

ABSTRACT

The Pluralist God Strategy: How Religious Rhetoric has Developed as a Political Weapon
Through the Lens of Presidential High-State Addresses

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The God Strategy, a way of garnering the approval of a religious voting bloc, rose to prominence with the election of Ronald Reagan in 1980. This approach appealed to religious people by invoking God and invoking faith, using terms that have been understood as evoking religious ideas increasingly often. Yet, it is not the same exact strategy that has prevailed in each presidency each case to unify the nation. Through chronologically analyzing the references to faith used in High-State (Inaugural and State of the Union) addresses of all presidents from Reagan through Obama I show how, with the goal of increasing national unity, presidents have adapted the God Strategy to be increasingly pluralistic and have come to depict religion as a divisive force instead of a unifying one, ultimately developing a new method of utilizing religion, which I call The Pluralist God Strategy.

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DEVELOPED AS A POLITICAL WEAPON THROUGH THE LENS OF
PRESIDENTIAL HIGH-STATE ADDRESSES

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction: The God Strategy	1
Chapter One: Ronald Reagan's Application of the God Strategy	6
Chapter Two: George H.W. Bush's Application of the God Strategy.	20
Chapter Three: Bill Clinton's Pluralist God Strategy	29
Chapter Four: George W. Bush's Adjustments to the Pluralist God Strategy.	41
Chapter Five: Barack Obama's Explicit Articulation of the Common Creed.	66
Chapter Six: The Progression of the God Strategy	80
Bibliography	84

INTRODUCTION

Even before Jesus said, “Render therefore unto Caesar the things which are Caesar's; and unto God the things that are God's”¹ there was tension about the relationship between faith, the realm of God, and politics, the realm of Caesar. This tension has carried itself into present-day America where politicians continue to blur the line between the realms of religious devotion and political rhetoric.

Indeed, from the nascent of America, the national politics, and political speech in particular, have been characterized by their intermingling with religion. In George Washington's first Inaugural, the first official presidential speech under the American nation, he charges his audience with words that are full of religious meaning, saying:

I dwell on this prospect with every satisfaction which an ardent love for my country can inspire, since there is no truth more thoroughly established than that there exists in the economy and course of nature an indissoluble union between virtue and happiness; between duty and advantage; between the genuine maxims of an honest and magnanimous policy and the solid rewards of public prosperity and felicity; since we ought to be no less persuaded that the smiles of Heaven can never be expected on a nation that disregards the eternal rules of order and right which Heaven itself has ordained; and since the preservation of the sacred fire of liberty and the destiny of the republican model of government are justly considered, perhaps, as deeply, as finally, staked on the experiment entrusted to the hands of the American people.²

Thus Washington focuses on the nation's regard for the laws “which Heaven itself has ordained” as a litmus test for its national prosperity. Therefore, the national ability to maintain the “sacred

¹ Matthew 22:21, KJV

² George Washington: "Inaugural Address," April 30, 1789. Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project. <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=25800>.

fire of liberty,” symbolizing American government, is cast as dependent on the national accordance with the laws of Heaven.

Throughout the history of American politics, the idea of divine will has played role in how national leaders have described American politics. Taking a similar approach to Washington over one hundred years later, Franklin Delano Roosevelt concluded his state of the Union

Address on January 6 1941 with these words:

This nation has placed its destiny in the hands and heads and hearts of its millions of free men and women; and its faith in freedom under the guidance of God. Freedom means the supremacy of human rights everywhere. Our support goes to those who struggle to gain those rights or keep them. Our strength is our unity of purpose. To that high concept there can be no end save victory.³

Appealing to God for the guidance of American freedom, FDR continues the American pattern of mixing national purposes and ideals, in this case freedom, with religious beliefs.

Moreover, some Presidents of the past have taken biblical passages and appropriated them to the American context. Such was the case with Abraham Lincoln who, as a young congressman appropriated the truth of Mark 3:25 to declare that, in America as in Jesus’ day, "A house divided against itself cannot stand.” The mixing of religion and politics has always been a part of the American reality.

However, since 1980 the mixing of politics and religion has become incredibly more prominent, as politicians have discovered the potent use of religion as a political weapon. The dramatic increase in direct references to God and to terms that evoke faith has been attributed by David Domke and Kevin Coe to an intentional strategy to demonstrate solidarity with religious groups, which they call “The God Strategy.” In their book entitled The God Strategy: How

³ Franklin D. Roosevelt: "Annual Message to Congress on the State of the Union," January 6, 1941. Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project. <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=16092>.

