Christ to forgive us, Borowicz is also making the claim that only the Christian faith can serve as the agent of this forgiveness.

Borowicz then turns to reading out a list of figures for whom she is thankful that God placed them in power: Mike Turzai, the Republican speaker of the Pennsylvania State House; Bryan Cutler, the Republican Pennsylvania House Majority Leader; Tom Wolff, the Republican Governor of Pennsylvania; and Republican President Donald Trump. She specifically thanks Trump for standing with Israel, and she says that "we're blessed because we stand by Israel, and we ask for the peace of Jerusalem as your word says, God." These arguments come from a Christian theological perspective that privileges Israel as the original people of God and argues against a two-state solution granting rights to Palestinians living in the area. Borowicz makes her allegiance to Republican leadership, Trump, and Israel obvious and connects this allegiance to her Christian faith.

The prayer concludes with a final admonishment of secular society and a call for a turn to the Christian faith. “We ask that we not be overcome by evil, but that we overcome evil with good in this land once again.” While it is not explicitly stated what the “evil” in question is, the context of the speech given on the same day as the swearing-in of a Muslim congresswoman leaves little doubt as to what Borowicz is referring to. Evil here serves as the unspoken logic underlying her argument; if the listener has followed her to this point, there can be no doubt as to what the ‘evil’ is to which she is referring. She closes with another reference to giving Christianity an elevated place in the public sphere: “I claim all these things in the powerful, mighty name of Jesus the one who- at the name of Jesus every knee will bow and every tongue will confess, Jesus, that you are Lord. In Jesus name, Amen.” The prayer ends with this reference again to Christian scripture, to a recognition of Jesus as Lord, and with the prayer being given not in the name of God, but in the name of Jesus.

In the following section, this prayer will be further examined for the way that it relies on a tragic framing of the situation to emphasize the need for an explicitly Christian civil government, but it is worth considering an overall assessment of the prayer given its content and context. The prayer relies heavily on references to Jesus, which are explicit references to a specific religious practice, Christianity. The prayer calls out the secular world as wicked and in need of forgiveness, and posits that Jesus is the only true source of this forgiveness. Borowicz connects her prayer to other members of the Republican party in her state and to the Republican President Donald Trump and makes the connection between her Christian faith and the policy position of the support of Israel. It is clear that this prayer was a pro-Christian, pro-theocracy diatribe meant to emphasize the need for greater influence of Christianity within the state legislature, and it was given at a time when a different religious practice might have received

significantly more attention (the swearing-in of a Muslim congresswoman). By giving such a loaded speech, Borowicz deflected attention away from Rep. Johnson-Harrell and turned the focus towards the role of Christianity in the public sphere.

It is also worth briefly considering the response to Borowicz's prayer. I have chosen two artifacts that illustrate the main thrust of the argument given in response to the prayer: one is a brief response given by Rep. Movita Johnson-Harrell, the Muslim congresswoman who was sworn in later the same day of the prayer; the other is a response given to an interviewer by Pennsylvania House Democratic Whip Jordan Harris. While their responses are brief, they are instructive of the argument made against Borowicz in the days following her controversial prayer.

Movita Johnson-Harrell does not mince words or hold back in responding to the prayer. She begins her response by noting that she "doesn't look at that as a prayer, I think it was a political, radical statement masked as a prayer." The role of a prayer is traditionally to show reverence to a religious deity or ideal, but Johnson-Harrell believes that Borowicz was not interested in reverence but rather in making a political statement. She next makes it clear that she found the prayer offensive not only to her, but to her family and others that had come to see her sworn in as the state's first Muslim congresswoman.

In describing the novelty of her inclusion into the state house, she also highlights the diversity of the group she brought with her. "Our group was inclusive, we had Muslims and Jews and Christians and people from all walks of life." Including this as part of the response to Borowicz's prayer makes it clear that Johnson-Harrell does not have a problem with the private religious beliefs of Borowicz or anyone else, but rather the use of those religious beliefs as a tool of political power. Johnson-Harrell ends her response with the claim that everyone in her group

felt offended by the prayer; this presumably includes the Christians in her group, who may have identified with Borowicz's personal convictions while decrying their being used from the speaker's dais. A similar dynamic played out in House Whip Harris's response as well.

In his own response, Jordan Harris begins by highlighting what the legislative day was "supposed to be about: the election of Pennsylvania's first Muslim female to serve in the [state] House of Representatives." He further goes on to note that Johnson-Harrell deserved more, and he also argues that everyone in the state deserved more. Harris further notes that "this is not a place where you should weaponize religion and use it to intimidate anyone." This is very similar to Johnson-Harrell's response that disconnects Borowicz's statement from its supposed position as a prayer and instead identifies it as a political statement. Harris closes out this first part of his response in a similar fashion: "Prayer was weaponized from the speaker's dais. There's no place for that type of hate in this chamber. There's no place for that type of divisiveness."

In the second part of his response, Harris makes clear the separation that should exist between personal belief and civic duty. Harris notes that he himself is a Christian and he believes firmly in the teachings of Jesus Christ. In arguing against Borowicz, also a Christian, Harris challenges her on theological terms, arguing that "his [Jesus's] teaching would not be about, and was not about, dividing us as a people, but uniting us as a people." He closes his response with an appeal to the civic duty of the state house, regardless of their religious perspective: "It is our similarities that help us get things done for our constituents back home, not the divisive nature that we saw today." In this final part of his response, Harris makes clear that his personal religious perspective does not play a role in allowing him to find *difference* with others, but it provides a point of *similarity* with others, even those whose religious practice may differ.

In their responses, both Johnson-Harrell and Jordan Harris first remove the classification of Borowicz's response as a "prayer" and instead classify it as a radical political statement. Johnson-Harrell points to the value of a diversity of viewpoints and makes the argument that her friends and family who constitute this religious diversity found the statement appalling. Harris argues that he himself is a Christian, but that he does not believe the faith should be wielded as a weapon to further division with those who do not share our religious ideology. Both are invested in considering the ways that Christianity was used by Borowicz as a way to shame not only Johnson-Harrell but the people who voted for her, and both argue instead for a broader acceptance of others and a more open and willing approach to religious difference.

Having explored the prayer and two responses to it more broadly, I now argue that these artifacts fit squarely into Burke's notions of comic and tragic framing. Borowicz's prayer can be seen as an example of how an issue can be framed in a tragic light, with the elevating of a scapegoat and an attempt to replace the current social order with a new way of thinking (specifically, a Christian nationalist perspective). The responses by Movita Johnson-Harrell and Jordan Harris, on the other hand, are responses that instead view the situation through a comic lens, highlighting the diversity of opinion and perspective present in humanity and calling for a recognition and celebration of this very diversity.

Tragic Framing in the Borowicz Prayer

In considering the prayer given by Stephanie Borowicz, I use Burke's framework for tragic drama to consider the ways in which the prayer makes its central argument. I argue that Borowicz uses Christianity as a cudgel to fight off what she perceives as the problem with an increasingly secularized world. In doing so, she relies on a tragic frame that pits non-Christians as the enemy, the scapegoat upon which the problems of the country can be placed. She also

does not present resolutions that involve diversity or plurality of perspective, but instead presents Christianity as the one true pathway to resolving the world's ills. The prayer implicitly argues for a Christian theocracy that would overthrow the current social order and place governance in the hands of explicitly Christian leadership.

The prayer begins with an acknowledgment that giving the prayer is a privilege, but for Borowicz, this is not a privilege given by men but by God. She thanks Jesus and refers to herself as his "ambassador" in the chamber that day. From the beginning, the prayer is framed as one woman speaking on behalf of her Christian faith, rather than a Christian setting aside their personal beliefs for the sake of civil governance. She further argues that she represents Jesus, the "King of Kings and Lord of Lords," in her own words, and describes the central tenet of the Christian belief in Jesus's birth, life, death, and resurrection. Through this, she reiterates that she is honored to stand and give the prayer. This honor, again, comes not from government or from man, but for Borowicz, the honor comes from Christ himself.

In the next section of her prayer, Borowicz invokes major elements of American history and connects them to Christianity. She names George Washington and Abraham Lincoln and refers to the Founding Fathers who "sought after you [Jesus] and fasted and prayed for this nation to be founded on your principles and your words and your truth." Setting aside the validity of these arguments, this section builds upon Borowicz's rejection of the authority of man or government and reiterates her allegiance resting with her Christian faith above all else. This frames the prayer and the social issues she will soon address as coming from a single authoritative voice, rather than what we might see in a more comic frame as a multitude of human voices or perspectives. The invocation of Christ as the supreme being also precludes any

notion of human fallibility or human redemption outside the framework of the Christian faith, key elements of the tragic frame.

It is in the next section when Borowicz turns to one of the hallmarks of the tragic drama, the scapegoat. She prays for forgiveness to God and to Jesus. She claims that the nation has forgotten God. She asks for people to turn from their “wicked ways” and humble themselves before Jesus so that God may “heal our land.” In this, Borowicz is laying the blame for society’s ills at the feet of non-Christians. In doing so, she is providing Christians with absolution from their complicity in the ills of the world. In Borowicz’s worldview, the problem in the world is the lack of Christian faith; if only we would all convert to Christianity, we would be saved not only in eternity, but from evil here on Earth, as well. “Jesus, you’re our only hope.” This explicitly connects building a better world through civil governance to a belief in Christianity as the only tool through which a better world may be built. It is not enough for Borowicz that we work legislatively to solve problems for constituents; we must be vocally converting them to Christianity as this is the “only hope” we have of redemption of the world.

Borowicz then names several leaders who she prays to God for. All of them are Republican; apparently, no Democrat was deserving of Borowicz’s prayer. She prays for the Republican leadership of the state house, the governor of Pennsylvania, and the President, Donald Trump. By listing them by name, Borowicz is subtly granting them the same ambassadorship for Christ that she granted to herself at the outset of the prayer. They are listed by name because they have aligned themselves with Borowicz in their worldview, and it is clear that going into the prayer, Borowicz felt confident enough in their own Christian bona fides to say their names as part of the prayer. This naming of leadership identifies for the audience who is to be trusted and, by omission, who is not. These leaders, and Borowicz herself, are painted as

the leaders of the new Christian coalition; by immediately following an explicit call for Christian leadership with these names, Borowicz connects them to her own plea for Christian nationalism. In this, she reifies the element of the tragic frame that highlights the need for a new social order and the place of scapegoats (the unbelievers) in taking on blame for the ills of society.

The prayer ends with a grateful aside about Trump and his support for the nation of Israel. Support for Israel has been a constant within the Christian political movement, as Israel is seen in the Bible as the people of God. Palestinians are not considered a part of God's plan for the Middle East region, and therefore evangelical Christian politicians have largely found themselves defending Israel and praising Trump and other past Presidents who have defended Israel. Borowicz thanks God for giving us a President in Trump who defended Israel and connects this defense of Israel to prosperity through the Christian gospel. She then turns back to an argument against the evils of the world, asking that "we not be overcome by evil and that we overcome evil in this land." Once again, "evil" is framed as anything un-Christian, and being that this was given before the swearing-in of a Muslim congresswoman, we can ascertain that Islam is part of the evil that Borowicz is arguing against. This further confirms Borowicz's argument that anyone who is not a believer in Christ as the Savior of the world is part of the problem in the world, and it is they who are to blame for the world's problems. This is a tragic framing of the situation and it is a further push towards Christian theocracy as Borowicz's avowed political ideology.

To end her prayer, Borowicz "claims all of these things in the powerful, mighty name of Jesus the one who - at the name of Jesus every knee will bow and every tongue will confess, Jesus, that you are Lord." Her entire prayer now is couched under the name of Jesus Christ and Christian ideology. She relies on Christian scripture to affirm the power of her religious ideology

over all others. In closing her prayer in such a way, Borowicz is making it very clear that this was not a generic prayer to a higher power to open proceedings, nor was it a chance to praise religious plurality on a day that could have been seen as a celebration of exactly that. Instead, Borowicz makes it clear that her prayer is a Christian creed to which we should all listen and be wary, and if you are not a Christian, you are called out as part of the problem.

Throughout this prayer, Borowicz relies on several key tropes of the tragic frame. She presents Christianity as the one truth - "Jesus, you're our only hope." She presents those who have turned away from Jesus as evil doers, filling the world with their "wicked ways." These non-believers serve as the scapegoats, the carriers of blame for all of society's failings. She also calls for an expansion of Christianity within government and implies that Christian theocracy is the only way that America can become "good in this land once again." Borowicz is proposing a new social order founded upon Christian scripture to overthrow what she perceives as the current secularism within America. Finally, there is no path towards human redemption nor acknowledgement of human fallibility outside of the framework of Christianity; Borowicz makes it explicit that she believes no one can be redeemed except through Christ. All of this serves as markers of the tragic frame used throughout the prayer.

Hayden White (1973)'s argument that tragically framed movements are inherently transformative and radical helps us to see the ways that Borowicz closes her audience off from alternative interpretations of her prayer. Borowicz argues that the United States needs a reorientation away from the secular status quo. Her prayer argues for a form of Christian nationalism that would present a stark change from the current reality of American civic life. Ironically, this tragic framing places Borowicz's politically conservative views in favor of

radical change and simultaneously places the responses to the prayer, given by politically progressive voices, in a more comic and thus conservative light.

Comic Framing in Responses to the Prayer

In juxtaposition to the tragic frame used throughout the prayer, the responses by Rep. Movita Johnson-Harrell and House Democratic Whip Jordan Harris rely on comic framing. This includes a focus on human diversity and plurality of perspectives, and it seeks to grant everyone at the table an equal voice. It also emphasizes human fallibility and the room for improvement; the comic frame recognizes that we are all human, we all make mistakes, and we all deserve the chance to respond to and correct those mistakes. The responses to Borowicz's prayer emphasize that a diversity of religious perspective is welcome, and that unity is stronger than division.

Johnson-Harrell's response was brief but touched on several key elements of the comic frame. Johnson-Harrell begins by changing the terms at play; she does not consider Borowicz's words a prayer, but rather a political statement dressed up as a prayer. In changing the terms, Johnson-Harrell changes the way we think about the words that were used. If this was truly a political statement, it is easier to see why the call for morality based on Christianity throughout was so inappropriate. Johnson-Harrell is emphasizing that by privileging her own religious beliefs over everyone and everything else, Borowicz was not engaging in the religious ethic of love but the political ethic of power and partitioning.

Movita Johnson-Harrell then goes into describing the family and friends that had come to see her be sworn in and their own religious diversity. She notes that some of the people that came down were Christian, Jewish, and Muslim. In making this clear, Johnson-Harrell is emphasizing once again religious plurality and expressing her own support for a diversity of religious opinions in the civil public sphere. It is imperative to note that Johnson-Harrell does not

respond to Borowicz's call for Christian political leadership with a call for Muslim political leadership. Rather, she responds with a call for an appreciation of religious diversity within the chamber. Johnson-Harrell, and those who voted for her, believed that her status as a Muslim woman of color would be beneficial in providing fresh perspective on a multitude of issues affecting the citizens of the state. Borowicz's prayer, however, makes clear that her interest is not in unity, but in division between the Christians and the non-Christians.

Johnson-Harrell closes her response by noting that her friends and family were offended by the prayer. In doing so, she argues that the prayer did not serve any sort of purpose that we might normally associate with prayer; it was not reflective or contemplative, nor did it place the people as humbly prostrating themselves before their divine being to which they pray. Rather, the prayer served as a warning shot, of sorts, to those who would come into the chamber and attempt to move beyond Borowicz's (and others') Christian perspective. The prayer was not welcoming, as Johnson-Harrell notes; it was in fact quite the opposite.

Another response that hewed to the comic frame was that by Jordan Harris, the Democratic House Whip in the Pennsylvania State House. His response begins by pointing out what the day was "supposed to be about", the election of Johnson-Harrell and her status as the first Muslim woman elected in the Pennsylvania state house. In starting this way, Harris is pointing out an irony lost on Borowicz, it seems: her prayer that attacked any non-Christians was given on a day that should have very much been a celebration of religious diversity. Where a comic frame of the event would have emphasized the value in this, Borowicz's tragic framing focuses on the superiority of one voice over all others and silences the diversity of viewpoint that the comic frame seeks to enlighten.

Harris then proceeds in much the same way as Johnson-Harrell in dissociating the words of Borowicz from the term “prayer.” He still uses the term prayer, but he notes that prayer was “weaponized from the speaker’s dais.” Again, we do not conceptualize prayer as a weapon to be wielded, but that is what Harris argues here. He argues that the prayer was used to intimidate anyone who was not a Christian, an argument that is hard to deny given the content of the prayer as outlined above. This weaponization rhetoric chastises Borowicz and frames her prayer as something that served to attack others and to silence them. Certainly, it was not a prayer meant to gather everyone together under the tent of civil service; rather, it was a call for Christians (and *only* Christians) to band together to reject the “evils” present in anyone who believes something different.

Harris then uses two critical words to describe the outcomes he associates with Borowicz’s prayer: hate and divisiveness. Each of these were directed by the prayer at anyone who would disagree with Borowicz’s assertion that “Jesus [is] our only hope.” If one does not agree with Borowicz on that, then they fall under her category of evil doers who are polluting the world with their “wicked ways.” Harris astutely points out that this hate and divisiveness should have no place in civic governance. It is not the job of the chamber to protect a religious perspective such as Christianity, Harris argues; rather, it is the job of the chamber to serve the constituents and *all* the constituents, regardless of their religious creed. One wonders if Borowicz is committed to serving all the constituents in her district, or only those whose religious beliefs closely align with her own.