Religion Became a Political Weapon in America Domke and Coe describe the distinct manifestations of this strategy as being fourfold. By using religious language, “linking America with divine will,” “embracing important religious symbols, practices, and rituals,” and defending bellwether issues, politicians since 1980 have attempted to establish their commonground with religious people.⁴

With the successful candidacy and celebrated presidency of Ronald Reagan, Republicans have taken advantage of the use of the God Strategy to win over a newly active voting bloc of evangelical voters⁵. As a result of this strategy, Republicans maintained consistent control of government with a brief lapse in the Clinton years, where a Democrat too applied this strategy of leaning on religious rhetoric to win elections. When George W. Bush, as part of a campaign interview answered that his favorite philosopher was “Jesus because he changed my heart,” it was clear that another Republican had taken up this strategy and he ended up utilizing it for an ultimate electoral victory.⁶ Appealing to God had proven successful, but what made it so useful?

With the rise of a politically active, sizable religious voting bloc practitioners of the God Strategy could gain a crucial advantage in the competition for political office by appealing to this new source of votes. A significant representation of this emergent religious interest, and its interaction with the God Strategy was the Moral Majority founded by Jerry Falwell. The size and novelty of this religious coalition made its interests compelling to politicians as they sought advantages over their competitors. Falwell indicates the sizable political advantage that appeals to the interests of the Moral Majority could have on elections when he noted of Reagan, “If

⁴ Domke, David Scott, and Kevin M. Coe. *The God Strategy: How Religion Became a Political Weapon in America*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008., 19

⁵ Ibid, 17

⁶ Ibid, 29

evangelicals are excited about the platform, which they are, and about both candidates, I'd say three or four million votes will be available to Mr. Reagan that have never been available to anybody.⁷ As such, at its inception the God Strategy was made useful by the rising of a growing religious voting bloc.

Moreover, Domke and Coe indicate that a primary reason for the success of the God Strategy is its effectiveness in sending a signal of solidarity with religious communities. Here, these signals of religious solidarity become potent political weapons because once a politician has effectively communicated a politician's religious message, this signal of religious solidarity becomes a "shortcut" voters use to guide decision-making. In an information age, people have become apt to look for quick signals about who to vote for, a prime one of these signals is personal character. Believing that candidates who have a strong religious faith are more credible and trustworthy, voters are liable to cast ballots based on a few words, without doing thorough research⁸. This is where the God Strategy pays off by indicating the solidarity of a candidate with religious voters via his use of faith terms,⁹ advocacy for moral issues, and utilizing religious rituals.

Yet, Since Reagan's presidency, the God Strategy has not been standing still. Instead, every new president has altered the strategy to his liking. Now, more than thirty years after Reagan, the God Strategy in use is different, but how? And how did it change? Expanding on Domke and Coe's assessment of the prominence of this strategy, I argue that the God Strategy pluralized, referring to a wider variety of religions over time, from Clinton onward to appeal to

⁷ Ibid, 17

⁸ Ibid, 21

⁹ Ibid, 39

promote national unity in the face of a increasingly diverse nation. By analyzing the faith-terms used by Ronald Reagan, George H.W. Bush, Bill Clinton, George W. Bush, and Barack Obama in chronological order, I will trace the elements of the Strategy that Reagan developed, the use of appeals to specific religions and to a national idea of civic religion, and then analyze how these elements interacted and were utilized to change the Strategy by the presidents that came after him.

My analysis will provide snapshot pictures of this pluralizing trend by looking at Inaugural and State of the Union speeches exclusively. While this overview-type approach fails to account for how presidents would utilize or fail to utilize religious appeals in front of different audiences, since presidents are always before a totally national audience when delivering these addresses, it does account for how presidents would view religion's role in their appeals for national unity. After all, national unity is a primary focus of these televised addresses to the entire American populace. Moreover, Inaugural and State of the Union speeches form a unique category of addresses that manifests the God Strategy in an especially prominent manner through increased invocations of God and increased references to faith,¹⁰ allowing for a more clear identification of the shift in religious rhetoric in front of a national audience than any other addresses.

¹⁰ Ibid, 40

CHAPTER ONE

Ronald Reagan's Application of the God Strategy

Setting A Precedent

I will begin my analysis of the developing pluralism of the "God Strategy" by analyzing Ronald Reagan's use of religious rhetoric in his two Inaugurals and eight State of the Union addresses. This beginning will serve several purposes for my further analysis of the increasing acknowledgement of pluralism in presidential religious rhetoric since Reagan. First, the characteristics common in Reagan's references to religious groups, ideas, and beliefs will serve as a basis from which to identify changes that subsequent presidents made to the God Strategy. Moreover, the way Reagan referred to faith in his speeches will be seen to have planted ideas about the role of faith in politics that would be further developed and articulated through time, some which are even still present in Obama's speeches today

In analyzing Reagan's rhetoric to find the degree to which his faith invocations are pluralistic, appealing to multiple religions or applying religious terms to inherently irreligious concepts that all of America can identify with without needing the filter of a particular religious tradition. I will proceed by identifying recurring faith terms ¹¹ in his addresses that are useful in gauging to what degree Reagan appeals to a pluralistic notion of religion in order to motivate national unity. In order to accomplish this, I will investigate Reagan's rhetorical advancement of

¹¹ The list of 50 faith terms used by Domke and Coe in their analysis of invocations of faith can be found at <http://www.kpolisa.com/KP6-7/Pdf/KP07-I-3-DDomkeKCoe.pdf> on page 82.

American unity under a common democratic creed and his appeals to America as a nation that is defined by its relationship to God.

Statements About the American Common Creed

In his first Inaugural address Reagan emphasized an idea that would become a staple for pluralist appeals to religion with future presidents, the idea of a common civil belief system centered on devotion to democracy. Commenting on the setting of his first inaugural, Reagan noted, “This is the first time in our history that this ceremony has been held, as you've been told, on this West Front of the Capitol. Standing here, one faces a magnificent vista, opening up on this city's special beauty and history. At the end of this open mall are those shrines to the giants on whose shoulders we stand.”¹² Referring to the national monuments as “shrines,” Reagan situated the memory of America’s national heroes in a religious and memorial context. Doing this, he called for unity around America’s national history and a religious respect for liberty. This appeal provided a solid basis for the common connection of people from all religious perspectives. The common veneration of democracy and democracy’s heroes can serve as a uniting force beyond appeals to God.

Further support for the idea of a uniting civic creed comes from Reagan’s use of the term “miracle” to explain American government. Reagan began this practice in his first Inaugural address where he noted that:

To a few of us here today this is a solemn and most momentous occasion, and yet in the history of our nation it is a commonplace occurrence. The orderly transfer of authority as called for in the Constitution routinely takes place, as it has for almost two centuries, and

¹²Ronald Reagan: "Inaugural Address," January 20, 1981. Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project. <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=43130>.

few of us stop to think how unique we really are. In the eyes of many in the world, this every 4-year ceremony we accept as normal is nothing less than a miracle.¹³

Casting the peaceful democratic passing of power as a “miracle,” a term that is most often associated with God, Reagan characterized democracy as an object of common awe, that we as Americans uniquely experience. The unique and inexplicable blessing of American democracy provides something for non-Christians to appreciate and rally around with their fellow Americans.

Reagan further cemented the idea of America’s uniqueness by emphasizing the miraculous nature of American progress in his fifth State of the Union. In doing this, Reagan further affirmed devotion to the nation as a common cult that people can get behind, regardless of their personal beliefs about God.

Let us begin by challenging our conventional wisdom. There are no constraints on the human mind, no walls around the human spirit, no barriers to our progress except those we ourselves erect. Already, pushing down tax rates has freed our economy to vault forward to record growth. In Europe, they're calling it "the American Miracle." Day by day, we're shattering accepted notions of what is possible. When I was growing up, we failed to see how a new thing called radio would transform our marketplace. Well, today, many have not yet seen how advances in technology are transforming our lives.¹⁴

Here, Reagan purposely emphasizes American progress without recognizing God. The fact that the limits of the human mind are solely self-imposed assumes that God does not impose any limits, putting Reagan on the same footing as many Deists, Agnostics, Atheists, and optimistic Christians. Moreover, the appeal to “the human spirit” is a source of common ground that does

¹³ Ibid

¹⁴ Ronald Reagan: "Address Before a Joint Session of the Congress on the State of the Union ," February 6, 1985. Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project. <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=38069>.

not differentiate based on beliefs, appealing to panoply of faiths. In conjunction with these appeals, the reference to the “American Miracle” puts America on display as an object of unique awe and devotion. Attributing the economic success to American uniqueness and labeling it miraculous, Reagan indicates that America is worthy of communal awe and devotion for the great things she can make happen. This furthers the advocacy of a common pluralist belief system, one that does not hinge on belief in a particular deity.