The next argument that Harris makes is very compelling as a response to Borowicz’s arguments about the need for more Christian governance. Harris makes clear that he himself is a Christian and that he believes in the teachings of Christ. However, he offers a very different

interpretation than that of Johnson-Harrell: “What I believe is Christ’s teaching more than anything. And his teaching would not be about, and was not about, dividing us as a people, but uniting us as a people.” Here, Harris is attempting to turn Borowicz’s words, and her tragic framing of her religious argument against her. Even as Borowicz argues using Christian theology, Harris counters her argument with a different, and comically framed, interpretation of that same theology. Harris points towards Christ’s call for unity and peace, rather than anger and division, as the ultimate rebuke against Borowicz’s prayer. This comic framing highlights the value of diversity in the individual person, the need for multiple pathways to redemption, and the emphasis on collective human effort and will.

Finally, Harris concludes his argument by turning to what the central role of Borowicz, Johnson-Harrell, Harris, and everyone else in the legislature is: to serve their constituents. Harris argues that it is not a divisive and hateful prayer like Borowicz’s that will get things done for the state of Pennsylvania, but rather an argument for inclusion and unity. In doing so, he is explicitly acknowledging the comic interpretation of the scene in emphasizing the need for a diversity of opinion, the humanness of all of us, and the pathway towards human redemption that is open to all regardless of religion or creed.

The responses by Johnson-Harrell and Harris both align with the comic framework for interpretation. Both emphasize the need for religious diversity and the need to keep explicit calls to a specific religious practice out of the state legislature. Both do not paint Borowicz even as a scapegoat herself, but rather argue for a broader understanding of human fallibility and redemption outside of the Christian perspective. For Johnson-Harrell and Harris, the role of religion is not to beat people over the head with it, or to convert others. It is to recognize the

oneness of humanity and celebrate a diversity of perspective. In this way, the comic frame is used to understand a narrative redemption arc available to all people, not merely Christians.

Borowicz's prayer frames Christianity as the only solution for what she sees as a corrupt and immoral society. Harrell-Johnson's and Harris's responses, on the other hand, illustrate an alternative to this Burkean tragic frame: a comic frame that highlights a multiplicity of paths towards solving problems and embraces the potential of religious diversity. These responses are also seen as rhetorically conservative, even as they come from politically progressive voices. Hayden White (1973) argues that comic framing is inclined towards conservatism and the maintaining of the status quo. The responses by Johnson-Harrell and Harris advocate for a return to the normalcy of modern civic society with an emphasis on equality, diversity, and respect.

The responses to Borowicz's prayer also illustrate that pure secularism as the removal of religious dialogue completely from the public sphere is not what either rhetor desires. Instead, they both advocate for a recognition and celebration of a multiplicity of religious viewpoints, without the privileging of any one practice over the others. The difference between tragically framed language, where there is only one path forward and this path involves transforming the status quo, and comically framed language, where there are places for disagreement and compromise and change is made incrementally through popular consent, is not easily bridged. Borowicz sees Christian nationalism as the only path towards the redemption of American social life, while Johnson-Harrell and Harris argue for a diversity of religious perspectives as beneficial to the furthering of this social life. Because the language that each is using is so radically different, there is a disagreement that goes beyond political ideology or religious belief. It is a fundamental difference in how audiences can and do interpret different forms of argument.

The responses align with Charles Taylor's argument for a new secularism that seeks to find ways to encourage religious dialogue without moving towards Christian nationalism. I argue that this new secularism, or civic religious pluralism, may be able to displace traditional secularism as the counterweight to Christian nationalism in the public sphere.

Charles Taylor and the Meaning of Secularism

In a contribution to Mendieta and Vanantwerpen's *The Power of Religion in the Public Sphere* (2011), Charles Taylor argues that we should reconsider our definition of secularism and what it means for a nation to be founded on "secular" principles. Taylor's goal in redefining the term is to better understand how it is that we can accept and even embrace religious pluralism while maintaining an equality among these perspectives in the formal public sphere. For Taylor, the answer lies not in the complete abstention from religious logic, but in the acceptance of a plurality of perspectives without the privileging of any particular religious creed or argument. In devising his new definition of secularism, Taylor highlights three elements that are central to a secular nation-state: liberty, equality, and fraternity.

The first of these, liberty, concerns the religious freedom of expression that is codified in our First Amendment. Taylor notes that this includes not only the right to believe what one chooses to believe about religion, but it also protects the right to not believe. In short, we all have the right to our own chosen mode of religious expression so long as it does not curtail the rights of others and does not break the law. We also have a right to not believe in any religious creed if we so choose. This ideal of liberty is critical because it is a protection of individual rights, something that is central to any functioning liberal democratic state.

The second element of secularism that Taylor seeks to highlight is equality. This is a focus on equal treatment given to all religious practices and to those who do not believe. The

state cannot privilege any religion (or non-religious beliefs) over any other, and there must be, in the public space of civil discourse, adequate protections given to all. Everyone should feel free to participate in religious discussion no matter their creed and their voice should be given equal weight. In this equality, Taylor is not suggesting the blocking out of religious argumentation that others have (Habermas 1962; Rawls, 1993) . Rather, he is emphasizing that religious argumentation *can* be afforded a space at the table so long as it is not given a *privileged* space.

Finally, the third element of a secular state that Taylor highlights is fraternity. By this, Taylor means that “all spiritual families must be heard, included in the ongoing process of determining what the society is about... and how it is going to realize these goals” (2011) . Not only should a variety of religious arguments be permitted in the public space, but they should be encouraged to ensure a diversity of viewpoints and to solidify a feeling of community and togetherness within the populace. Religious and non-religious people can all come together to make their voices heard and to hear others in a respectful and unbiased manner, and it is this spirit of unity that helps codify the place of the nation-state as an entity of respect and power. Through liberty, equality, and fraternity, we recognize the plurality of perspectives around us and work to ensure a diversity of beliefs in our political system.

Taylor notes that these obligations can often come into conflict with one another, and he ties these conflicts to a central problem. For Taylor, we have been conceptualizing secularism as a relationship between church and state, when we should rather think of it as the response of the state to issues of diversity. The goals of secularism outlined above have three commonalities that Taylor highlights:

1. They are concerned with protecting people’s right to practice whatever belief they hold (or the right to non-belief).

2. Whatever their choice, all people are treated equally.
3. All people are given an equal right to a voice in the political system.

When considering secularism from this perspective, this goes beyond a fixation on religion and its place within state functions. Instead, Taylor's new definition of secularism considers the place of religious diversity within the civic space and how the state can work to help this diversity flourish. As the diversity expands, the state also has an obligation to ensure that practitioners are protected in their rights to practice and their equal treatment under the law. They also must be given freedom to express their perspective on political matters so long as they do so in a manner that reflects their commitment to an equality of perspectives.

My analysis in this chapter shows how a discursive position aligned with Taylor's new definition of secularism provides a lens through which we can view the controversy. Rather than promoting liberty of religious choice, equality of religious perspective, and fraternity among religious voices, Borowicz instead privileges Christianity as the only religion that should be given space in the public sphere, subtly chastises members of the nation-state who may be non-believers, and the timing of her prayer makes it clear that she seeks to eliminate any sense of fraternity between herself and practitioners of other religious practices (particularly Ms. Johnson-Harrell, a Muslim congresswoman). The secularism described by Taylor relies on a comic framing of events that emphasizes the pathways to redemption for the fallen and highlights the need for an equality of perspectives among all people. Movements toward Christian theocracy, on the other hand, focus on a tragic framing that emphasizes the finality of a decision and a lack of potential for redemption for those outside the "one true truth", so to speak. But it is also this pluralism, framed comically, that itself stands in the way of reconciliation, so long as the opposite side maintains a radical tragic frame of the proper role of religion in secular society.

The Role of Taylor's New Definition of Secularism

Taylor wants to redefine secularization to mean not the *exclusion* of religion from the public sphere, but rather the ability of all people to practice the religion (or non-religion) of their choice and the necessity of the state to ensure the right to this participation. Taylor also emphasizes that the state must also prevent any religion from having a dominant voice; all religious practices are to be treated equally. Taylor provides three elements that must be present in a contemporary secular state: liberty, equality, and fraternity. I argue that Borowicz's prayer violates all three of these tenets and that the response by Rep. Johnson-Harrell and Jordan Harris affirm them.

Liberty. Borowicz's prayer serves as a clear violation of the religious liberty tenet of secularism. Borowicz explicitly calls Jesus Christ "our only hope," and quotes Scripture to encourage people to "turn from their wicked ways" so that God may "heal our land." She asks for forgiveness for the current state of the country, placing the blame for our social ills at the feet of unbelievers. Borowicz does not present any evidence that her worldview is tolerant of other religious practices or agnosticism/atheism, and she makes it clear throughout her prayer that she believes it is only through Jesus Christ, an explicitly Christian figure, can the United States prosper. In short, Borowicz does not believe that non-Christians are contributing members to society, and she seeks to instead turn civil government towards a Christ-centered approach to governance, at the expense of anyone who may believe something different.

The responses by Johnson-Harrell and Harris, on the other hand, emphasize this need for religious liberty. Johnson-Harrell points out the religious diversity present in the friends and family that came to see her sworn in, noting that the group consisted of Christians, Jews, Muslims, and others. Harris likewise points to unity and love as solutions to solving the

problems facing their constituents rather than hate and divisiveness, which he attributes to Borowicz's prayer. Johnson-Harrell and Harris identify the need for all people to feel comfortable to practice the religion of their choice and the need for legislators to be open to all of their constituents, not merely those who align with their personal religious worldview.

Equality. On the grounds of religious equality, Borowicz's prayer falls short. Borowicz makes no acknowledgement of other religions in her prayer, and by peppering the prayer with references to Jesus throughout, she makes it clear that this is a Christian prayer. Not only is the prayer explicitly Christian, but the context in which it was given violates Taylor's vision for religious equality. There appears to have been no other prayers or invocations given that day by members of other religious practices. Even if there had been, it is important to note that it is impossible for the state government to provide for specific prayers for every religious practice that exists among Pennsylvania residents (there would need to be hundreds of prayers given). The solution, clearly, that Taylor proposes is that under no circumstances should a prayer be given in a public setting, such as the state house, that emphasizes the value of one religious practice over another, as Borowicz's prayer so clearly does.

Johnson-Harrell and Harris provide a more nuanced approach to Taylor's call for religious equality. Johnson-Harrell removes the label "prayer" from Borowicz's screed, instead referring to it as a "radical political statement disguised as prayer." By changing the terms, Johnson-Harrell is making the argument that under no circumstances could something as Christian-centric as Borowicz's prayer be considered appropriate for a legislative session precisely because it violates this ideal of equality of religious voices. Similarly, Harris says that "prayer was weaponized from the speaker's dais", reaffirming that the prayer was a violation of the principle of freedom of religious expression.

Fraternity. Finally, Taylor calls for what he refers to as fraternity, or the encouragement of a diversity of spiritual viewpoints. This is distinct from equality in that equality focuses on the *right* of all religious groups to participate in public deliberation, while fraternity focuses on the *need* for these voices to be heard. Rather than merely claiming that we give open voice to all religious viewpoints, fraternity is about the encouragement of a diversity of religious viewpoints. For Taylor, the liberal nation-state must seek out a diversity of viewpoints and consider the ways that alternative spiritual practices may give us unique insights into issues of civic importance. When we seek out this religious diversity, we strengthen our common cause among citizens and find ways to reconceptualize the problems we are facing.

Borowicz's prayer falls short in the area of fraternity, as well. Borowicz does not want a religious diversity of perspective; she wants Christianity to be the singular religious voice in the legislature. There are clear calls for a move towards Christian theocracy - "Jesus, you're our only hope;" "at the name of Jesus every knee will bow and every tongue confess..."; "turn from their wicked ways... and you will heal our land;" - that violate any idea that Borowicz might appreciate alternative religious conceptions. The prayer makes it clear that for Borowicz, Christianity is not only the dominant voice; it is the *only* voice. By locking out the perspective of different religious traditions, Borowicz is preventing a diversity of worldview that is necessary for the functioning of a pluralistic democracy.

The responses by Johnson-Harrell and Harris touch on the need for a diversity of worldview, although not as explicitly as the need for religious liberty and equality. Johnson-Harrell points out the value that she hopes to bring as the first Muslim congresswoman in the state legislature, and Harris also begins his response by pointing out that the day was supposed to be a celebration of religious diversity. While neither of them explicitly mentions a need for a

wide variety of religious voices in public deliberation, both make it clear that a prayer that focuses on one religious tradition at the expense of all others is a violation of their civic duty as legislators.

Charles Taylor's new definition of secularism consists of three components: liberty, equality, and fraternity. On all three of these metrics, the Borowicz prayer is seen as a violation of the tenets of secularism and can be approached instead as a call for Christian theocracy. There is an explicit focus on Christian teaching and principles, a lack of openness to a diversity of religious perspective and appeals to Christ as the ultimate authority. In contrast, the response of Rep. Johnson-Harrell and House Democratic Whip Jordan Harris highlight these elements of secularism and encourage a more open and welcome environment for the expression of different religious views.

Implications and Future Directions

This study has explored one key artifact, a prayer given on the floor of the Pennsylvania State House by state congresswoman Stephanie Borowicz, and two responses to the prayer, one by Representative Movita Johnson-Harrell, a Muslim congresswoman who was set to be sworn in later that day, and one by Jordan Harris, the House Democratic Whip. The prayer itself serves as a pro-Christian, pro-theocracy statement that emphasizes the role of Christ in Borowicz's political worldview. For Borowicz, the state is not a liberal, open space for deliberation and a diversity of perspective, or rather, it *should not* be. Borowicz's prayer makes explicit the argument that Christianity should serve as the moral compass upon which the laws of Pennsylvania are founded. She connects major figures in the history of the country to Christianity, despite the tenuous nature of these claims, and she makes it clear that without Jesus, she believes the world will devolve into evil. The responses by Johnson-Harrell and Harris, on

the other hand, emphasize the political nature of Borowicz's prayer, argue against the privileging of Christianity over other faiths, and call for a more open and welcoming space for unity and collaboration in the state legislature.

We should be careful not to consider this prayer an isolated incident. While Republican leaders in Pennsylvania distanced themselves from Borowicz's prayer, I argue that this may only be because Borowicz "said the quiet part out loud," so to speak. There are a multitude of connections that can be made between GOP policies and the pursuit of power by evangelical Christian leaders, including other examples given in this dissertation. Future research should continue to call out questions of Christian theocracy and Christian nationalism and should continue to encourage a diversity of religious viewpoints in places of public deliberation.

Where Charles Taylor's new definition of secularism takes us is to a place of celebration and openness with regards to religious expression. While other scholars call for the restriction of religious argumentation in the public sphere, Taylor encourages all religious views to have a voice, and for their voice to not only be tolerated but *encouraged* in deliberation. The only restriction that must be placed on this freedom of expression is ensuring that no voice is privileged over others, a particularly thorny issue with regards to a religion that has always been perceived as dominant (such as Christianity in the United States). If we can control ourselves against the privileging of one perspective, however, opening up the public sphere to a diversity of viewpoints makes us all more connected to the religious views of others around us, and it may open our eyes to perspectives that we hadn't considered before.

Taylor's new definition of secularism allows for a new understanding of the Borowicz prayer and the subsequent responses to it. Borowicz's prayer serves as one extreme on the spectrum of religious dialogue in the public sphere. It is unfettered theocracy, a blatant call for

Christian nationalism framed tragically to exclude any alternative perspectives. But whereas many see the other side of this spectrum as pure secularism, the complete removal of religious discourse from the public sphere, the responses by Harrell-Johnson and Jordan Harris instead illustrate something different. They align with Charles Taylor's new definition of secularism, one that still recognizes the value of religious thought so long as it does not privilege one religious practice over another. Secularism, then, is not the force that pushes and pulls back against Christian nationalism, but rather I argue that Taylor's new secularism, which I have termed here civic religious pluralism, is the counterweight. This civic religious pluralism encourages a diversity of perspectives, including religious and non-religious views, while recognizing the dangers of any one view elevating itself as superior over others. This new understanding of the place of religion in the public sphere helps us to see how religious dialogue may still find a place within public deliberation that is acceptable to religious followers and to non-religious citizens.

CH. 3: MORALITY OR THEOLOGY: DONALD TRUMP, CHRISTIANITY TODAY, AND EVANGELICAL CHRISTIANITY'S RESPONSE

Religion without morality is a superstition and a curse, and morality without religion is impossible.

-Mark Hopkins

Introduction

The case of Stephanie Borowicz concerns Christian nationalist dialogue and its place in the public sphere. It also touches on issues of division and unity, and questions of how a politician with an explicit religious tradition can represent constituents who may not share those beliefs. It is hard to argue that Borowicz's prayer wasn't a call for theocracy, but it is more difficult to understand what role religion plays in the eyes of her supporters and her constituents, and the punishment that Borowicz faced as a result of her prayer was rather light. The prayer also placed Christian nationalism and secularism as opposing forces while tragically framing Christian nationalism as a necessary transformation of civic life and secularism as the maintenance of the status quo.

The second case study of this dissertation, on the other hand, focuses on how religious audiences perceive a politician who speaks to them and connects with them. Donald Trump relied on the evangelical vote to win the presidency in 2016, and there were only minor rifts in the Christian support he enjoyed for the first two years of his presidency. In late 2019, however, Trump was impeached by the House of Representatives, and the Christian support for him felt its first real ripple. How Christian rhetors framed their support for, or antipathy towards, Trump is the chief focus of this chapter. Like in chapter 2, the goal here is to assess the deliberative space in which questions about the role of religion in civic matters are contested, and to argue that in

analyzing an illustrative example, we can find alternative ways of understanding the configuration of this deliberative space and nuance our insights from chapter 2.

President Donald Trump's 2020 State of the Union address was delivered on February 4, 2020, just a day before the Senate was scheduled to vote on the articles of impeachment drafted against him. There was little doubt that the President would be acquitted, and the impeachment ordeal played only a minor role in his speech. Trump did, however, touch explicitly on the role religion plays in his policy efforts:

My Administration is also defending religious liberty, and that includes the Constitutional right to pray in public schools. In America, we do not punish prayer. We do not tear down crosses. We do not ban symbols of faith. We do not muzzle preachers and pastors. In America, we celebrate faith. We cherish religion. We lift our voices in prayer, and we raise our sights to the Glory of God!