Reagan lays further groundwork for this pluralist civic creed based on duty to America in his second State of the Union by saying, “Let us so conduct ourselves that two centuries from now, another Congress and another President, meeting in this Chamber as we are meeting, will speak of us with pride, saying that we met the test and preserved for them in their day the sacred flame of liberty—this last, best hope of man on Earth.”¹⁵ The use of “sacred flame” alludes to George Washington’s first inaugural address on April 30 1789 and refers to his characterization of liberty, which reads, “the preservation of the sacred fire of liberty and the destiny of the republican model of government are justly considered, perhaps, as deeply, as finally, staked on the experiment entrusted to the hands of the American people.”¹⁶ As such, Washington depicts liberty as something that must be preserved. Adding to Washington’s statement, “the last, best hope of man on earth,” Reagan indicates that the preservation of democracy is of utmost importance. Thus, no matter what differences would be in their way, Americans ought to work together to preserve liberty.

Common devotion to liberty is advanced through use of the imagery of holy places in Reagan’s third State of the Union address where he clarified, “if we want them one day to be

¹⁵ Ronald Reagan: "Address Before a Joint Session of the Congress Reporting on the State of the Union ," January 26, 1982. Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project. <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=42687>.

¹⁶George Washington: "Inaugural Address," April 30, 1789. Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project. <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=25800>.

thankful for what we did here in these temples of freedom, we will work together to make America better for our having been here-not just in this year or this decade but in the next century and beyond.”¹⁷ A “temple” has always been considered a holy place, so Reagan’s identification of Congressional chambers with this idea is yet another force for a unity around democracy, something all Americans can revere, much like objects in a temple. The idea of there being “temples” to freedom reinforces the scarcely sub textual idea that Americans should apply religious rigor toward their protection of freedom. This heavy demand and corporate responsibility forms the basis for a common creed that would ideally define all Americans equally and unite them toward a common goal.

In his fourth State of the Union, Reagan emphasizes yet another element of this common creed, the need for revival. He notes that prior to his presidency, “There was a hunger in the land for a spiritual revival; if you will, a crusade for renewal. The American people said: Let us look to the future with confidence, both at home and abroad. Let us give freedom a chance.”¹⁸ What is distinctive about this appeal to revival is that it is entirely severed from traditional religion. Keeping with the theme of a common creed, Reagan attaches this need for “revival,” a term which at the time Reagan uttered it was most closely associated with Billy Graham’s evangelical movement, to the America’s devotion to freedom. The devotion to freedom must be constantly passionate and consistently zealous. Therefore, the spirit with which America pursues liberty needs to be revived because it is required to be vigorous. Additionally, the appeals to unity

¹⁷Ronald Reagan: "Address Before a Joint Session of the Congress on the State of the Union ," January 25, 1983. Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project. <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=41698>.

¹⁸Ronald Reagan: "Address Before a Joint Session of the Congress on the State of the Union ," January 25, 1984. Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project. <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=40205>.

through reference to the belief of the “American people” as if it was a unified thing and the appeals to action through the imperative “let’s give freedom a chance” reinforce the necessity of this revival as something that requires immediate action and is justified by the united American will.

The miraculous nature of democracy, the amazing progress Americans are capable of, the vulnerability of liberty, and the need to be passionate about the pursuit of new liberties all create the foundation for a common creed around which citizens of all faiths can unite. Reagan cast a vision for an America where this common creed had its full effect, a uniting force deeper than all differences, when he speaks in his last State of the Union of, “an America whose divergent but harmonizing communities were a reflection of a deeper community of values: the value of work, of family, of religion, and of the love of freedom that God places in each of us and whose defense He has entrusted in a special way to this nation.”¹⁹ What is revelatory about this statement is that, while a religion founded in God is not the whole story behind Reagan’s view of a common creed, it certainly is a crucial part.