The next day, Utah Republican Senator Mitt Romney became the first Senator in United States history to vote for the removal of a President from office who was a member of their own party. In a speech justifying his decision, Romney laid out his rationale in plainly religious terms:

The allegations made in the articles of impeachment are very serious. As a Senator-juror, I swore an oath before God to exercise impartial justice. I am profoundly religious. My faith is at the heart of who I am. I take an oath before God as enormously consequential. I knew from the outset that being tasked with judging the President, a leader of my own party, would be the most difficult decision I have ever faced. I was not wrong.

Donald Trump and Mitt Romney serve as an interesting opening to this case study, as they illustrate the divisions that can erupt even within a single religious tradition. While Trump

and Romney do not share denominations, both share an identification as members of the broader Christian community. Despite this shared religious ideology, the impeachment effort against Donald Trump placed them on opposite sides of the ideological aisle, while both continued to use religion as a rationale for their argumentative purpose.

Donald Trump has served as a divisive issue within Christianity, garnering a significant amount of Evangelical support while also drawing his fair share of Christian detractors. For some, Trump has become a sort of litmus test: for both supporters and detractors, the connection to Trump is seen as a marker of one's true Christianity. Those who oppose Donald Trump claim that Christians who follow him are hypocrites ignoring the teachings of Jesus Christ, while those who support him believe that he is a religious leader born to lead America in this specific cultural moment as a devout Christian servant of God.

For Christians, there is a great deal of consternation and urgency in their differing approaches to the Presidency of Donald Trump within an American culture of increased secularization. McCaffree (2017) defines secularism not as merely the decline in religious participation within a society, but rather as a decline in the influence and power that a religion holds within a community. Many Christians perceive this to be the case in America in recent years. Not only has church attendance declined, but the Christian church has lost some of its former position of authority as a political and social voice in the mainstream. President Trump was seen by many Evangelical Christians as a push back against the dilution of religious political power. Support for Trump, then, is not merely support of a *candidate*; it is connected to support of a religious *way of life* and a call for a return to prominence of religion in the political and public sphere.

Opponents of Donald Trump, meanwhile, point not only to his dubious personal character but also to how Trump may have a lasting effect on the perception of the Christian faith to the American people. The list of Trump's personal indiscretions is long, but the highlights will suffice: an affair with a porn star; referring to Mexicans as "rapists"; mocking a disabled reporter; referring to several African nations as "shithole" countries; bragging about "grabbing women by the p***y". To his detractors, this is plainly not the actions or language of a devoutly Christian person. In addition to his moral failings, his opponents also point to the dangers of Trump continuing to garner public support from Christians. This support, coupled with his list of transgressions, leads many to a view of Christianity as hypocritical in their blind support of a President merely because he claims the mantle of the Christian faith (Luo, 2019). In short, for his opponents, Trump presents an existential threat to Christianity and any claims it may make to moral leadership in the future.

This article explores the rift that has developed within Christianity as a result of the Presidency of Donald Trump. I do this through a rhetorical analysis of two artifacts: a prominent *Christianity Today* editorial that called for Trump's removal from office and a letter written in response (and opposition) to the editorial and signed by over 200 Evangelical Christian leaders. This editorial and its response demonstrate how Trump is seen differently by competing factions within Christianity. My analysis of these artifacts highlights the religious rhetoric that both sides draw on to make their argument and emphasizes the competing interpretations of religious doctrine that guide their rationales. While Trump and his supporters attempt to conflate these two, there is also a conscious movement within Christianity to maintain a separation between the faith and the civil religion of American patriotism. Galli's editorial and the response to it illustrate the different strategies used to talk about Trump and what these strategies say about the

rhetors involved. While Galli carefully crafts his argument to be readily accessible to both evangelicals and the broader Christian, and even non-Christian, community, the evangelical letter in response is explicitly designed to talk to evangelical Christians in a much narrower way.

In this chapter, I first describe the ascension of Donald Trump within the Republican party as first a candidate for the Presidency and, later, as the elected President and its connection to religious, specifically evangelical Christian, support. I then use Stephen Toulmin's model for effective argumentation as a lens through which I rhetorically analyze the *Christianity Today* article calling for Trump's removal from office and the letter written by a collection of 200 Evangelical leaders in opposition to this editorial. I argue that the language used by both the editorial and by Evangelical leaders served to amplify the editorial in ways that served to further highlight the split within Christian circles regarding Trump. These two artifacts serve to present conflicting views towards the role of Christianity within American civic and political life. This analysis then leads to a consideration of the work of Robert Bellah, whose concept of civil religion grants a place for religious discourse in American politics so long as it does not privilege one practice over any other, much like Taylor's new secularism. I argue that Bellah contributes to civic religious pluralism through a recognition of religion's place in the history of America's public sphere and the need to find a counterweight to Christian nationalism that is less restrictive than pure secularism.

Donald Trump, Christian Nationalism, and American Civil Religion

Donald Trump's bid for the Presidency in 2016 began with political outrage. When Trump first descended the escalators at Trump Tower and announced his bid for the Republican nomination for President of the United States in June of 2015, his speech immediately garnered pushback for its treatment of Mexican immigrants crossing the border: "When Mexico sends its

people, they're not sending their best. They're sending people that have lots of problems, and they're bringing those problems with us [sic]. They're bringing drugs, they're bringing crime, they are rapists. And some, I assume, are good people" (Gabbatt, 2018 n. p.). Despite this quote and the press response to it, Trump quickly rose to the top of the list of Republican nominees for the Presidency. As the campaign continued, Trump would continue his penchant for saying things that were politically incorrect at best, and racist and xenophobic at worst. Even as his detractors grew more vocal about the dangers he posed to the American political landscape, Trump won the Republican nomination for President. On November 8, 2016, Donald Trump defeated Democratic nominee Hillary Clinton to become the 45th President of the United States.

The rise of Trump, and his electoral success despite a lack of political experience or finesse, has been a topic of exploration for researchers since his nomination. Some have connected his rise to economic fears (Berezin, 2017), sexism towards Hillary Clinton (Edgell, 2017), and anti-Muslim and xenophobic attitudes (K. L. Blair, 2016; Ekins, 2017). However, another compelling argument is made by Whitehead, Perry, and Baker (2018) that Trump's rise may also be due in part to a tradition of Christian nationalism that has intertwined itself with the American civil religion initially developed by Robert Bellah (1967; 1992) and others. In this, Trump may have found an ability to connect Christian theological concerns with Republican economic and social political priorities to garner strong Evangelical Christian support. In short, Donald Trump and the GOP may have conflated love of country with love of Christianity, and in so doing made themselves the clear choice for Christian voters.

Donald Trump and the Rise of Christian Nationalism

During the Presidential campaign of 2016, Donald Trump made his fair share of faux pas related to religion and Christianity. He referred to a book of the Bible as "Two

Corinthians,” rather than the more standard “Second Corinthians” (Taylor 2016). He previously admitted to having never asked God for forgiveness, something that is central to the Christian faith (Tani, 2017). During an interview, he failed to identify specific verses of the Bible that stood out to him, claiming that was very personal, and when asked if he preferred the Old Testament or New Testament, he responded, “Probably equal... I think it’s just incredible, the whole Bible is incredible” (Zorn, 2016). When discussing Communion, he referred to it as “my little wine... and my little cracker,” (L. Blair, 2016), hardly the language a typical believer might use to discuss the Holy Sacraments, and while attending church he mistook the Communion plate for an offering plate. These gaffes point to a candidate who is, at best, uncomfortable discussing religion and at worst, has a complete lack of institutional knowledge about common religious practices.

Despite these mistakes, Donald Trump garnered significant Christian support during the Republican primary and won over 80% of the Evangelical Christian vote in the 2016 Presidential election (Martinez & Smith, 2016). As Haberman (2018) details, the past four decades have seen a concerted effort by evangelical Christians to support Republican policies and candidates in a bid to garner political support for Christian priorities such as anti-abortion and anti-LGBTQ laws. By 2016, the connection between evangelical Christianity and the Republican party was ensconced in the mind of the public. Despite Hillary Clinton’s public declarations of her faith and even adapting a Methodist phrase as a campaign slogan (“Do all the good you can, for all the people you can, in all the ways you can, as long as you ever can”), Christian voters overwhelmingly voted for Donald Trump.

The reasons for the Christian support of Republican candidates and policies is tied to harnessing political power, but it is also related to a new interpretation of American civil

religion. While the country was founded on the ideals of religious participation as a tool for moral and civic virtue, the Republican party's connections to Republican politics demonstrates a desire to make America a more explicitly Christian nation. For many Christians, it is not enough to say this is a nation founded on religious ideals; our past is now reinterpreted to conceptualize America as a Christian nation from the outset, and therefore Christianity can and should be the religion of the country as a whole (Seidel, 2019). This conflation of Christianity and American nationalism is not only dangerous for religious minorities and non-religious people, but it also diminishes the voices of those Christians who maintain their private faith while recognizing the role of government and secular argumentation in the public square.

This debate was crystallized in late 2019, when an editorial from a prominent Christian magazine directly condemned President Donald Trump during his impeachment trial. Mark Galli, the editor of *Christianity Today*, penned a bombshell of an editorial: "Trump should be removed from office" (2019). This editorial called out not only the impeachable offenses of Donald Trump but pointed more broadly to his moral failings and the dangers to public perceptions of Christianity in continually defending him. The editorial caused an uproar among the evangelical Christian community, culminating in a harsh rebuke of the editorial signed by over 200 evangelical leaders across the country (Barnhart, 2019). This document not only defended Trump but attacked Galli and *Christianity Today* for daring to raise concerns from a Christian perspective about the President. The editorial from *Christianity Today* and the subsequent response by evangelical leaders serve as the artifacts for this rhetorical analysis.

Analysis

Contextual Analysis of Artifacts

This essay rhetorically analyzes two artifacts: an editorial calling for the impeachment of President Trump in the prominent Christian magazine *Christianity Today*, and a contentious response to the editorial signed by over 200 Evangelical Christian pastors and leaders in the United States. I argue that by analyzing these two competing texts, we can understand the tension that exists between those seeking to maintain the place of American civil religion and those who seek to replace it with a more explicitly Christian government.

Each of these artifacts carry with them contextual characteristics that should be noted prior to embarking on a rhetorical analysis. It is vital that we understand the context that surrounds the texts and that inform their presentation and interpretation. This analysis concerns specific linguistic strategies employed by both Mark Galli, the author of the *CT* editorial, and by the Evangelical faith leaders who collectively signed the open letter in response to the editorial. These strategies are inseparable from the outlet through which they are published, the author and their connection to the issue of Donald Trump and impeachment, and a consideration of the intended audience of the text.

The *CT* editorial serves as a rare rebuke against Trump from a seemingly conservative outlet. The editorial's author, Mark Galli, begins the editorial by outlining the normal stance taken by *CT* regarding political matters:

The typical *CT* approach is to stay above the fray and allow Christians with different political convictions to make their arguments in the public square, to encourage all to pursue justice according to their convictions and treat their political opposition as charitably as possible. We want *CT* to be a place that welcomes Christians from across

the political spectrum and reminds everyone that politics is not the end and purpose of our being. We take pride in the fact, for instance, that politics does not dominate our homepage.

That said, we do feel it necessary from time to time to make our own opinions on political matters clear—always, as [*CT* founder Billy] Graham encouraged us, doing so with both conviction and love. We love and pray for our president, as we love and pray for leaders (as well as ordinary citizens) on both sides of the political aisle.

Galli is making clear that his goal in the editorial is not political attacks or increased polarization among Christians, but rather to always consider the major news of the day from an evangelical Christian perspective. He also makes a concerted effort to highlight the need for prayer for Donald Trump and those with whom we disagree. That said, as the editorial moves forward, Galli does make his own opinion on the matter of Trump's impeachment clear.

As Galli moves forward into his critique of Trump, he softens the force of his argument by explicitly disconnecting critique of Trump from support for the Democratic party, Trump's political opponents. Galli notes that “the Democrats have had it out for him [Trump] since day one,” and he writes that everything the Democrats did in the lead up to the impeachment trial is “under a cloud of partisan suspicion.” He points out his belief that Trump was not given a fair opportunity to respond to his accusers during the trial. These rhetorical attacks on Democrats and the impeachment serve to soften the impact of Galli's turn towards his critique of the President:

But the facts in this instance are unambiguous: The president of the United States attempted to use his political power to coerce a foreign leader to harass and discredit one of the president's political opponents. That is not only a violation of the Constitution; more importantly, it is profoundly immoral.

The editorial then turns to a critique of Trump's Presidency. Galli focuses in on the immoral aspect of the Trump administration: he has "dumbed down the idea of morality in his administration"; he "hired and fired" a number of former or now convicted criminals; Trump admitted to immoral relationships with women and in running his personal businesses; Trump's "Twitter feed alone—with its habitual string of mischaracterizations, lies, and slanders—is a near perfect example of a human being who is morally lost and confused." Galli uses these examples to reinforce his argument in the preceding paragraph that it is not only Trump's violation of Constitutional law that is the problem; it is his character and his moral compass, as well.

Galli begins the editorial by critiquing Democrats to soften the impact of his critique of Trump's morality. He then bookends his critique of Trump with more hedges that highlight evangelical Christian support for many of Trump's conservative policies, including protection of religious liberty and the nominating of conservative Supreme Court justices. Galli then once again pivots the argument away from policy and towards morality:

The impeachment hearings have illuminated the president's moral deficiencies for all to see. This damages the institution of the presidency, damages the reputation of our country, and damages both the spirit and the future of our people. None of the president's positives can balance the moral and political danger we face under a leader of such grossly immoral character.

Galli then continues his focus on Trump's morality by smartly pivoting to *CT*'s coverage of the Monica Lewinsky scandal during the Presidency of Bill Clinton, a Democrat President who was critiqued by evangelical Christians long before he had an affair with a White House intern. Galli highlights some of the writings of past *CT* editorials that critiqued Clinton's morality and his character, before twisting the rhetorical knife: "Unfortunately, the words that we

applied to Mr. Clinton 20 years ago apply almost perfectly to our current president.” Galli is attempting to highlight a double standard of evangelical Christians who unquestioningly support Trump despite his moral misgivings.

In concluding his argument, Galli poses a series of rhetorical questions to evangelical Christians who continue to support Donald Trump. The thrust of Galli’s argument is the irrevocable damage that the Trump Presidency is doing to any future claims to moral authority that Christians may have. Galli argues that if evangelical Christians cling to Donald Trump, then his moral failings become their moral failings: “Can we say with a straight face that abortion is a great evil that cannot be tolerated and, with the same straight face, say that the bent and broken character of our nation’s leader doesn’t really matter in the end?” As he ends his editorial, Galli calls for Trump’s morality to become a major concern for Christian voters, and once again points to the future of Christianity’s moral authority as an argument for why Trump should be removed from office.

Donald Trump has largely enjoyed the support of conservative and religious groups, and it is evident from Trump’s personal response to the editorial that he may have been caught off-guard by its publication. On Twitter, Donald Trump responded to the editorial:

A far left magazine, or very ‘progressive,’ as some would call it, which has been doing poorly and hasn’t been involved with the Billy Graham family for many years, *Christianity Today*, knows nothing about reading a perfect transcript of a routine phone call and would rather have a Radical Left nonbeliever, who wants to take your religion & your guns, than Donald Trump as your President. (Trump, 2019).

In this response, Donald Trump makes clear that he views the editorial as a political attack, rather than as a nonpartisan opinion piece. In fact, this tweet can be taken as confirmation

of one of Galli's central arguments, that Trump's Twitter feed serves as argument enough for his lack of morality. Trump falsely calls *Christianity Today* a "far-left, or progressive" magazine, criticizes Galli's reading of the transcript (despite there being no mention of the transcript in the editorial), and conflates criticism of himself with support of a "radical Left non-believer" (Galli makes no mention of other candidates or what political choice a Trump defector should make). What is even more fascinating, however, is that *Christianity Today* has not been exclusively critical of the President in its coverage of his administration.

As a religious magazine, *Christianity Today* has been more conflicted about the Presidency of Donald Trump than most. During his Presidency, there have been a significant number of articles criticizing some of his policy decisions (Annan, 2018; McNeel, 2020; Shellnutt, 2017a; Weber, 2017), with a number of articles supporting his policies as well (Binkley & Shor, 2020; Shellnutt, 2017b; Stetzer, 2018). While the magazine has been more critical of Trump than others, it can hardly be seen as a "far left" or "progressive" outlet. It is further worth noting that nowhere in the editorial or in *Christianity Today*'s archives is there a call for a "Radical Left nonbeliever" or anything of the like to be the President. As evidenced by the language used throughout the editorial, Galli captures the nuances of the magazine's positions in critiquing Trump while espousing praise for some of his specific policy decisions.

Mark Galli, the author of the *Christianity Today* editorial and the editor-in-chief of the magazine at the time of the editorial's publication, certainly understood both the place of his magazine in the larger political landscape and his potential audience. In comments to CNN shortly after publication, Galli admitted as much: "I don't have any imaginations [sic] that my editorial is going to shift their views on this matter. The fact of the matter is that *Christianity Today* is not read by Christians on the far right, by evangelicals on the far right. So, they're going

to be as dismissive of the magazine as President Trump has shown to be” (Gordon, 2019). Given its place as a more nuanced, and some might say centrist, perspective towards Trump, Galli recognized that his editorial would not be well-received by Trump’s supporters. This informs the way Galli writes about the impeachment and about the Christian obligation towards supporting morality in the public square, and it allows him to present the full thrust of his argument without couching it in terms that may be more welcoming for Trump supporters. In short, Galli is aware of who his audience is: Christians, many of them still conservative politically, who nonetheless find Donald Trump to be problematic as both a President and as a public exemplar for Christianity.