References to Communities of Faith

My analysis of the degree of specificity Reagan applies to his “invocations of faith” with begin with a further probing into the way in which he uses the word “church” in his addresses. In his third State of the Union address, Reagan provides conclusive evidence for an exclusively Christian understanding of “church”, noting, “From coast to coast, on the job and in classrooms and laboratories, at new construction sites and in churches and community groups, neighbors are

¹⁹Ronald Reagan: "Address Before a Joint Session of Congress on the State of the Union ," January 25, 1988. Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project. <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=36035>.

helping neighbors. And they've already begun the building, the research, the work, and the giving that will make our country great again.”²⁰ “In churches” here references the church buildings, referring to a distinctively Christian moniker for houses of worship. While Jews would worship at a temple or synagogue and Muslims at a mosque, only Christians call their houses of worship “churches.” This is significant because of the absence of references to either temples or mosques as places where “neighbors are helping neighbors.” Given this absence, Reagan has chosen to not emphasize religious pluralism in his picture of national religion. This is indicative of the original focus of the “God Strategy” as posited by Domke and Coe, to attract previously inactive evangelicals into politics, not necessarily to appeal to the entirety of the American religious landscape.²¹

Moreover, Reagan referred explicitly to “Churches” as the places where people are helped the society, painted a positive, but exclusively Christian picture of religion. Commending support for church among “charity, culture, art, and education,” Reagan further shows his favor on the church and on Christianity over and against any other belief system. Thus, Reagan sets Christianity up as a crucial element of national life, elevating its importance. Reagan again references “church” in this way in his second State of the Union address. Making sure to include it among several programs that are intended to meet the needs of the community, Reagan again pairs it with other more general categories “Our private sector initiatives task force is seeking out successful community models of school, church, business, union, foundation, and civic programs that help community needs. Such groups are almost invariably far more efficient

²⁰ Ronald Reagan: "Address Before a Joint Session of the Congress on the State of the Union , " January 25, 1983. Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project. <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=41698>.

²¹ Domke and Coe, 7

than government in running social programs.”²² Thus, here “church” is established as one among several organizations that are useful in filling the void left by the government programs he wants to eliminate. The church is commended for its social function, filling needs in the American democracy. This method of praising faith-based ministries would carry on into the use of the God Strategy among future presidents.

Reagan’s particular focus on Christianity is further illuminated by his selection of Tyrone Ford for recognition at his 6th State of the Union address saying, “We see the dream glow in the towering talent of a 12-year-old, Tyrone Ford. A child prodigy of gospel music, he has surmounted personal adversity to become an accomplished pianist and singer. He also directs the choirs of three churches and has performed at the Kennedy Center. With God as your composer, Tyrone, your music will be the music of angels.”²³ Identifying Tyrone as a representative of Christianity via the reference to “gospel music” and “the choirs of three churches,” Reagan took time at the end of his address to highlight the promise that can be associated with involvement in Christian worship, using Tyrone’s life as an example. This point appeals solely to Christians and they, through the aforementioned references, are the only religion addressed in this, Reagan’s sixth State of the Union. The exclusion of other faiths from Reagan’s Inaugural and State of the Union speeches create a picture of national religion that is intensely focused on Christianity.

Part of this strategy to prioritize Christianity was manifest in how Reagan talked about conflicts over South America during the Cold War. Reagan first referenced Christianity in the

²² Ronald Reagan: "Address Before a Joint Session of the Congress Reporting on the State of the Union ," January 26, 1982. Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project. <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=42687>.

²³Ronald Reagan: "Address Before a Joint Session of Congress on the State of the Union ," February 4, 1986. Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project. <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=36646>.

struggle against Communism in South America in an attempt to garner support for U.S. involvement in South America's struggle with Communism by saying in his fifth State of the Union address, "The Sandinista dictatorship of Nicaragua, with full Cuban-Soviet bloc support, not only persecutes its people, the church, and denies a free press, but arms and provides bases for Communist terrorists attacking neighboring states. Support for freedom fighters is self-defense and totally consistent with the OAS and U.N. Charters."²⁴ Then he followed in his seventh State of the Union with the statement that re-emphasized the plight of the Nicaraguan church by noting that, "Democracy is on the march in Central and South America. Communist Nicaragua is the odd man out—suppressing the church, the press, and democratic dissent and promoting subversion in the region."²⁵ The clear emphasis on Christianity in these instances reflects its crucial role as a unifying force during the Cold War. The fight against "godless Communism" made Christianity something that Americans could rally around as an identifying marker that distinguished them from those who they were struggling against. Here the first type of suppression that Reagan emphasizes is the suppression, not of democracy, but of the church. This priority elevates Christianity into being a matter of unique national concern, certainly not equal to other perspectives of faith.

Infusion of Policy with Faith

Even more overt than this, Reagan's advocacy of prayer in several high-state addresses emphasized the elevated position of Christianity in national life. His first reference to prayer, in

²⁴ Ronald Reagan: "Address Before a Joint Session of the Congress on the State of the Union," February 6, 1985. Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project. <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=38069>.