In contrast, the open letter written in response to Galli’s editorial makes no pretenses about its support for Donald Trump. The authors write forcefully of their support for Trump, and they extend this support beyond policy to include his character as well. It is these evangelical leaders, among others, who played a major role in Trump garnering over 80% of the evangelical Christian vote. The authors of the open letter certainly recognize their position and the difficulty presented by contradicting their previous support for Trump were they to be critical of him. The letter maintains support for the President and rebukes the outlet, while also questioning its legitimacy.

Galli’s perspective on his own magazine seems not to be shared by his most vocal opponents. In their open letter, the authors make a point of expressing their prior connection to *Christianity Today*:

Of course, it’s up to your publication to decide whether or not your magazine intends to be a voice of evangelicals like those represented by the signatories below, and it is up to

us and those Evangelicals like us to decide if we should subscribe to, advertise in and read your publication online and in print, but historically, we have been your readers. While Galli believes that his readership is largely not the evangelical Christians who support Trump, the authors of the open letter explicitly note that they are, in fact, readers of the magazine (or at least that they have consistently read the magazine in the past). Contained in this passage is also an explicit threat to cut off subscriptions and advertising based on Galli's editorial. It is clear that the evangelical authors of the letter do not plan on giving the same "far radical Left" designation to the paper that Trump espouses, but they also clearly are concerned about the direction that the magazine is moving with the publication of an explicit call for Trump's removal from office.

The authors next turn towards a description of their support of Trump by listing the various policies that they support, and that Trump has been an advocate for: pro-life, religious freedom, parental rights, and protecting the State of Israel, among others. By highlighting these policies, the authors build their own position and seem to silently place Galli on the other side of these issues. They do not mention in their letter that Galli's editorial acknowledged his support of some of Trump's policies, including pro-life positions. By omitting this part of the editorial in their response, the authors paint Galli as inherently *against* each of the policies they outline. They conflate Trump with his policies, and support or criticism of Trump as inherent support or criticism of each of those policies.

The next sentence of the open letter serves as highly contradictory and will be explored more fully in the linguistic analysis, but it bears mentioning here as well: "We are not theocrats, and we recognize that our imperfect political system is a reflection of the fallen world within which we live, reliant upon the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, which is freely given to sinner and

saint, alike.” There is a rhetorical decision to pay lip service to the ideal of religious pluralism by denying any theocratic motivation, immediately followed by explicitly religious language to explain their political worldview. This is not a contradiction that is resolved later in the letter, which turns to a conflation of the evangelical leaders with Jesus Christ in their efforts to be engaged in public service.

The letter then criticizes the impeachment trial that the Christianity Today editorial was written about. The trial is characterized by the evangelical authors as “entirely-partisan, legally dubious, and politically motivated”, and the authors remain incredulous at Galli’s support for impeachment of Trump. Further, the authors argue, they rail against Galli’s suggestion that, impeachment trial notwithstanding, Trump should not be voted for again in 2020. In response, the authors once again draw a false equivalence, assuming that not voting for Trump is politically the same as voting for his opponent: “I hope Christianity Today will now tell us who they will support for president among the 2020 Democrat field?” As with their earlier conflation of Trump and his policies, there is here a false assumption that one must support Trump or support his Democratic opponent.

The open letter concludes with two final accusations. The first is that the editorial served as a critique of Christians who support Trump and who engage in civic and political duties. One wonders if the authors would consider the possibility that a Christian may be politically engaged without supporting Donald Trump. The open letter ends by accusing the editorial of not merely critiquing Trump but critiquing his supporters and supporters of *Christianity Today*. In these final sentences, the authors feel the editorial went beyond political criticism and ventured into theological and moral criticism of Trump supporters.

Having provided a brief contextual analysis and summary of the artifacts, I turn now to a rhetorical analysis of the specific linguistic strategies employed in the *Christianity Today* editorial and in the response by evangelical leaders. Drawing on Toulmin's model of argumentation, I argue that Galli makes conscious efforts in the editorial to present qualifiers that outline his conflicted position as a critic of Trump and supporter of some of his policies. The language that Galli uses serves to highlight the concern that he has for the collapse of Bellah's notion of American civil religion and a theocratic movement towards a Christian-dominated government. In response, the letter from evangelical leaders quickly and decisively identifies its political affiliation with Donald Trump and does not make any effort to couch this language in nonpartisan terms. The response to the editorial serves as a glaring example of poor argumentation, with multiple instances of claims and evidence being presented without warrants connecting them. These artifacts serve as two poles on a continuum from civil religion to Christian theocracy, and the way that each makes their rhetorical argument can serve as a way for us to further understand this divide moving forward.

Evaluating the Arguments

Stephen Toulmin, a British philosopher, developed a theory of argumentation that considers six different elements necessary to develop effective arguments (1958/2003). The central thrust of an argument consists of a claim made, the grounds given to support that claim, and the warrant, or the connecting thread between the grounds and the claim. Three additional elements also present themselves in arguments: backing of the warrant, qualifiers that serve to hedge the argument or acknowledge counterevidence, and rebuttals to the claim or to the qualifiers. Taken together, these elements combine for a holistic view of argumentation.

In evaluating the accuracy and strength of an argument presented to us, Karbach (1987) identifies six key questions that Toulmin gives that can guide us towards an answer:

1. What position do I want my audience to take?
2. Where must my audience begin so that they will take the step I want them to take and agree to my claim?
3. What is the warrant, or the linking idea between the grounds and the claim?
4. Is this warrant safe and reliable?
5. What possibilities might upset the argument, or form the basis of a rebuttal?
6. Is a qualifier necessary?

By taking up each of these questions and how the *CT* editorial and the letter from evangelical leaders answers each, we can better understand which artifact presents the stronger argument. It will also provide us with insight into how the opposite pole to Christian nationalism in considering religious discourse is not total secularism, but a nuanced approach that allows for the expression of religious belief within a context of religious equality. For Galli and *CT*, qualifiers become a significant element of the argumentative strategy because they help to hedge the argument for an audience that may be skeptical; for the evangelical Christian leaders' letter, there is a noticeable lack of warrants connecting claims to evidence throughout. Each of the six questions outlined above will now be taken up and considered for each of the two artifacts

Question 1: What position do I want my audience to take?

The first question we must take up is what the claim being made by the author is. In any argument, there must be a persuasive claim advanced. This claim is the position advocated by the rhetor and communicated to a specific audience. In the case of the *Christianity Today* editorial, the rhetor is author and *CT* editor-in-chief Mark Galli, and the claim is made evident in the title

of the editorial: “Trump should be removed from office.” In the case of the letter from evangelical Christian leaders in response to the *CT* editorial, the actual author is unclear; the letter is signed alphabetically by nearly 200 people. The claim is also a bit murkier, as there is no headline or title for the letter, but this excerpt identifies the key argument advanced by the authors:

The editorial you published, without any meaningful and immediate regard for dissenting points of view, not only supported the entirely-partisan, legally-dubious, and politically-motivated impeachment but went even further, calling for Donald Trump not to be elected again in 2020 when he certainly survives impeachment.

Each artifact also highlights the thrust of their argument throughout. After providing an introduction and numerous qualifiers (which we will address shortly), Galli lays out the argument for impeaching Trump both for violations of the Constitution and for moral failings. Galli further claims that “None of the president’s positives can balance the moral and political danger we face under a leader of such grossly immoral character.” In the conclusion of his editorial, Galli writes: “To use an old cliché, it’s time to call a spade a spade, to say that no matter how many hands we win in this political poker game, we are playing with a stacked deck of gross immorality and ethical incompetence.” All of these serve as claims Galli advances throughout the editorial. Galli wants his readers to know, above all, that it is Trump’s moral failings that should render him incapable of remaining the President of the United States.

The letter from evangelical Christian leaders also weaves its claims throughout. The letter opens with a clear description of its purpose: “We write collectively to express our dissatisfaction with the editorial *Christianity Today* published on Thursday, December 19, 2019.” After laying out their reasons for this dissatisfaction (or the grounds for their argument),

the authors conclude with two additional clarifying sentences about their argumentative purpose: “Your editorial offensively questioned the spiritual integrity and Christian witness of tens-of-millions of believers who take seriously their civic and moral obligations. It not only targeted our President; it also targeted those of us who support him and have supported you.” These evangelical leaders wrote not only to an audience of editors at *Christianity Today*, but also to any evangelical Christians who may have felt outrage over the editorial.

Question 2: Where must my audience begin so that they will take the step I want them to take and agree to my claim?

The second question that Toulmin asks us to consider in evaluating an argument is how our audience can move from their current attitude to the conclusion that the rhetor is proposing. The rhetor must consider what type of audience they are writing for and what this audience expects from them in order to effectively build their argument. Different contexts and different audiences will require different types of evidence, and the grounds that are used to defend a claim are vital to the claim being accepted by audience members. The evidence presented should be relevant to the lived experience of the audience, it should understand what their needs are and how to respond to those needs, and it should be easily digestible while remaining factually and ethically accurate in its presentation.

In the case of the *CT* editorial, the evidence presented by Galli is very much tailored to his specific audience. While Galli makes passing mention of the Constitutional violation that Trump engaged in by withholding aid from an ally in exchange for an investigation into a political opponent, Galli’s argument is much more centrally focused on the *moral* failings of Donald Trump. When he begins laying out his evidence, it is not the transcript that Galli

discusses. Rather, Galli focuses on the evidence that Trump lacks a level of morality that we should expect from our leaders:

...this president has dumbed down the idea of morality in his administration. He has hired and fired a number of people who are now convicted criminals. He himself has admitted to immoral actions in business and his relationship with women, about which he remains proud. His Twitter feed alone—with its habitual string of mischaracterizations, lies, and slanders—is a near perfect example of a human being who is morally lost and confused.

In discussing the impeachment, again Galli focuses less on the withholding of aid and more on ethical concerns: “The impeachment hearings have illuminated the president’s moral deficiencies for all to see.” Galli is clearly not interested in making the Constitutional argument for Trump’s removal, although he does acknowledge that Trump has committed violations of Constitutional law. Rather, Galli is engaged in pointing out the moral failings of the President and uses this as the central grounds upon which he makes his claim.

The reasons for this choice are obvious and are linked to the question here that Toulmin asks. Where should our audience begin in order to accept our claim? For Galli, he writes in a way that highlights the Christian focus on moral teachings and family values and he attempts to use these as evidence of Trump’s failings in this area. Galli understands that his audience of Christian readers likely are less worried about the nuances of a transcript between two world leaders and are more concerned with questions of moral clarity and ethical leadership. By connecting his claim (Trump should be removed from office) to evidence (Trump’s moral failings) that may be more readily accepted by his audience (Christian readers), Galli is attempting to find the strongest possible argument that his audience will accept.

The letter from evangelical leaders, on the other hand, takes a markedly different approach in developing evidence for their claim. Their letter goes on a long diatribe about who they are as evangelical Christian leaders and, more importantly, why they support Trump and denounce the *CT* editorial:

...we are Bible-believing Christians and patriotic Americans who are simply grateful that our President has sought our advice as his administration has advanced policies that protect the unborn, promote religious freedom, reform our criminal justice system, contribute to strong working families through paid family leave, protect the freedom of conscience, prioritize parental rights, and ensure that our foreign policy aligns with our values while making our world safer, including through our support of the State of Israel.

The evidence presented here is not moral, but political. Where Galli pivots away from politics to discuss broader issues of morality, the evangelical Christian leaders here outline in specific detail the political reasons for their support of Trump. These policies are never argued *against* by Galli, but the letter seems to assume that by their omission, Galli must not be in support of them. Their evidence (the policies that Trump has advanced are tied to Christian values) supports their claim (that the *CT* editorial unfairly attacked and maligned the President and all evangelical Christians) by outlining the ways that Trump's policies are aligned with evangelical Christian values.

The audience for the evangelical response letter is also worth mentioning. While the letter is addressed to Dr. Dalrymple, the president and CEO of *Christianity Today*, it is clearly written to a broader audience of evangelical Christians around the world. The letter purports itself to be the voice of evangelical Christians who did not agree with the editorial, and it is written with these supporters in mind. There are clear defenses of Trump and attacks on Democrats, and they characterize the impeachment as “the entirely-partisan, legally-dubious, and politically-

motivated”. These terms would be familiar to many evangelical Christians as the language of some of their most frequented political news sources, including Rush Limbaugh, Sean Hannity, Mark Levin, and others. This language is used specifically to appeal to those evangelical Christians who have already connected this language with the impeachment and who believe this to be true.

Question 3: What is the warrant, or the linking idea between the grounds and the claim?

Having explored the claims and evidence presented in an argument, we now turn to the warrant, or the thread that connects the two. The warrant is what begins to identify the logic behind an argument; almost all arguments contain claims and evidence, but many arguments fail to show *how* this evidence supports their claim. It is not enough to have evidence; you must be able to justify why this evidence matters and how it supports your claim; this is the role of the warrant in argumentation.

In the *Christianity Today* editorial, Galli’s claim is that Trump should be removed from office, and he points to Trump’s moral failings as evidence. The warrant that Galli uses to connect these two is that we should have an expectation of morality from our national leaders. The logic of Galli’s editorial is that Trump’s moral failings are cause for removing him from office. He points to evidence in the form of specific instances of Trump’s failings. The warrant that connects the logic to the evidence is that the Presidency is inherently a moral position. Galli makes this explicit as he discusses Trump’s moral failings that were highlighted during the impeachment trial:

This damages the institution of the presidency, damages the reputation of our country, and damages both the spirit and the future of our people. None of the president’s

positives can balance the moral and political danger we face under a leader of such grossly immoral character.

Galli continues to demonstrate how concern for the moral character of our President is not new by turning to *CT*'s previous coverage of the Bill Clinton-Monica Lewinsky affair:

This is not a private affair. For above all, social intercourse is built on a presumption of trust: trust that the milk your grocer sells you is wholesome and pure; trust that the money you put in your bank can be taken out of the bank; trust that your babysitter, firefighters, clergy, and ambulance drivers will all do their best. And while politicians are notorious for breaking campaign promises, while in office they have a fundamental obligation to uphold our trust in them and to live by the law. ("The Prodigal Who Didn't Come Home," 1998)

So far, Galli has made his argument clear. He has a claim (Trump should be removed from office), grounds to support that claim (evidence of Trump's moral failings), and a warrant that shows how the evidence is connected to the claim (we have an expectation of morality from our leaders). Using Toulmin's model, we can see a clearly developed and well-constructed argument to this point.

The letter from evangelical Christian leaders first begins to falter in its argumentative structure in the case of the warrant. While there is a claim (the *CT* editorial unfairly maligned the President and his supporters) and evidence (Trump's conservative policies are aligned with Christian values), there is a missing link. It is never made clear in the letter how Donald Trump's conservative policies can serve as a rebuttal of the *CT* editorial. Galli even attempts to head off this line of criticism (as we will see when discussing rebuttals) by admitting that many Christians have supported the political positions of the President. Galli then turns his argument *away* from

policy and towards discussion of morality and the necessity of strong moral leadership. It is strange, then, that the letter in response to this editorial makes no mention of Trump's ethical or moral misgivings, offers no defense for some of the personal choices that Trump has made that Galli identifies as immoral, and largely ignores the thrust of Galli's morality-based argument.

The response letter does not contain any clear warrant between the evidence of Christian policies enacted by Trump and their claim that the editorial was unfair. They take time to outline who they are as speakers and why they support the President, but their reasons for supporting him (policy) are not the reasons given in the editorial for his removal from office (morality). The response letter further moves the goalposts on evaluating the editorial by largely setting aside Galli's criticism of Trump and focusing instead on his criticism of other evangelical Christians: "Your editorial offensively questioned the spiritual integrity and Christian witness of tens-of-millions of believers who take seriously their civic and moral obligations. It not only targeted our President; it also targeted those of us who support him, and have supported you." Galli's editorial devotes only one paragraph to considering Trump's Christian supporters, while the rest is focused squarely on the President; needless to say, the letter in response largely attacks this one paragraph while ignoring the majority of Galli's morality-driven argument. Thus, while the editorial points from Trump's moral failings to the broader moral role of the Presidency, the letter in response instead points from Trump's political leanings to the broader ideological role that they see the Presidency serving for his followers.

Question 4: Is this warrant safe and reliable?

The next thing we should consider in evaluating an argument is backing, or how logical the warrant is and how readily it will be accepted by the audience. When identifying the backing of a warrant, it is important to recognize that this backing "establishes the reliability and

relevance of the warrant” (Karbach, 1987, p. 82). In other words, now that we have seen a claim, evidence to support that claim, and a warrant that shows us why the evidence is valid, we now have to also briefly evaluate whether the warrant itself is valid and reliable.

In the case of the *Christianity Today* editorial, Galli’s warrant is that we as Americans expect and have a right to effective moral leadership. Galli never explicitly states why this is the case, although his references to *CT*’s coverage of the Clinton-Lewinsky scandal do note that the “President [Clinton]’s failure to tell the truth ... rips at the fabric of our nation” (“The Prodigal Who Didn’t Come Home,” 1998). Galli then uses the threat of hypocrisy to illuminate why it is so critical for Americans, and Christians in particular, to accept his warrant that moral leadership is a requirement of the Presidency:

Consider what an unbelieving world will say if you continue to brush off Mr. Trump’s immoral words and behavior in the cause of political expediency. If we don’t reverse course now, will anyone take anything we say about justice and righteousness with any seriousness for decades to come? Can we say with a straight face that abortion is a great evil that cannot be tolerated and, with the same straight face, say that the bent and broken character of our nation’s leader doesn’t really matter in the end?

Galli is highlighting the Christian call to be moral leaders in the world, and their common position as voices of moral authority in American society, to underline the importance of moral leadership in America. In this way, Galli is developing a strong backing for his warrant.

The letter from evangelical leaders fails largely to develop a warrant that connects their evidence (the policies of Trump) to their claim (that the *CT* editorial was unfair to Trump and his supporters). In lieu of a warrant, it is difficult to argue that the letter contains any backing that might serve to support a warrant. The authors do point out that they believe it is a Christian call

to be engaged with politics, noting that “we take deeply our personal responsibility to render unto Caesar what is Caesar's --- our public service.” Had their claim been that Galli unfairly maligned the *policies* of Trump, this may be an effective backing for a warrant that connects the editorial to a lack of support for Trump’s policies. As outlined above, however, this is not the argument advanced most forcefully by the editorial, and therefore there is not a strong warrant connecting the claim to the warrant in the case of the evangelical Christian response. Given the lack of a warrant, there is also a lack of backing.

Question 5: What possibilities might upset the argument, or form the basis of a rebuttal?

Next, the effective argument must consider the opposition, or the counterarguments that can be made. Arguments must not only articulate their own perspective, but they must also be able to presage and respond to potential rebuttals. While a debate may involve point-counterpoint, artifacts such as the ones under analysis here do not have an interactive nature to them. They are static, and as such they must be able to predict what the most pertinent argument against their own point may be and be able to respond to it effectively.

Galli takes care throughout his editorial to consider what the response of some of his critics may be. He starts off early by acknowledging that “We love and pray for our president, as we love and pray for leaders (as well as ordinary citizens) on both sides of the political aisle.” This serves as a potent reminder to his audience that this is, in fact, a Christian publication with a Christian perspective. Perhaps most remarkably in his editorial, Galli predicts with stunning accuracy the response that Trump supporters might have towards his argument: “Trump’s evangelical supporters have pointed to his Supreme Court nominees, his defense of religious liberty, and his stewardship of the economy, among other things, as achievements that justify their support of the president.” This checklist is very similar to the policies that the evangelical

response letter lists off in their explanation of why they support the President. In this instance, Galli very effectively acknowledges a potential rebuttal; his next few sentences then attempt to neutralize it:

We believe the impeachment hearings have made it absolutely clear, in a way the Mueller investigation did not, that President Trump has abused his authority for personal gain and betrayed his constitutional oath. The impeachment hearings have illuminated the president's moral deficiencies for all to see. This damages the institution of the presidency, damages the reputation of our country, and damages both the spirit and the future of our people. None of the president's positives can balance the moral and political danger we face under a leader of such grossly immoral character.

The question of the rebuttal is one area where Galli's argument is slightly weakened. Rather than directly taking on the counterargument that he knows is coming, Galli pivots, both in the following sentences and in the remainder of the editorial, towards a discussion of morality. Galli does not explicitly discuss why support for Trump's policies should be subordinated to questions of morality, although as noted above, he does hint at this in his discussion of Christian hypocrisy in claiming grounds for moral leadership. In short, Galli does acknowledge the rebuttal that is coming, but his attempts to counter it veer away from direct argument and towards a redirection, away from policy and towards morality.

The letter from evangelical leaders serves as a rebuttal to the *CT* editorial, but it does not include any consideration of rebuttals that the letter itself may receive. The authors chastise *CT* for choosing to publish the editorial and for its critique of evangelical voters, and it critiques Galli's decision to implicate evangelical Christian voters as part of Trump's morality problem. There is little in the letter that attempts to head off future rebuttals, aside from an explicit denial

of theocratic intent and a rejection of the label “far-right” evangelicals (this label was applied by Galli in an interview with CNN after the publication of the editorial, but not in the editorial itself). These do serve as attempts to head off future arguments or critiques about their position in the political landscape and do serve the purpose of being proactive in the face of some potential rebuttals.

Question 6: Is a qualifier necessary?

The final element that should be considered in evaluating the strength of an argument is the need for, and use of, qualifiers. Qualifiers serve as modifiers to the claim and serve to ameliorate concerns that may arise about the claim. Qualifiers may “soften” an argument or make it more palatable. These qualifiers are often necessary in argumentation when a claim is particularly controversial, or when a rhetor knows that their argument will not be easily received by a potentially hostile audience.

The *Christianity Today* editorial goes to great lengths to soften their argument against Donald Trump, recognizing that much of their readership is supportive of the President and his policies. At the outset of the editorial, Galli points to *CT*'s goal to “stay above the fray and allow Christians with different political convictions to make their arguments in the public square, to encourage all to pursue justice according to their convictions and treat their political opposition as charitably as possible.” Before any critique of Trump has been given, Galli gives his readers a heavy dose of criticism for Trump’s opponents:

Let’s grant this to the president: The Democrats have had it out for him from day one, and therefore nearly everything they do is under a cloud of partisan suspicion. This has led many to suspect not only motives but facts in these recent impeachment hearings.

And, no, Mr. Trump did not have a serious opportunity to offer his side of the story in the House hearings on impeachment.

Galli recognizes that his audience is almost certainly not Democratic, and therefore critiques of Democrats or the impeachment trial itself will serve to build a bridge between Galli and his audience. Later, even while critiquing the President's moral character, there is an acknowledgement of the President's positive impact via policy. Towards the end of the editorial, Galli again highlights the magazine's efforts to allow for political disagreement:

...when it comes to condemning the behavior of another, patient charity must come first. So we have done our best to give evangelical Trump supporters their due, to try to understand their point of view, to see the prudential nature of so many political decisions they have made regarding Mr. Trump.

All of these serve as qualifiers to Galli's arguments to remove Trump. These qualifiers are attempts by Galli to hedge his argument, to build rapport between him and his audience, and to maintain his Christian principles while engaging in a critique that goes against what many Christians believe politically. Galli uses these to further his argument and to help his audience understand the possibility of dissent within evangelical Christianity with regards to Donald Trump.

The letter from evangelical leaders, on the other hand, makes no efforts at softening its argument or hedging its claim. The authors attack Galli's words, both in the editorial and in an interview with CNN following its publication, and do not attempt to build bridges between themselves and the editorial. While they do acknowledge that "historically, we have been your [*Christianity Today's*] readers," the use of the past tense clearly indicates a break from *Christianity Today* in the present and moving forward. The authors make no attempts to hide

their political affiliation with Trump and their disdain for Democrats, and they do not make any mention of the possibility of a multiplicity of viewpoints within the evangelical Christian tradition. In short, there is an intentional lack of qualifiers, likely because the authors did not believe they were necessary to sway their intended audience of evangelical Christians who had been outraged by the editorial.

Robert Bellah and Civil Religion

The analysis above points to significant differences in the way each author – Galli and the collection of evangelical leaders – build their argument for their respective audience. These artifacts also illustrate Robert Bellah’s concept of civil religion, which attempts to account for religion’s complicated place in American history. Bellah (1967; 1992) argues that religion, when conceived broadly as not a specific set of practices but as a guide leading to moral truths, does have a place in the public sphere. The artifacts in this case outline the dangers of taking religious discourse too far and the repercussions that some rhetors face when attempting to recognize the division between their private faith and public service.

A key principle that informed America’s founding fathers is a commitment to both a freedom of religious practice and a separation of that religious practice from government functions. The Pilgrims that left England to form a new colony did so partly out of a rejection of the Church of England and a desire for freedom of religious expression. Following the Revolutionary War, America as a new nation was formed through the Constitution and the Bill of Rights, the first of which protects individuals’ right to exercise their own religious beliefs and prohibits the government from favoring one religion over the other. This principle has repeatedly been invoked to keep the separation between church and state and to protect religious minorities from persecution.

Robert Bellah argues convincingly that, in fact, America is not only a home for a multitude of religious expression, but it also serves as a religious practice in and of itself. He calls this American civil religion, and he points to the rituals and practices by which we identify ourselves as American. Bellah specifically highlights Thanksgiving Day and Memorial Day as two key holidays that celebrate America as a quasi-religious institution. We engage in practices meant to both bring the national interest to focus and to consolidate local communities within this national mindset. Through this civil religion, we come to identify ourselves as members of the body politic and identify those who are not American as “Other.”

This American civil religion also contains within it elements of religious practice. As Bellah notes, there are elements of religion throughout both our founding documents and current national practices: “endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights” being found in the Declaration of Independence; “secure the Blessings of Liberty” being found in the Constitution; “one nation, under God” in the Pledge of Allegiance; “in God we trust” on our currency; and many more. What Bellah notes, however, is that all these references are to God or the Creator; in other words, they are references to a divinity, but not necessarily one from a specific religion. Indeed, practitioners of many religious practices may be able to identify with the “God” that is found in our Declaration and on our money. It is here where American civil religion is both inclusive of religious ideals while simultaneously open to the practice of a variety of different religions and religious beliefs.

There is a significant difference between religion as a general framework and religion as a specific set of beliefs and practices, and it is this distinction which Bellah wishes to bring to the forefront. As Gorski (2010) points out, the concept of civil religion dates as far back as the Roman Empire, when citizens participated in rituals to celebrate their government. These rituals

were meant to mirror some of the religious rituals that took place in worship of a god or a deity, with the Roman Empire serving as the source of praise and adulation. As the founders of America considered how to establish a successful nation, they recognized the immense value in cultivating practices that would encourage solidarity among citizens and promote the country as a source of pride and service. This American civil religion was meant as a tool of governance for a “moral and religious people” (Adams, 1798/2002), but it did not discriminate based on a specific religious practice.

Of course, there is no denying that despite its stated protections for all religious practices, America has been home to a dominant majority of Christian believers. From the earliest Pilgrims who brought their Protestant beliefs with them, to early Spanish and French settlers who brought Catholicism, the Christian faith has been the central religious practice of America as a country. While this has declined in recent years, it has not given way to a different religion but rather to declining religious participation overall. In short, since the first settlers came to America, it has been a Christian nation and, in many ways, remains one today.

Thus, there are two elements difficult to reconcile: a concerted effort to develop a civil religion that recognizes the virtues and moral guidance religion can provide, and a nation that has also predominantly populated by Christian citizens. Given the dominance of a particular religious practice, it is no wonder that there have been efforts to more explicitly Christianize the United States and to establish more firmly the Christian tradition within the public sphere. At the same time, it is no surprise that non-religious citizens have become wary of even tangential mentions of religion, such as those invoked through American civil religion. These mentions may feel like the first steps towards a theocracy, despite their best intentions. It is here that the

rise of Donald Trump, his connection to evangelical Christianity, and the efforts by some Christian leaders to infiltrate the formal public sphere of government becomes paramount.

Galli, in his editorial, recognizes the need for religion to serve less as a theocratic set of principles that must be adhered to by the President and more as a moral guide. Galli bases his argument not on Trump's failures regarding Christian belief or policy, but on his failures as a moral leader. The argument is that Trump has failed to uphold the President's duty to maintain a sense of civil religion in the country through his dearth of moral stewardship of the country. Evangelical leaders, on the other hand, reject the notion of the Presidency as a purely moral institution (something Galli connects to hypocrisy through his use of *Christianity Today's* coverage of the Bill Clinton-Monica Lewinsky affair). They instead see Trump's value in promoting their political and ideological agenda and are therefore willing to overlook his moral failings. Bellah sees this type of rationalization as dangerous and leading towards the Christian nationalism that has been espoused by many voices throughout the nation's history.

It is also important to consider the ramifications of attempting to demonstrate the divide between one's individual beliefs and beliefs about the role of religion in public service. Galli received significant backlash for his editorial (Dalrymple, 2019), and he chose to resign his post shortly after the editorial became controversial. The pressures faced by Galli cost him his job, due to an editorial that attempted to recast Christianity's support for Donald Trump in the public square. This case study serves as a cautionary tale about the power of a highly organized religious tradition that has claimed significant political influence and will fight any attempt to limit their reach.

Conclusion

A few days after the publication of the *Christianity Today* editorial and the letter posted in response by evangelical Christian leaders, the president and CEO of *Christianity Today*, Dr. Timothy Dalrymple, penned an additional response(2019)(2019). In it, he articulated the competing arguments that surrounded President Trump and his support from Christian followers:

Let me protect against two misunderstandings. The problem is not that we as evangelicals are associated with the Trump administration's judicial appointments or its advocacy of life, family, and religious liberty. We are happy to celebrate the positive things the administration has accomplished. The problem is that we as evangelicals are also associated with President Trump's rampant immorality, greed, and corruption; his divisiveness and race-baiting; his cruelty and hostility to immigrants and refugees; and more. In other words, the problem is the wholeheartedness of the embrace. It is one thing to praise his accomplishments; it is another to excuse and deny his obvious misuses of power.

There is a contentious space for disagreement at the nexus of Donald Trump and Christianity. His policies have been conservative and largely applauded by the evangelical Christian community. His moral failings, however, have often been shooed away by those same Christian leaders. Dalrymple, and Galli in the editorial, point towards the dangers of this hypocrisy for Christians. At the same time, they do not presume to suggest that a Democrat would be better, or that the policies do not matter. Rather, their argument is that moral leadership *is* a key element of a President, and in that regard, they argue that Donald Trump falls well short.

This is also, however, a space for an argument about the role of Christianity in the public square. One wonders if the same debate would be happening among Christians regarding moral

failure would be in order were the President to be a Democrat; in fact, Galli convincingly argues that the Christian argument against Clinton's moral failures should hold the same weight for Trump. But ultimately, a Democrat President, regardless of his religious affiliation, would not present the same cognitive dissonance that is presented by Trump: a Democratic President would fail at the *policy* element of the equation, even if he succeeded at the moral element. In short, what the argument surrounding the *Christianity Today* editorial seems to underline is that the only acceptable President for evangelical Christians is... an evangelical Christian. Despite claims to the contrary in the letter from evangelical leaders, this is assuredly a theocratic notion.

Galli is arguing for a recognition that it is possible to be a Christian and to be morally lost, to the point of losing any authority one might have to govern a nation. For Galli, the question is *not* about Trump's Christianity; it is about his character and his moral being. On the other hand, the evangelical Christian leaders make it clear in their letter that Trump's Christianity is *the* deciding factor in their support, moral failings or not. It is a question of what matters more: commitment to a moral and just leader, or commitment to a Christian one. Sadly, these are not always one and the same.

The artifacts analyzed in this essay are two extremes on a continuum from civil religion to Christian theocracy. Mark Galli, a Christian himself, argues in his editorial that Trump's religious affiliation is not as important as his morality and his capability of being a leader worth looking up to. It is possible for Galli and for many other Christians to maintain their private faith while acknowledging the need for moral leadership regardless of one's religion or faith tradition. On the other end of the spectrum, evangelical Christian leaders, in their written response to Galli's editorial, make clear their support for Trump lies on religious, theocratic grounds. They support Trump because his policies align with their own Christian faith; they make no mention

of nor defense of Trump's moral misgivings. This, for them, is less important than his Christian affiliation and his use of Presidential power to advance explicitly Christian policy goals.

**CH. 4: ‘THAT’S THE FIRST MISTAKE WE MAKE’: THE WACO SIEGE AND THE
SHORTCOMINGS OF TOTAL SECULARISM IN RESPONSE TO RELIGIOUS
THOUGHT**

We are not human beings having a spiritual experience. We are spiritual beings having a human experience.

-Pierre Teilhard de Chardin

Introduction

So far, this dissertation has explored two different tensions that exist in the deliberative space in which we attempt to locate the proper place of religion: that between Christian nationalism and Charles Taylor’s view of secularism (seen as a civic religious pluralism); and that between Christian nationalism and Bellah’s concept of American civil religion. Both case studies concern the difficulties that arise in negotiating a freedom of religious expression and the dangers of one dominant religion imposing itself on the public sphere, and both help provide a more nuanced perspective on what deliberative positions exist opposite each other. In the case of Stephanie Borowicz, the Christian nationalist themes in her prayer are opposed not by pure secularism, but by arguments for civic religious pluralism, closely hewing to Charles Taylor’s redefined secularism, that acknowledge the validity of religious expression so long as all religious voices are given equal space. The *Christianity Today* editorial similarly highlights the Christian nationalist rhetoric that has permeated the evangelical Christian movement in their ties to political power. Mark Galli’s editorial serves as a counterpoint to this nationalist language, pointing to religion as a source of moral order and grounding, and I argue that Galli’s rhetoric aligns with Robert Bellah’s vision for civil religion.

The Borowicz prayer highlighted Christian nationalism and secular society as existing on the opposite ends of the deliberative spectrum where religious discourse enters the public sphere. It also illustrated the way that tragic frames are transformative and comic frames are conservative by nature, with Borowicz's tragically framed prayer arguing for a radical reconfiguration of American civic society around Christianity, and the responses to the prayer framed comically as a call for a maintenance of the social order founded on equality, liberty, and fraternity. The Galli editorial emphasizes the role of argumentation and the way that effective argumentation is not always about the *strongest* argument, but the right argument for a particular audience.

I want to now turn to an exploration of how we can expand beyond a two-dimensional model that sees Christian nationalism as a point from which Taylor's secularism and Bellah's civil religion branch out. The first two case studies of this dissertation explored the place of Christian nationalist rhetoric in secular society and the response that it often engenders, which I term civic religious pluralism. Toulmin's model of argumentation helps us to see how arguments for both Christian nationalism and civic religious pluralism are built and supported, while Burke's comic and tragic frames help us understand the way that different rhetorical strategies may prevent compromise and cooperative dialogue between the two. I want to add a new dimension for us to consider: a balance between religious separatism and state intervention in religious communities. The first two case studies presented in this dissertation have focused on instances of rhetoric being used to advance or deter moves towards Christian nationalism. This final case study considers those rhetorical moves within a context that moved beyond the realm of discourse and into the realm of physical confrontation.

In contemporary American history, the Waco Siege is the extreme outcome that can occur when religious and secular logics clash. As we have seen in Taylor's updated definition of secularism and Bellah's civil religion, there is a place for religious discourse at the table of American civic life. The danger is in allowing one religious voice to dominate and in failing to accept a plurality of religious viewpoints. But this third case study presents an intriguing question complicating the two-dimensional deliberative spectrum we find in these earlier case examples. In the case of the Waco siege, the question is not about curbing the role of religious persuasion in the public sphere. Instead, we are presented with a different challenge: What responsibility does the state have to monitor and legislate over religious groups who attempt to live outside of normal American civic life?