²⁵ Ronald Reagan: "Address Before a Joint Session of Congress on the State of the Union," January 27, 1987. Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project. <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=34430>.

his 1981 Inaugural address illustrates this well. Calling for every Inaugural day to be a national day of prayer, Reagan declares, “We are a nation under God, and I believe God intended for us to be free. It would be fitting and good, I think, if on each Inaugural Day in future years it should be declared a day of prayer.”²⁶ Like the aforementioned references to religious suppression in South America, the linkage of prayer with the concept that “we are a nation under God” appeals to tension with the Soviets and calls for unity around America’s religious uniqueness--Christianity.

Even more clearly than that, Reagan’s appeals for prayer in schools make clear that Christianity is the focus of his God Strategy rhetoric. In his 4th State of the Union address he questions Congress:

Each day your Members observe a 200-year-old tradition meant to signify America is one nation under God. I must ask: If you can begin your day with a member of the clergy standing right here leading you in prayer, then why can't freedom to acknowledge God be enjoyed again by children in every schoolroom across this land? America was founded by people who believed that God was their rock of safety. He is ours. I recognize we must be cautious in claiming that God is on our side, but I think it's all right to keep asking if we're on His side.²⁷

The use of “200 year-old tradition” and “clergy” situates the Congressional prayer as an affirmation of America’s traditional reliance upon God, which was anchored in a variety of Christian denominations, situating Reagan’s argument as an appeal to the Christian tradition of America. Yet, Reagan takes an even more overtly Christian stance on the issue of school prayer by bringing up the question “if we are on His [God’s] side,” assuming that if America will not let God be addressed in the schools, then she certainly is not on God’s side. However, from the

²⁶ Ronald Reagan: "Inaugural Address," January 20, 1981. Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project. <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=43130>.

²⁷ Ronald Reagan: "Address Before a Joint Session of the Congress on the State of the Union," January 25, 1984. Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project. <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=40205>.

perspective of the nation, Reagan's appeal to God as a "rock of safety" is even more crucial.

Here, God is the steady foundation that the nation holds to and thus, in Him the U.S.A. is able to live out its founding creed of individual liberty and democracy.

Moreover Reagan indicates specifically that the issue of classroom prayer is essential to national well-being, noting in his seventh State of the Union Address that:

Finally, let's stop suppressing the spiritual core of our national being. Our nation could not have been conceived without divine help. Why is it that we can build a nation with our prayers, but we can't use a schoolroom for voluntary prayer? The 100th Congress of the United States should be remembered as the one that ended the expulsion of God from America's classrooms.²⁸

In an attempt to justify his taking sides in the debate between religionists and secularists about the role of religion in governmentally-sponsored activities, Reagan attempts to unite his ideas of a common-creed and God-honoring policy by declaring that advocating religious policies is entirely consistent with the spirit of the American founding-- the spirit we are entrusted with protecting. To further emphasize the urgency, Reagan pejoratively terms the prohibition on school prayer "the expulsion of God from America's classrooms." Taking on the jaded attitude of many evangelicals, Reagan communicates his affirmation of a policy agenda informed by Christian values and confirms that he views school prayer as a serious issue that must be addressed.

Taking on religious issues like prayer from a Christian perspective was not an anomaly for Reagan. In his 8th State of the Union address, Reagan took on the controversial and divisive issue of abortion by appealing to biblical values, challenging Americans by saying:

²⁸ Ronald Reagan: "Address Before a Joint Session of Congress on the State of the Union," January 27, 1987. Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project. <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=34430>.

Let us unite as a nation and protect the unborn with legislation that would stop all Federal funding for abortion and with a human life amendment making, of course, an exception where the unborn child threatens the life of the mother. Our Judeo-Christian tradition recognizes the right of taking a life in self-defense. But with that one exception, let us look to those others in our land who cry out for children to adopt.²⁹

By appealing to the “Judeo-Christian tradition,” Reagan invokes years of scholarship regarding Old and New Testament teachings. By referencing this school of thought whose primary authority is the Old Testament, he puts biblical values on display as the only justification for an abortion, and therefore the final say on the legitimacy of abortion. This rhetoric cuts against the idea of an areligious common creed that could unite America by taking a clear side in a political debate that is motivated by a religious belief. By affirming the primacy of biblical values from his position as President, Reagan sends the message that it is legitimate and in accord with America’s ideals and history to make policy decisions based on biblical tenets. To further emphasize the unique importance of these values, Reagan follows the previous statement about abortion with the reminder that “spiritual values alone are essential to our nation's health and vigor.”³⁰

As such, the basis of national policy and purpose is clearly religiously infused, informed, and hopefully directed. By following his appeal to “spiritual values” above with an appeal to the theocratic Plymouth colony directed by John Winthrop, Reagan connects his vision of a common creed centered on democracy with his perspective on how Christian values should influence government:

²⁹ Ronald Reagan: "Address Before a Joint Session of Congress on the State of the Union , " January 25, 1988. Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project. <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=36035>.