The case of the Branch Davidians is complex, but it illustrates another dimension of the conflict between religious and secular logics that must be considered. While the Waco siege occurred 25 years ago, the wounds remain fresh and the problems remain unsolved. There still exist religious communities within the United States that choose to live a largely separate and distinct life from the rest of American society. They do not participate in public education, they do not accept federal funds for their communities, and they intentionally maintain a separation between themselves and the rest of the outside world. There exists a delicate tension between allowing these religious communities to practice their beliefs freely and a need for some sort of civic participation by members of a modern democracy. The Waco siege highlights the stark differences that illuminate this tension, and it can also serve as a template, of sorts, for how *not* to deal with the difficulty inherent in protecting religious liberty while mandating participation in some elementary form of modern civic life.

This chapter will draw on the final negotiation transcript between FBI hostage negotiators and David Koresh, the leader of the Branch Davidian movement as the extreme negative exemplar: a tragic piece detailing how disidentified groups fail to communicate. In this case study, I argue that the root of the conflict at Waco can be found in the competing and incompatible logics carried by the FBI and by the Branch Davidians, and a lack of ability to bridge this ideological gap. Analysis of the discursive tactics used during these negotiations may provide prescriptions for navigating the complexities of religious freedom and state intervention by identifying communicative practices that find commonalities within separate discursive logics.

This chapter begins by exploring religious and secular logics, drawing on the work of Durkheim and Habermas to explore how religion serves as a logic that is distinct and separate from secular logic. Following this, the chapter considers the nature of contested logics, and how groups with competing worldviews find ways to build connections or to move further towards polarization. I then turn to an examination of the final negotiation transcript that took place during the Waco Siege as a tragic case study of competing religio-secular logics that are unable to find places of connection and identification. Finally, implications for the current state of communication between religious and secular groups are considered, and the importance of language as a tool for division or connection is highlighted.

Theoretical Framework

In considering the nature of religious and secular groups, and how they interact with one another, this chapter draws on two theorists who have contributed significantly to this area of research. The first, Emile Durkheim, posited a foundational connection between religion and society-at-large, drawing on the nature of ritual and community consciousness to posit that

secular society is built upon largely religious foundations. The second, Jurgen Habermas, developed the idea of public spheres, and considered the nature of religion within these spaces for communicative discourse.

Durkheim and the Religious Foundations of Contemporary Society

Emile Durkheim posits in *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life* (1995/1912) that religion serves as a utopian model of collective social life. The church is seen as representative of the ideal form of society, with individuals voluntarily engaging in rituals that unite them in their core beliefs and allow new members a sense of unity and cohesion with the group. Those who reject the rituals are also rejecting the core values commonly held by the community, and this serves as a regulating mechanism for new member acceptance into the social group.

Durkheim's advances the notion that religion is inherent in contemporary public life (Lessl, 2009). By this, Durkheim did not mean traditional religion (he was not a man of faith himself), but rather that the core tenets of society were grounded in ideas that originated in religious foundations: the gathering together of common individuals; the sharing of common rituals to solidify group bonds; and the collective nature of social progress.

Tole (1993) traces Durkheim's notions of religion as it evolved over time to become what Durkheim would refer to as the "religion of humanity" (1995, p. 46). Durkheim saw modernization not as the end of religion, but rather noted that religion was evolving to place the human individual at its center – a religion of individualism. This individualism formed alongside a common morality that is regulated by the society. Social groups constrain and operate on members to maintain a sense of order, control, and morality. Durkheim draws connections between these socially practiced customs and their religious origins.

Durkheim saw religion as something beyond the beliefs that define traditional religious practices. Wallace (1977) draws on Durkheim's work to advance the notion of patriotism as a form of civil religion. Durkheim was a strong advocate for public schools and saw their value in establishing a shared set of values for members of society to draw upon. For Durkheim, "religion" constitutes any set of beliefs shared by a group of individuals, and it is through using this broader definition that Durkheim can posit its centrality in the organization of contemporary social life.

Durkheim's work on religion is extensive, but this essay draws on three key characteristics of religion that he developed. The first is the nature of society as a set of structures that mirror religious practices: individuals coming together and bonding over shared values and beliefs and utilizing rituals and symbols to express this shared belief and to regulate social membership. The second is Durkheim's "religion of humanity." This was religion in its modern form, evolved over time, and it places the individual at the center of the rituals and symbols used to express meaning. It is through this religion of individuality that social morality is also regulated. This is closely connected to the third concept from Durkheim this essay draws upon, that of a broad definition of religion that includes any set of shared beliefs that are acted upon and reinforced by a social group. Durkheim moves religion beyond traditional faith practices to understand its importance as a way for individuals to connect to the broader social world.

In contemporary social theory, Habermas extends Durkheim's work on the nature of religion in a contested public space. Durkheim and Habermas were similarly interested in the intersection of religious and secular life. Durkheim saw religion as a social origin for many of the social practices prevalent in the secular world. Over time, Habermas changed his

perspectives on the importance of religious discourse in the public sphere, recognizing later in life its deliberative importance in the public sphere. Habermas and his work on religion is now explored further, specifically as it relates to the development of a religious deliberative logic that can help frame the Waco siege in the context of a disconnect between religious and secular logics.

Habermas and Religion in the Public Sphere

The work of Jürgen Habermas in the nature of the public sphere, and how membership and deliberation within the sphere is negotiated, is critical to understand how competing logics (operating within competing spheres) struggle to find areas of commonality. Habermas initially excluded religion as a topic for discussion within the sphere, but later felt this added undue translational burden to religious participants within the sphere. This essay advances the notion that in contemporary times, religious individuals have turned away from participation in secular spheres and have instead formed distinctly religious spheres, where membership is restricted to those who share common beliefs and values, and whose logic is isolated in its religious nature.

Habermas (1962/2003) used the term *public sphere* to describe the “realm of our social life in which... public opinion can be formed” (p. 49). This public sphere comes into existence whenever individuals come together as a collective group. Habermas defines this public sphere as separate from both the individual sphere within which one lives and from state authority, which may often appear to be a part of the public sphere but is in fact an outside entity working on and through public spheres. Public spheres serve as spaces where like-minded individuals can come together and feel free to openly discuss common problems and work towards collective solutions. These public spheres are how the state authority is made aware of what problems are

affecting various community groups, and it is for this reason that public spheres are instrumental to the functioning of a broader civil society.

Religion was originally not a significant component of the public sphere as conceived by Habermas, but his thinking on this changed over time. The crux of this change, as outlined by Platt and Majdik (2012), was the notion of religion as a private individual practice. In the public sphere, individual details about a person – their age, gender, social status, etc. – were bracketed upon their entrance into the public sphere, to allow for open discussion of topics at interest to the broader sphere. For Habermas, religion was initially included in these individual details and was marked to be set aside upon participation within the public sphere. Habermas later modified this position, noting that the secularization of public spheres placed an inherent double-bind on religious individuals, who had to modify their language and thought in order to participate in secularized spheres. This secularization was initially intended to allow for debates that were more logical and less founded on moral or value judgements, but instead, it marginalized the voice of religious individuals within their various public spheres.

Garcia (2010) brings to light another important element of Habermas and his thoughts on religion in the public sphere: the benefit that religious individuals can provide to public spheres through moral grounding that may be missing from purely secular arguments. Drawing on Pope Benedict XVI and his debate with Habermas about the moral and religious foundations of secular society, Garcia notes that Habermas believed that religion could provide both a sense of value beyond secular logic to public discussion, and a different type of knowledge that could be beneficial when considering moral questions. The inclusion of religion into the public sphere provides for a broader and more comprehensive understanding of the issues that are common to the public sphere, and Habermas saw the inherent value that these could provide: ““When

secularized citizens act in their role as citizens of the state, they must not deny in principle that religious images of the world have the potential to express truth” (Habermas & Benedict XVI 2006, p. 51).

A central element of Habermas’s public sphere is that of debate centered on rational discussion between engaged citizens (Lind, 2014). In order to fully participate in these debates, Habermas believed that individuals needed to modernize their religious practices, allowing for reflection and modification of religious stances based on logical discussion within the public sphere. A hardened religion that was unamenable to adjustments based on reason or evidence was not conducive to productive deliberation in the public sphere (2005). Habermas recognized that the purpose of public spheres was to allow for groups with common interests to come together to advocate for themselves, and to debate problems in an open and civic forum; to exclude religious individuals from this debate was untenable, but those who did participate in the public sphere had to keep themselves open to changing their perspective based on logic and reasoning developed through deliberation.

There is an additional dimension to Habermas’s notions of the public sphere: that of religious groups who form their own isolated spheres within which they deliberate. These religious public spheres are exclusionary to those who do not adhere to the religious beliefs of the community, which provides a stark contrast to Habermas’s utopian ideal of a public sphere that brackets individual beliefs or status in favor of communal discussion. These religious spheres are a space for all within the public sphere to deliberate important issues, but entry into the sphere must be negotiated and tacitly approved by the members of the public sphere. These religious spheres operate with what Durkheim (1912/1995) referred to as a *collective consciousness*, wherein the group develops a common set of morals, values, and beliefs that must

be agreed to by anyone seeking to gain admittance into the public sphere. These beliefs are reinforced through common rituals that serve to reinforce the value system of the community, and that serve as barriers of entry for newcomers.

Religious public spheres are set apart from secular public spheres in the logics in which they operate. Habermas saw religious individuals as being able to participate in secular spheres only if they accepted the premise that their religious beliefs should be subject to change given the nature of the rational discourse that takes place within the public sphere. Many religious individuals and groups have explicitly rejected this notion. Rather than bracketing their religious beliefs, they have instead formed communities where their religious beliefs serve as the *foundation* of the rational discourse that Habermas believes is the ultimate purpose of a public sphere. The difference here is crucial: where Habermas posits a public sphere that is a place of civic discourse and permits a place for religious individuals who can participate while keeping their religious beliefs open to new evidence, religious public spheres are a place of discourse that begins with faith and is exclusionary to those who do not practice that faith. Participation is no longer open but is mediated by belief in the value system and logic of the religious group.

Methodology

Like the previous case studies in this dissertation, this chapter relies on a combination of contextual and rhetorical analyses. Unlike the previous case studies, however, this chapter relies on a single, larger artifact for analysis: the negotiation transcript between the FBI/ATF and David Koresh, leader of the Branch Davidians, on the last day of the Waco stand-off before it ended in bloodshed. This transcript was selected because of the urgency with which both parties felt to resolve the stand-off in a peaceful manner and because it captures both the state and the religious group in a unique moment of communicative impasse.

The rhetorical analysis in this case study is an open form of discourse analysis. Discourse analysis is a methodology that focuses on the way that language is used in an artifact or conversation and how that language connects to the broader context that surrounds it. In considering the negotiation transcript, I first read through the document once for a full picture of the conversation. I then analyzed the discussion by breaking it into segments that felt connected; in other words, there are chunks of conversation that are cohesive and built around a topic before the topic is changed and a new chunk of conversation is built. In doing so, I was able to then analyze those segments for their rhetorical impact, their linguistic cues, and the way that the language used by both parties connected to the broader context of the stand-off.

Discourse analysis has been used in a variety of ways and can carry with it multiple meanings. For the purposes of this analysis, I draw on Snape and Spencer (2003)'s definition of discourse analysis as the process of "examining the way knowledge is produced within different discourses and the performances, linguistic styles and rhetorical devices used in particular accounts." This sociological approach ties together the context of the situation, the agents, or actors central to the scene, and the rhetorical strategies employed by each to work towards their desired outcome.

This discourse analysis allows for me to build my argument through rational inferences developed from a reading of the text. The negotiation transcript was considered for not only the actual words and phrases used, but also for what those choices meant and how each agent in the scene came to choose them. Particularly in the context of a transcript that takes place on the last day of a 51-day standoff, it is critical to consider not only what is said, but how that reflects back to what has been said and done previously. It is also important to consider what is *not* said in the artifact; as I discuss later, there is a failure of communication not only in the transcript, but in

what is missing from it: namely, any effort to communicate *across* difference rather than around or through it. What follows is an analysis of a transcript of the last conversation between the FBI/ATF hostage negotiation team and David Koresh, leader of the Branch Davidians. I first provide an overview of the Waco siege as a way of setting the contextual scene before turning to a rhetorical analysis of the transcript.

Analysis

Background

In order to understand the nature of the situation in which the negotiations between Koresh and the FBI took place, it is important to know some basic information about Koresh and the Branch Davidian movement, and how it evolved over time to become a threat to the federal government. Koresh and his followers believed that they were living in the end times, and that soon the world would be overrun by evil forces attempting to destroy them before God returned to take them to heaven. Unfortunately, the FBI's armed standoff was interpreted by Koresh and many within the cult as a fulfillment of this prophesy. The context of the situation provided below draws primarily from Stuart A. Wright's collection of essays, *Armageddon in Waco: Critical Perspectives on the Branch Davidian Conflict* (1995) .

The Branch Davidian movement began in 1929, when Victor Houteff left the Seventh-Day Adventist Church after claiming to have received a message from God. Throughout its history, a central tenet of the Branch Davidian movement has been an emphasis on apocalyptic predictions. The group first believed the world would end in 1959, shortly after the death of Houteff. When this did not happen, a follower named Benjamin Roden took over the group's compound at Mount Carmel outside of Waco, Texas. Many people left the religion over the next twenty years before Vernon Howell, or David Koresh, joined the Branch Davidians as a follower

in 1981. Koresh's rise to leadership, and the way he consolidated power, point to elements of Koresh's personality that would later reveal themselves more fully during the Waco siege.

After the death of Benjamin Roden, his wife, Lois Roden, led the Branch Davidian movement. Upon her death in 1986, Koresh and her son, George Roden, engaged in a power struggle for leadership of the movement. During this struggle, Roden challenged Koresh to raise people from the dead using God's power and exhumed a corpse. Koresh took this opportunity to tell the police. Eventually, through a combination of legal investigations and armed conflict, Koresh won the support of the Branch Davidians and became the leader of the movement in 1990. As the leader of the group, Koresh proclaimed himself to be a descendant of King David and identified himself as the human fulfillment of the Lamb that is mentioned in the book of Revelations. It is also believed that Koresh also used his prophetic claims to take what he termed "spiritual wives," some of whom were as young as 12. These suggestions of child abuse, along with Koresh's obsession with stockpiling weapons and ammunitions to prepare his followers for the end of days, were what led to the FBI raid on the Mount Carmel compound.

On February 28, 1993, FBI and ATF agents approached a small religious movement known as the Branch Davidians at their compound known as Mount Carmel outside of Waco, Texas. Their stated aim was to serve an arrest warrant for Vernon Howell, or as he was then known, David Koresh, the leader of the Branch Davidian movement. What followed was a shootout, followed by a 51-day standoff that ended on April 19, 1993, when the compound was set on fire, likely by Branch Davidians still inside. By the end of the Waco siege, as it has become known, 76 people were dead, including Koresh. The conflict between the federal government and the Branch Davidian religious movement was one that involved complicated questions of First Amendment protections for a religious group's freedom of expression. What

became a central question for those involved and for the public watching on: who is the instigator in this conflict? For the federal government, the Branch Davidians had broken the law by illegally modifying firearms, while for Koresh and his followers, the government had impeded upon their religious freedoms.

Throughout the 51-day standoff, FBI negotiators engaged in conversations with Koresh to persuade him and others to come out of the compound. During this time, Koresh allowed some children to leave, but all his own children stayed. Koresh also claimed that his followers were free to leave, but were choosing to stay, the veracity of which remains largely unknown. Throughout negotiations with the federal government, Koresh also explained his religious beliefs, provided his perspective on the siege, and projected a vision of his religious movement that was contrary to many of the claims that had been reported to the public.

This essay now turns to an analysis of the final negotiation transcript between David Koresh and the FBI, which took place on April 18, 1993, one day before the conflict ended in tragedy. This transcript was selected to serve as an exploratory device through which the claims of this essay regarding the nature of contested logics and competing groups can be explored.

Rhetorical Analysis

In conducting this rhetorical analysis, I focus on three central elements at play within the discourse present in the transcript. The first is the rhetorical agents and how each asserts their own sense of authority. The second is the rhetorical strategies employed by each to advance their goal. The third is the disconnect that permeates the discussion as each rhetor remains singularly focused on their own motivations and goals rather than working collaboratively with the other through communicative action.

Rhetorical agents. Within the final negotiation transcript, there is a fundamental inability to effectively communicate between the two central actors: the government and the Branch Davidians. Their worldviews stand diametrically opposed to one another, and this makes it difficult for either group to effectively communicate their ideas. This analysis draws excerpts from the transcript to illustrate the competing logics at play in this conflict and the hardened internal identification that made external identification with outsiders difficult, if not impossible, for both groups involved.

Koresh: Look. The ah - the generals out here - right? You have a hard time controlling them, right?

FBI: I don't control them. No.

Koresh: OK. Well look. We have done everything we can to be able to communicate in a nice, passionate way. We've ah - you know - I've told you what our work with God is. And ah - we've been kind. We've not been your everyday kind of cult. We've not been your everyday kind of terrorist which I'm sure you - you're familiar with having to deal with.

FBI: Um, hm.

In the opening lines of the transcript, the conversation begins with a misunderstanding that highlights the disparity between the goals of these two rhetorical agents. Koresh tries to explain the perspective of the Branch Davidians, and intimates that they have been attempting to communicate in good faith. Koresh frames the group as fulfilling the work of God – “I’ve told you what our work with God is” – and also makes reference to the group’s efforts to communicate on secular terms – to “communicate in a nice, passionate way...and we’ve been kind.” Koresh makes sure to note that the group is not “your everyday kind of cult”, aware of the

ways that language and word choice frame situations both for the viewing public and for the groups involved.