³⁰ Ibid

We can be proud that for them and for us, as those lights along the Potomac are still seen this night signaling as they have for nearly two centuries and as we pray God they always will, that another generation of Americans has protected and passed on lovingly this place called America, this shining city on a hill, this government of, by, and for the people.³¹

The nexus of the common-creed and Judeo-Christian values for Reagan comes in a national devotion to protecting American government joined by a reliance on God to make American efforts count. As seen previously, this reliance on God manifests itself in allowing corporate beliefs about His will, informed by Jewish and Christian ethics to direct and in some cases limit the actions that cooperative effort can accomplish. Reagan seems to say this much when he notes in his seventh State of the Union address “The responsibility of freedom presses us towards higher knowledge and, I believe, moral and spiritual greatness.”³² A direct result of the common creed--the corporate responsibility to democracy-- is an excellence that comes from rightly aligned national morals.

The way in which Reagan brought the common creed of democracy and explicit and implicit Christian beliefs together set a pattern for the unity of the two concepts, practically endorsing Christianity as a national religion, that future presidents could choose to follow or adapt to the changes of their time. As I continue to analyze the ways in which the presidents that followed Reagan altered the God Strategy to cater toward their own objectives, the constants of the “common creed”-- appeals to American civil religion centered around democracy and “Invocations of faith,”³³ references to faith that vary from extremely general, applying to almost

³¹ Ibid

³² Ronald Reagan: "Address Before a Joint Session of Congress on the State of the Union," January 27, 1987. Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project. <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=34430>.

³³ Domke and Coe, 31

all types of faith, to addressing particular religious creeds will be clearly seen. As I continue my analysis, the consistency of these two themes will be shown, demonstrating in part the incredible impact Reagan's use of the God Strategy had on its future practitioners.

CHAPTER TWO

GEORGE H.W. BUSH'S APPLICATION OF THE GOD STRATEGY

Inaugural Address--the Opening Ritual

Like Reagan, George H.W. Bush maintained the strategy of using distinctly Christian faith-talk while also establishing a common creed based on democratic civil religion. As I follow his speeches chronologically, it will be apparent that the way he maintains these two potentially conflicting ideas represents a further articulation of themes and ideas already present in Reagan's God Strategy. Following Reagan's lead, Bush attempts to further define the interrelationship of distinctly Christian invocations of faith and appeals to the American common creed. George H.W. Bush does this by crediting faith, which he frames in Christian terms, with the American ability to protect and promote the common creed of democracy and freedom.

This approach is made explicit in his Inaugural Address when George H.W. Bush prays:

Heavenly Father, we bow our heads and thank You for Your love. Accept our thanks for the peace that yields this day and the shared faith that makes its continuance likely. Make us strong to do Your work, willing to heed and hear Your will, and write on our hearts these words: "Use power to help people." For we are given power not to advance our own purposes, nor to make a great show in the world, nor a name. There is but one just use of power, and it is to serve people. Help us remember, Lord. Amen.³⁴

Beginning the prayer, a religious ritual that already inherently identifies him with Christians, with the phrase "Heavenly Father," George H.W. Bush situates his rhetoric in the Christian tradition, borrowing from the beginning to the Lord's prayer in Matthew 6:9 "Our Father who art in heaven."³⁵ As Bush proceeds to thank God, first and foremost for His "love," the relational aspect of his faith in God is further emphasized. In what follows, Bush provides examples of manifestations of God's love to the nation, concluding his thanks to God with gratitude for "the shared faith" that makes likely America's continuing peace. This "shared faith" is not merely a religious set of beliefs but a national one as well. To this effect,

³⁴ George Bush: "Inaugural Address," January 20, 1989. Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project. <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=16610>.