This is met with little response by the FBI. Throughout the conflict, as Koresh attempted to explain what the Branch Davidians believed and what their “work with God” was, the FBI negotiators largely failed to make an effort to understand this work, or to respond to it in a way that would provide credence to Koresh and the group. By rejecting communication about the faith-based nature of the group, the FBI was inadvertently rejecting the central ideological core of the group. The Branch Davidians relied on their faith in God as central to their entire worldview; by failing to communicate with the group on terms that would be conducive to an understanding of their faith, the FBI raised barriers in communication and understanding between the two groups.

This is illustrated by two additional statements by Koresh in the opening moments of the transcript:

Koresh: And a lot of the things that the FBI, or these generals are doing is just kinda way beyond the scope of reason. And they're not only destroying private property, they're also removing evidences. And this doesn't seem like that ah - these are - these are moves that should be made by a government who says to a people that we're going to be able to take this up in a court of law.

Koresh: And - ah - they keep - they keep doing these kind of things it's just proving to us that they're not - they're not showing good faith in their part, and I just - I just suggest they shouldn't do it.

Throughout the transcript, a central problem is the failure of each group to recognize the logic of the other and to accept that their opponent might be engaging in reasoned actions.

Koresh highlights the disconnect between the way that the FBI is treating the situation, and how the Branch Davidians perceive it. Koresh notes that what the government has done is “beyond the scope of reason,” but this scope of reason he is referring to is from his group’s internalized logic. For a group of religious individuals who collectively drew on their faith and separated social structure to derive their purpose and meaning, an armed conflict certainly does seem incomprehensible. The internal logic of the FBI, however, is vastly different. They have been trained in armed conflicts, and likely have participated in several before this conflict. The armed standoff, while unique in its context and length of time, is not something outside the scope of reason for the FBI. It is a part of their worldview, one incomprehensible to the Branch Davidians, much as the religious aspects of the Branch Davidians seemed incomprehensible to the FBI.

Koresh: In all courtesy's please - please impart that, because - because it's coming to the point to where ah - you know - God in heaven has somewhat to do also. And it's just really coming to the point of really, "What - What do you men really want?"

FBI: I think what - you know - just - this is - I'm just imparting to you what my perception is. And my perception is that - that - what they want is they want you and everybody to come out. You know - I -

Koresh: I don't think so. I think what they're showing is that they don't want that.

FBI: Well, I think that - that is exactly what they want.

Koresh: No. They're not gonna - they're not gonna - they're not gonna get that. They're not gonna get that by what they're doing right now. They're gonna get exactly the opposite - exactly the opposite. They're gonna get wrath on certain people. They're gonna get anger from certain guys. Now I can't control everybody here.

FBI: I think you can.

Koresh: No. I can't.

An interesting thing happens here: the validity of a third actor is contested. As the conversation continues, Koresh invokes God as an actor in this scene – he “has somewhat to do also.” The FBI responds by attempting to steer the conversation back from the religious conversations to the tangible situation. The conflict turns to a question of how the stand-off will be resolved, and Koresh makes a point to identify that the tactics being employed by the FBI were not going to work for the Branch Davidians: “they’re gonna get wrath... they’re gonna get anger.” There is also a question of control: the FBI believes that Koresh has the power to control the actions of members of the group, but Koresh rejects this notion.

Competing Religious and Secular Logics. The insular and hence competing logics at play include discussions of the nature of religious and secular discourse. Each group is attempting to frame the conversation in a way that the other can understand it, but their perspectives are so different that understanding is virtually impossible. For the government, the priority is getting as many lives saved as possible and ending the armed conflict. For the Branch Davidians and Koresh, however, this conflict is a religious battle, and their lives are less important than the relationship of this conflict to their religious beliefs. Koresh attempts to speak religiously; the FBI staunchly refuses to move beyond the secular, tangible realm.

In addition to the nature of contested public spheres and competing logics, Burke (1969)’s notions of identification are heavily at play in this negotiation transcript. While the FBI seems unwilling to engage in religious dialogue, focusing instead on the nature of the conflict itself, Koresh makes efforts to weave discussions of the conflict into his religious discourse; in

other words, Koresh attempts to communicate within a sphere of dialogue that the FBI understands and could respond to:

Koresh: But ah - but I would really and in all honesty and in good faith tell these generals to ah - to - to back up. They don't need to tear up anymore of this property. You tell us out of one side of the mouth, we're going to be able to come back here and all this. And ah - you know - we're gonna take this up in court, and on the other hand you're showing us there's not gonna be nothing to come back to.

FBI: I think the problem with this thing David is that this thing has lasted way too long.

Koresh: Oh, it - it - it has. It should have never gotten started this way -

FBI: You're right.

Koresh: And that was not our fault.

FBI: Ok

[...]

Koresh: Well, let me tell you this. These men who everyday we try to show them good faith. They've walked out in front of us, they've driven their tanks up to us, they've bust in the side of the building a little bit one time. You said that was a mistake - it was not in your control - that wasn't in the commander's wishes. You know - all of this has been shown that if these guys want to fight - Now I don't want to fight. I - I want - I'm a life too, and there's a lot of people in here that are lives. There's children in here.

In this exchange, Koresh has moved away from religious dialogue and has engaged in discussions of the nature of the conflict itself to build a level of understanding with the FBI negotiators. He talks about the tangible problems the group is facing – “they don’t need to tear up anymore of this property”; “they’ve driven their tanks up to us, they’ve bust in the side of the

building” – and for a time, moves away from the religious dialogue that he had employed to this point.

In attempting to identify with the FBI, Koresh talks about the conflict at their level rather than his own. The Branch Davidians believed that the conflict was about more than their own lives but was instead a reflection of their beliefs about how the world would end (Wright, 1996). Koresh recognized that in order to attempt to build a communicative connection and end the conflict, he would have to communicate in a language that the FBI would better understand. The FBI, however, made no such efforts to communicate in a way that would align with the religious logic of the Branch Davidians:

FBI: This - this probably would not have had to happen -

Koresh: It never did have to happen.

FBI: That's right. And - and then - you know - if you would have come out on - on the day that you indicated that you promised that you were gonna come out none of this would have taken place.

Koresh: Look. You denounce the fact that I have a God that communicates with me.

That's - that's the first mistake that we - that we make.

“That’s the first mistake that we make.” Koresh has highlighted explicitly the central premise of this chapter, and the locus of the conflict at Waco: an inability, or unwillingness, by the FBI to engage meaningfully in dialogue that would bridge the gap in ideologies between the secular world and the religious isolationism maintained by the Branch Davidians. To Koresh, the government has rejected their beliefs, their inherent ideological system that served as the impetus for all their actions. This rejection made communication virtually impossible:

Koresh: I have my responsibility also you know. Come on, look at the reality of things.

FBI: And the reality of things is that there are priorities.

Koresh: OK. But you put your priorities -

FBI: And your priority and everybody's priority should be in the safety of the children -

Koresh: All right.

FBI: And the safety of the women, and the safety of everybody

Koresh: You're fixing - you are fixing to ruin - your commanders are fixing to ruin the safety of me and my children. My life - the lives of my wives - the lives of my friends - my family. You're fixing to step across the ribbon.

FBI: I think that - that was something that you brought on. It has nothing to do with the commanders, David.

Koresh: All right. I brought on - if this - if this is the corner of the box that you place me into -

FBI: I think that you're placing yourself in that David. I don't think anybody is forcing it

Their conversation continues and revolves around a discussion of the “reality” of things.

This reality is, of course, subjective for each group, as noted above. Neither group can agree to what the objective reality of the situation is: they disagree about who “started” it, the religious or secular nature of the conflict, and on the potential resolution. In the face of an inability to come to an understanding about the reality of the situation, neither group can effectively communicate their position to the other. Without some level of identification with the other, some attempt to bridge the widening gap between these two groups, there is no communicative resolution.

Secularism and Religion Talking Past One Another. As the transcript progresses, it becomes clear that both groups are becoming more agitated with each other. The lack of effective communication results in frustration – how can others not see things the way I see

them? Each group grows more frustrated, culminating in this exchange, where the hostility is raised:

Koresh: About something that you don't want to prove as a matter of a fact. You're telling me - now you've - now you telling me that I am under arrest. I have to come out and I -

FBI: When somebody's under arrest that doesn't mean that it - that you've already been proven guilty. It just means that you've been charged.

Koresh: No. I'm being punished. We've already been punished. We've been placed in jail. We're being punished as guilty.

FBI: Well, that is something that you chose for everybody inside.

Koresh: That is not correct.

FBI: Sure it is because -

Koresh: That is something that you chose as a confinement.

FBI: Because if you had walked out on that day as you promised, by now who knows where we would have been. You know - you probably would be out on bail for God sakes.

Koresh is “being punished... we’ve already been punished”, even as the FBI attempts to downplay this punishment by focusing in on the legislative process that has yet to take place (“It doesn’t mean... you’ve already been proven guilty. It just means that you’ve been charged”).

Once again, the situation is vastly different from each perspective, and Koresh and the FBI both are growing wearier with the other. The FBI again places the impetus for the conflict on Koresh – “that is something you chose for everybody inside” – which Koresh rejects. Finally, in their frustration, the FBI even uses the Lord’s name in vain – “you probably would be out on bail for God’s sakes” – as what could be an attempt to poke at Koresh’s religious beliefs. Koresh does

not respond to this, instead continuing to emphasize the use of language that may better relate to the FBI he is negotiating with, before turning back to religious dialogue:

Koresh: Everyone in the tanks - everyone in the tanks out there is playing.

FBI: No. Nobody is. People just want to see some progress.

Koresh: Look some progress is being made. You don't realize what kind of progress is being made. There are people all over this world who are going to benefit from this book of the seven seals. You don't seem to understand.

FBI: And what you don't seem to understand is - is that the people here want to see that kind of progress, but another kind of progress. There's no reason why you couldn't be doing the same very thing that you are doing now within the place out here.

As their conversation continues, another disconnect in logic comes through. The question of progress is brought up, and each group has a radically different interpretation of what “progress” should look like. For the FBI, progress would mean the evacuation of individuals from the conflict, an end to the armed standoff, and Koresh turning himself in. In other words, the FBI defines progress as the resolution of the tangible conflict taking place. Koresh, on the other hand, moves away from discussions of the conflict back towards progress in developing his religious ideas, working on the book detailing the Seven Seals that he had referenced throughout the 51-day standoff. For the Branch Davidians, this is further proof that the conflict itself is not what is at stake, and it is not their own lives with which they are concerned; rather, it is the spiritual end times that this conflict *represents* that is the focus of their concern. The FBI’s response is a rejection of this idea: “People here want to see... another kind of progress.”

As the negotiation ends, a final exchange captures the central dichotomy at play in the conflict between the FBI and the Branch Davidians:

Koresh: It's wrong! You're doing wrong before God - before man. You are doing wrong!
You're adding to your wrong.

FBI: David, you're the one that's doing wrong.

The question of who is right and who is wrong is one where neither group can find any areas of commonality. Both groups reject responsibility, with Koresh even invoking God again as a final reinforcement of the centrality of religious beliefs to his argument. The FBI, seemingly exhausted with the negotiations at this point, bluntly tell Koresh that he bears the responsibility for the conflict as it has taken place. At the end of 51 days of an armed stand-off, and 51 days of negotiating, the reality seems to set in for both the FBI and for Koresh: there is no negotiating with someone who fundamentally rejects your worldview.

This analysis has examined only one transcript of the over 200 that exist between the FBI and David Koresh. This transcript has served as a case study to examine this essay's central proposition: that in group conflict, the question of identification, ideology, and the public spheres involved are all intertwined and collude to complicate the communicative situation. In the case of the Waco siege, two groups – the FBI and the Branch Davidians – with radically different worldviews ran into one another, and neither was able to effectively communicate their beliefs or persuade the other to find a communicative resolution to the conflict. Both groups carried a very strong sense of internal identification with fellow group members, which can result in difficulties in communicating with external groups that do not share the same values or belief system. As their internal identification became stronger, their ability to identify externally grew weaker.

Implications and Conclusion

The Waco siege may be the most prominent and devastating example of the dangers of religious isolationism and state intervention, but it is certainly not alone. Today, there are

religious groups such as the Westboro Baptist Church or The Family who similarly exist within worldviews that seem radically different from much of contemporary society. There is no guarantee that we will avoid another conflict similar to the Waco siege with a group who carries strong internal identification and an inability to align their group with the state's civil society, and we must consider ways that the Waco siege could have been handled differently so that we may avoid another tragedy like it in a similar conflict in the future.

The previous two case studies in this dissertation both analyzed the two-dimensional model in which Christian nationalism is seen as one extreme potential outcome of religious discourse in the public sphere. On the other side, I argue in each of those case studies that civic religious pluralism serves as a more effective counterweight to pure secularism in the public sphere. This chapter adds a third dimension that expands beyond this two-dimensional space to incorporate another religious tension: that between religious isolationism and state intervention. Taken together, these three case studies reveal a double-bind for religious citizens: they feel they are not able to effectively participate in the public sphere when pure secularism is employed, but at the same time they are unable to completely separate themselves from public life. Religious individuals, thus, feel that they cannot win: if they wish to participate in the public sphere, they must translate their argument into secular logic, something that for many is not possible or not desirable. If they do not wish to participate in the public sphere, the state still intervenes to ensure compliance with the basic rule of law in civil society. The civic religious pluralism that I argue serves as an effective response to Christian nationalism can also serve as an effective relief for this second tension. Civic religious pluralism gives religious citizens the ability to participate in the public sphere while maintaining their religious logic. Their only burden is to refrain from

promoting their religion as the only or best option above others. This is a significantly lighter burden than that of translating religious argumentation into purely secular logic.

The central recommendation that this chapter would point to is civic religious pluralism as the acknowledgement and validation of the beliefs of religious groups who wish to remain separate in many ways from contemporary society while maintaining a certain sense of compliance with civil society. In the analysis of the negotiation transcript, Koresh tries to modify his language use to be more palatable to the FBI, but the FBI makes no such effort to communicate within the Branch Davidians' constructed religious sphere. Wright (1995) advocates for future negotiations to include theological and communicative scholars who can work to address these groups based on their religious beliefs, rather than attempting to subvert their beliefs altogether. The central basis for effective intragroup communication is finding some level of identification. This did not happen at Waco, but future negotiators should work with the group in conflict to find some area of commonality, some foundation of common humanity upon which negotiations can be built. Without this foundation, a repeat of the Waco siege is possible, with two groups who fail to build towards understanding or agreement, and who are unable and unwilling to adjust their own internal logics for the sake of compromise.

A final reminder of David Koresh's prescient words: "You denounce the fact that I have a God that communicates with me. That's the first mistake we make." In conflict between religion and the state, our first obligation is to reject rejections, so to speak. The Waco siege escalated because of a failure to validate the ideological system of beliefs of the Branch Davidians. When there is a failure to find common ground, to build identification with the other, there is a failure to communicate, and a failure to resolve conflict. As groups develop stronger internal identification, their ability to negotiate their group logic, or to communicate externally

with those who reject their values, is diminished. We must find ways to overcome this separation through a recognition of the failures of pure secularism to provide an effective response to Christian nationalism. When we replace secularism with civic religious pluralism as a counterweight to Christian nationalism, the dimension that arises above this pole – that of state intervention and religious isolationism – is also affected. It allows for a better connection between the state and the religion in question, and it provides them a chance, however limited, to have their voice heard in the public square. This voice may have made all the difference.

CH. 5: CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS

You do not have to be good.

You do not have to walk on your knees

for a hundred miles through the desert repenting.

You only have to let the soft animal of your body

love what it loves.

-Mary Oliver, "Wild Geese"

Introduction

This dissertation has explored three case studies, each of which point towards the need for a new conceptualization of religious discourse in the public sphere that I term civic religious pluralism. In the case of Stephanie Borowicz and her pro-Christian-nationalist prayer given in a state legislative assembly, I argue that while the place of religion in the public sphere in the United States has traditionally been seen as a spectrum from pure secularism to Christian nationalism, an alternate perspective is more productive. I term this perspective civic religious pluralism, and I draw on the work of Charles Taylor in finding a way to incorporate elements of religion into the public sphere without the privileging of any one specific tradition. This is reaffirmed by the case of the *Christianity Today* editorial calling for the impeachment of Donald Trump, and the vitriolic response by evangelical leaders. I argue that Robert Bellah's civil religion, whereby the nation itself is recognized to have been founded on religious ideals without the privileging of Christianity over other religions, adds an additional element to my proposed civic religious pluralism. Finally, the Waco siege elevates the deliberative space in which the role of religion is contested above the two-dimensional model of civic religious pluralism and

Christian nationalism to include a third dimension, the tension between religious isolationism and the state intervention.

Implications of Civic Religious Pluralism in the Public Sphere

This dissertation argues that civic religious pluralism serves as a productive counterweight to Christian nationalism than the pure secularism that seeks to exclude religion entirely from the public square. The first two case studies demonstrate how civic religious pluralism is effectively taken up in the public sphere, while the third case study illustrates the dangers of failing to engage in civic religious pluralism.

This dissertation has also demonstrated a key element of the clash between Christian nationalism and civic religious pluralism that goes beyond differences of political or religious belief. There is a difference in the way that each side rhetorically constructs their argument. Christian nationalist rhetoric relies on a tragic framing of a situation in order to present Christianity as the one true solution to the ills of America. Civic religious pluralism, on the other hand, relies on a comic frame that emphasizes pluralism, compromise, and dialogue together. When these rhetorical strategies clash in the public sphere of debate and deliberation, they become incredibly difficult to reconcile. When we take up civic religious pluralism as a response to Christian nationalist rhetoric, we must be cognizant of this key difference in argumentative strategy.

The prayer by Stephanie Borowicz is an example of Christian nationalism, and the responses to the prayer are emblematic of civic religious pluralism in action. While Borowicz points to Christianity as the only hope for the salvation of America, Movita Johnson-Harrell and Jordan Harris respond not by throwing out religion altogether, but by pointing to the potential for unity and compassion that can come from a broad acceptance of a variety of religious voices.

Harris takes care to point out that he himself is a Christian before describing how his personal faith leads him to accept others regardless of their own faith traditions. Johnson-Harrell mentions the wide religious diversity among her supporters that came to the state house the day of Borowicz's prayer, highlighting her acceptance of religion without the privileging of her own Muslim tradition over others. These responses are what civic religious pluralism looks like: the conscious recognition of religion and its place in the public square, with a continual acknowledgement that no religion can be privileged over any other.

While Borowicz's prayer serves as Christian nationalism in action and the responses demonstrate civic religious pluralism, the opposite of this takes place in the case of Mark Galli's editorial calling for President Trump's removal from office. Galli's editorial is the example of civic religious pluralism here, while the response to the editorial written by evangelical leaders serves as an artifact of Christian nationalism. Galli takes care to draw a distinction between his personal identification as a devout Christian and his belief in the need for public moral leadership regardless of theological creed. This is a central tenet of civic religious pluralism: that one is entitled to their own religious tradition and to expressing that tradition in the public sphere, so long as one does not do so at the expense of minority religious practices. The response by evangelical leaders, on the other hand, makes it clear that their commitment is to theological alignment, not to a common moral code. The evangelical leaders do not contest that Trump has moral deficiencies; rather, they argue that the moral deficiencies are not the metric by which Trump should be judged. Instead, they argue that Trump's political and ideological commitment to Christian causes should be the grounds for his support. This case illustrates again the two sides of the pole between Christian nationalism and civic religious pluralism, with the stronger

argument being built by Galli in service of recognizing religion's place as a moral guide without privileging Christianity in public leadership.

The final case study adds a new dimension to the two-dimensional model of a deliberative space in which Christian nationalism and civic religious pluralism stand opposite each other. The Waco case forces a reconsideration of that deliberative space in situations where religious isolationism and state intervention clash in rhetorical engagement with each other and challenge the flat deliberative spectrum of the prior case studies. The Waco siege illustrates the dual tensions that religious groups or citizens can find themselves stuck between: a tension between engaging in the public sphere and feeling excluded from it, and an opposing tension between adhering to their religious tenets and being forced to participate in civic life. For David Koresh and the Branch Davidians, their efforts to live in isolation from contemporary society came into conflict with the state's laws and regulations to ensure a safe and functioning society. In the conflict that ensued, the state failed to effectively protect the religious liberty of the Branch Davidians, and the Branch Davidians failed to integrate their religious traditions into contemporary society.

The Waco siege can serve as evidence for arguing that deliberative positions built on civic religious pluralism not just do (as we saw in the first two case studies), but also ought to play a central role in public discourse and civic affairs. The case is emblematic of the failures that can occur when a religious group feels that they do not have a voice in the public sphere *and* that they are not allowed to fully abstain from civil society. An approach to the Waco siege grounded in civic religious pluralism would provide Branch Davidians with a voice in public deliberation (so long as they do not promote their tradition as the only legitimate form of religious tradition) and the state with a broader latitude in accepting religious practices (within

the confines of state law). In short, both groups would have a new deliberative obligation: the Branch Davidians, to abstain from religious speech that is exclusive to their own tradition, and the state, to permit the Branch Davidians to maintain some aspect of their isolation from some tenets of modern society. It is not clear if this approach would have made a significant difference in the outcome. What is clear, however, is that the choices made by the state during the Waco siege were ineffective and led to a fatal outcome; an alternative paradigm may have presented at least a moderately better outcome for all involved.

I believe that civic religious pluralism provides the best solution for religious citizens who wish to participate in public deliberation. As an alternative to total secularism, civic religious pluralism provides religious citizens with the ability to voice their beliefs in the public square without the burden of secular translation. Wolterstorff and Audi (1997) explains the issue with translation into secularism as a solution: for many religious individuals, they are unable to engage in this translation. Their religious beliefs form the core of their political and ideological beliefs, and translation into secular argumentation is not only incredibly difficult, but it is not something they are willing to do. In the face of this, the solution is not to simply exclude religious individuals from public deliberation altogether. It is instead to permit religious discourse into the public sphere, with the only burden being a limitation on language that privileges one religious tradition over others. Stephanie Borowicz is entitled to her Christian faith, and this Christian faith may very well inform her political decisions. What she cannot do, however, is promote Christianity as preferable to other religious traditions or as the only path for redemption. In doing so, she alienates constituents who do not share her religious views and makes their perspectives marginalized. This is the danger of Christian nationalism and the reason why civic religious pluralism is an effective counterweight.

Civic religious pluralism serves as a more effective counter to Christian nationalism than pure secularism. When the state attempts to ban religious discourse from the public sphere entirely, religious citizens are not given equal participation in public deliberation. They are subordinated behind secular reasoning and, if they wish to participate, they are forced to make their argument in secular terms. This is an unfair burden, and in the face of such a burden, a reactionary position arises which aligns itself more closely with theocracy. In the United States, this theocracy is promoted through Christian nationalism. When total secularism of the public square is presented as the opposite pole of Christian nationalism, religious individuals gravitate towards the Christian nationalist discourse, even if they would prefer an alternative. When religious citizens are presented with two options, total secularism, or total religious theocracy, they gravitate towards the side that allows their religious discourse to be heard. By replacing total secularism with civic religious pluralism, then, we provide religious citizens with a space to provide their religious rationale for ideological positions without forcing them to align themselves with religious nationalists.

Practicing Civic Religious Pluralism

I want to close this dissertation with a vision for civic religious pluralism in practical application. From this dissertation, and from my analysis of these three case studies that in different ways sketch out the presence and need for civic religious pluralism, there are practical ways that we can engage in civic religious pluralism. These range from the public to the private, from deliberation with others to our own internal ideological frameworks.

Recognize the Value of Religious (and non-Religious) Diversity

The first and most critical application of civic religious pluralism in contemporary society is the recognition of the value that multiple perspectives can bring to the table. We often find

ourselves locked into our own particular way of thinking, our ideological commitments formed through our past, our present, and our vision of the future. What we must also work to do, however, is to see things from another vantage point. When we engage in public deliberation, civic religious pluralism asks us to shake off the notion that we are right, and our opponent is wrong. Instead, it asks us to recognize that we are human, and our opponent is human; our views form part of who we are, and our opponent's views form part of who they are. One is not above or below the other. Civic religious pluralism demands of us that we ensure equality and diversity of perspectives.

There are concrete ways we can work to broaden the scope of our own understanding of critical issues. We can seek out religious diversity among our friends, our colleagues, and our media sources. I believe we have an obligation to always be looking for new ways of building knowledge and solving the problems that our community faces. We cannot do this if we refuse to entertain the idea that our way is not the only way forward, nor is it always the best. We can also practice what Hannah Arendt called *amor mundi*, or 'love of the world.' This love is distinct from love in relationships. Arendt clarifies that this love is "not only apolitical, but antipolitical, perhaps the most powerful of all antipolitical forces" (1998/1958, p. 242). What Arendt means is that we should work towards an unconditional love of shared humanity, even with those with whom we disagree. In this work of love, then, we can ensure that we draw a distinction between disagreement and disrespect.

Disagreement is not Disrespect

Civic religious pluralism asks us to consider the possibility that our way may not be the only way. We carry our internal religious beliefs with us, but when we take those beliefs out into the public square, we have an obligation to ensure that we are not elevating our beliefs over those

of others. In matters of public deliberation, we should work to understand our opponent and to grant their views the level of respect that we expect of our own. This is not agreement; in any pluralistic society we will have differences in what we believe is the best course of action.

Disagreement, however, is not the same thing as disrespect, and this is a critical element of civic religious pluralism.

This commitment to respect works both when our position is taken up and when it is not. When, after public deliberation, our position wins out, we must take care to ensure that those who disagree still feel that they were permitted a voice. When our opponent's position is taken up, we must similarly not take offense or react as if a rejection of our policy is a rejection of us. In public deliberation, the focus must be on the merits of the argument, not the merits of the individual making the argument. In bringing religious dialogue into the public sphere, we need to ensure that citizens who speak on their religious beliefs feel free to do so without fear of retribution or fear that their views will not be taken seriously. Similarly, non-religious citizens must not be led to feel that their secular argumentation is more or less valuable than religious argumentation; all logics that are presented through the lens of equality are given the same level of consideration and value.

The Burdens of Translation for Religious and Non-Religious Citizens

In discourse within the public sphere, everyone has an obligation to make sure that their argument can be understood by the broader public. Without this effort of mutual understanding between rhetor and audience, deliberative democracy fails. Audiences cannot be expected to properly act on a recommendation, or engage in a particular activity, if they cannot identify with the logic of the argument presented to them. This burden of translation has been explored

through the lens of pure secularism (Habermas, 2005; Rawls, 1993), but civic religious pluralism changes the deliberative expectations for both religious and non-religious citizens.

For religious citizens, there are two obligations of argumentation. The first is that their religious views cannot be presented as the only valid perspective. Civic religious pluralism encourages the use of religious logic in the public sphere of deliberation, so long as there remains a vision of religious equality and a diversity of perspectives. The second obligation for religious citizens is to ensure that they are similarly recognizing the validity of secular argumentation. Not only must religious citizens respect diversity of religious perspectives, but they must respect atheist and agnostic perspectives as well. These two burdens are not insignificant, but they are far less intensive than the burden of translating their religious views into secular logic that is expected of them from a total secularist position.

For non-religious citizens, they have an obligation, as well: they must accept a diversity of religious viewpoints into the public sphere. Secular citizens must not dismiss a perspective presented in deliberation merely because of its religious roots. In the same way that religious citizens are expected to value non-religious viewpoints, non-religious citizens are expected to value religious viewpoints. This also comes back to the second recommendation listed above, a recognition that disagreement does not equal disrespect. All views that recognize a shared view of equality and human progress must be given equal weight in the realm of public deliberation.

Civic Religious Pluralism in our Private Lives

Civic religious pluralism is not merely a paradigm to consider in the realm of public deliberation, but it is also an interpersonal endeavor. When we take up its central premise, that religious discourse is valuable and that all religions (and non-religious views) have equal weight in the public space of deliberation, then it reverberates throughout our communicative selves. It

does not merely dictate how we engage with public deliberation; it dictates how we engage every day with people with whom we disagree, people we even despise.

Consider the example of Ram Dass, a spiritual teacher and leader, who keeps a picture of Barack Obama, Donald Trump, and Bob Dole on his spiritual altar at which he prays to the Divine. He sums up his message of love for all of humanity, even those with whom we disagree: “So in the morning, I say, ‘Good morning, Christ! Hello, Buddha! Good morning, Maharajji! *Hello, Bob.*’ And I see how far I have to go yet. Because after all, [Bob Dole] is merely God in drag, saying, *I bet you won't recognize me this way, will you?* They're all faces of the beloved” (Welch, 2018 n. p.). It is in prayer that Ram Dass aligns himself with common humanity, that he finds himself intentionally in a space of commonality with Donald Trump, Barack Obama, Bob Dole, and a multitude of religious figures. In this space, Dass recognizes them, and himself, as human, as inherently the same.

I am not encouraging everyone to have a picture of Bob Dole or Donald Trump at their altar (although it might be a place to start for some). I am not encouraging everyone to have an altar at all. What I do believe, however, is that we need to re-think some of the things we have assumed to be true about communication and about ideological differences. We need to reevaluate the assumptions that those who agree with us are *right*, and those who disagree are *wrong*. This binary precludes any possibility that we can find areas of connection with our fellow man. We also must reevaluate the sacred place given to dialogue within the public sphere as the dominant form of conceptualizing civic engagement.

From Civic Religious Pluralism in Public Argument to an Alternative Perspective of Language

To close, I want to step out on a speculative limb and ask us to consider what actively engaging in civic religious pluralism says about the nature of language itself. The public sphere model presents a compelling understanding of dialogue and deliberation, but it does not account for the inherent dangers of translation of religious arguments into secular terms. By engaging in this act of translation, we are asking religious citizens to devalue their own ideology for the sake of others. Instead, I argue that civic religious pluralism reduces the burden of translation and allows religious citizens to bring their ideas into the realm of public discourse. But civic religious pluralism also relies on an alternative view of language as spiritual and supra-rational. It is this distinct view of language that allows for an unfettered sharing of ideas and ideals. When we see language not as a tool of persuasion but as a binding agent between all humans, we can see the potential that it carries for radically transforming our engagement with our deliberative opponents. This alternative perspective drives my vision for civic religious pluralism and is based upon three claims about the nature of language.

Three Claims

The first claim that underlies the alternative linguistic perspective presented by civic religious pluralism: *language itself is a spiritual endeavor*. I propose that language is not merely rational, but supra-rational. It is not merely dialogue nor is it the sharing of ideas or ideals; it is, to borrow the language of Heidegger, rather a connection that goes beyond human explanation between our inner and outer Beings, a way of representing ourselves, but never our whole selves, to the world. It is a turning, an opening-up of a part of our being to others. This approach sees language as the first underlying connection we share with all people, and should we focus on this

in our engagement with everyone we encounter, our supporters and our detractors, we start from a place of connection, rather than a place of distance and disagreement.

A second claim: *by its spiritual nature, language is about recognizing with our shared common humanity.* In his seminal work *Speaking Into the Air*, John Durham Peters (2000) argues that we must consider every person as a unique and valid Self, as a being with their own history, context, linguistic understandings, and (I add now) their own spirituality. By conceptualizing language as something outside of and beyond rationality, what I am suggesting is that language can help us make connections that are outside of rationality, connections that can only exist within the spiritual milieu of language. These spiritual connections are not religious and are not dependent on shared religious, political, or ideological views. Rather, civic religious pluralism calls on us to recognize our fellow man as equal, valid, and loved. Language is a binding agent for making this type of connection.

A third and final claim that I wish to advance is that *language teaches us who we are, and it is only in knowing who we are that we can truly be in the world.* Language is symbolic, but it is never really about the symbols; it's about what language tells us about who we are and who the Other is. What I have found to be a beautiful and comforting thought in these times of strife, is that as language reveals things about myself and about my connection to common humanity, it is also revealing things about and to everyone I encounter. In recognizing all of humanity's shared connections, *in recognizing all that we share and not just all the places where we disagree*, we come together in a celebration of the unique language-using creatures that we are. In a very real way, this dissertation serves as a source of personal reflection and wrestling with what it means to share a common humanity with people with whom we disagree. Civic

religious pluralism provides a framework for employing this view of language as spiritual connection in the real world of public discourse and deliberation.

Civic religious pluralism can form the foundation of our interaction with those with whom we disagree. In the space of public deliberation, civic religious pluralism can give us a way to better understand how to bring our own religious (or non-religious) perspectives into the public sphere without silencing dissenting voices. This civic religious pluralism still places a burden on religious citizens: they must not make any argument that their particular view is superior to anyone else's. At the same time, secular citizens must be ready and willing to accept argumentation from religious grounds. This is not necessarily *less* of a burden than that proposed by Habermas and Rawls; it is, instead, a more *equal* burden between religious and non-religious citizens. Rather than forcing religious citizens to conform to secular reasoning, civic religious pluralism asks both religious and non-religious citizens to be open to hearing and accepting new thoughts regardless of their foundation, be it secular or religious.

Limitations and Future Directions

I want to pause for a caveat. It is easy for me, a cisgender heterosexual white man, to posit that we are all human and that we must work towards civic engagement and cooperative dialogue with those with whom we disagree. No one has ever taken away my basic human rights; no one has questioned if I have the right to marry the person I love; no one has treated me with disdain and malice because of the color of my skin; no one has taken away my autonomy over my body and my reproductive rights. These are worthy objections that I cannot hope to fully address in all their complexity, but perhaps my central argument is being made not towards the powerless, but towards the powerful. The work to be done of common love in civic dialogue must be taken up by all, but it is the obligation of those in power, those with privilege, to reflect

on their power and privilege and to work actively to eradicate it. This is not an easy proposition, but one goal of this research project is to contribute in some small way to this reckoning with male privilege, white privilege, straight privilege, and binary privilege, and to continue the necessary work towards a full and inclusive civic equality.

This dissertation has focused on two different cases where civic religious pluralism was employed as a response to Christian nationalist rhetoric and one case where civic religious pluralism was not employed and instead the linguistic chasm between the total secularism of the state and purely religious dialogue was never bridged. Civic religious pluralism as a new framework for understanding religious discourse in the public sphere should continue to be explored in future case studies. The dangers of both pure secularism and Christian nationalism in the United States remain. Pure secularism excludes religious discourse and, by extension, religious citizens from participating in deliberative democracy. Christian nationalism excludes all non-Christians from participation, as well. Civic religious pluralism provides a way for us to incorporate religious views without letting those views dominate the discussion. Future research projects that take up civic religious pluralism should continue to find instances of Christianity being given a privileged space in American society and call this out for what it is: theocracy.

There are many more cases where civic religious pluralism can serve as an effective framework for understanding religion's place in contemporary society. In 2019, the Supreme Court ruled that a World War I memorial in the shape of the Christian cross could stay on public property. Justice Alito, who wrote the majority opinion, argued that while the monument was a specific reference to Christianity when it was originally built, it has stood long enough to now be recognized primarily as a war memorial, not as a religious artifact. Justice Ginsburg wrote a dissenting opinion in which she argued that the passage of time is irrelevant; the cross is a fixture

of the Christian religious tradition and the monument still serves as a Christian relic. This is just one case where civic religious pluralism could provide a theoretical perspective to accompany a rhetorical analysis of the Supreme Court decisions and could further our understanding of religion's unique place in American public history.

Civic religious pluralism is useful for rationalizing religion's place in American society. Our pledge of allegiance contains the words, "under God." "In God We Trust" is printed on our money. Christianity has also been uniquely dominant in our country's history. The first pilgrims brought Christianity with them to America. Since its founding, Christianity has been the major religion of the country. The United States has had a President affiliated with Christianity since 1869. It is not surprising, then, that Christian nationalist perspectives maintain influence and support in the United States. Civic religious pluralism provides a framework for evaluating instances of Christian dominance and seeks to give citizens of all religious beliefs and no religious beliefs an equal voice in the public sphere.

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