³⁵ Matthew 6:9, KJV

Bush asks God that an outflowing of America's relationship to Him would be that the government "use power to help people" and not to "advance our own purposes." Implicitly, Bush uses the idea of America's relationship with God as a unifying force because it provides an imperative against letting individual interest get in the way. Since of their corporate relationship with God, Americans ought to cooperate to harness their collective power to help people. Concluding his prayer with "help us remember," Bush has drawn the American attention to remembering this idea of cooperation and common goals, the backbone of the civil religion advanced by Reagan, all while explicitly appealing to a Christian notion of God.

Further cementing the interdependence of the American common creed and Christianity, Bush continues to connect Christianity with America's founding values during his Inaugural. A crucial example of Bush's continued effort to connect traditional American values with Christianity occurs symbolically through the association of George Washington, America's founding president, with the bible, the holy book of Christianity. George H.W. Bush explains,

I've just repeated word for word the oath taken by George Washington 200 years ago, and the Bible on which I placed my hand is the Bible on which he placed his. It is right that the memory of Washington be with us today not only because this is our bicentennial inauguration but because Washington remains the Father of our Country. And he would, I think, be gladdened by this day; for today is the concrete expression of a stunning fact: our continuity, these 200 years, since our government began.³⁶

With the subject of this rhetoric being the bicentennial anniversary of America, Bush's reference to "Bible" situates Christianity exclusively as the foundational religion in the 200 year tradition of America. Thus, Bush's reference to the "Bible" paired with his affirmation of Washington as "The Father of our country" serves to magnify the unity of the American common creed with Christian religion, symbolized by the bible. After all, George Washington, as America's exemplary first general and first president, is undoubtedly a figure of reverence for those who take the American devotion to liberty as a sacred matter. Moreover, presenting the bible as the source of authority for the promises of American government, Bush represents the relationship between Christianity and the common creed as one of mutual reinforcement, they each garner strength from the other. By connecting his reference to the bible in the above quote to a

³⁶ Ibid

broader civil religion that is primarily focused on devoting its efforts toward protecting and executing liberty, Bush establishes the historical interdependence of Christianity and American governance. Making this relationship explicit, Bush notes that his oath on the aforementioned bible is an expression of America's ability to maintain her government for these past 200 years. In this light, G.H.W. Bush's oath and subsequent inauguration were expressions of victories for both the American civil religion, by representing a maintenance of democracy, and for Christianity by representing its stability as the pillar on which the American government, at least ceremonially, stands.

In the same address, Bush relies on this common moral fabric, informed by Christian values, to address the bellwether issue of abortion in conjunction with other national issues by noting that:

America is never wholly herself unless she is engaged in high moral principle. We as a people have such a purpose today. It is to make kinder the face of the Nation and gentler the face of the world. My friends, we have work to do. There are the homeless, lost and roaming. There are the children who have nothing, no love and no normalcy. There are those who cannot free themselves of enslavement to whatever addiction -- drugs, welfare, the demoralization that rules the slums. There is crime to be conquered, the rough crime of the streets. There are young women to be helped who are about to become mothers of children they can't care for and might not love. They need our care, our guidance, and our education, though we bless them for choosing life.³⁷

Appealing to Americans to take on certain obligations based in America's national identity, Bush used this statement to establish a set of national priorities--reducing homelessness, increasing adoption, continuing the war on drugs, improving law enforcement, and helping young mothers raise their children. At the end of this thorough list Bush took another opportunity to unite the idea of Americans' obligation to their nation with advocacy for Christian issues when he slips in the phrase "we bless them for choosing life." Declaring a national intention in line with the prevailing Christian stance on life, Bush emphasizes that he is not alone in blessing these mothers for not aborting their babies. In using "we" here, Bush refers to the nation, indicating that the national moral vision concurs with the value of life that Christians espouse. Thus, despite the divisive religious character of this debate, Bush spoke as if America had taken a side, associating the pro-life movement as part of the "high moral principle" of the nation, which demands Americans' allegiance. This allegiance derives from the responsibility to America who "is never wholly herself unless she is engaged in a high moral principle," and therefore the people's loyalty to the pro-life

³⁷ Ibid

principle is not dependent on religion inherently, but on their devotion to the country. By crafting a picture of a national creed bolstered by a national relationship to God and federal policies motivated by tenets of Christian belief, Bush attempted to create a more clear relationship between Christian religion and the government and appealed more strongly to Christianity's beliefs to justify political positions.

And yet, like Reagan he plays both sides by balancing these statements with some more inclusive ones in his Inaugural. Appealing to a common democratic life that every American has a part in, regardless of his faith, Bush announces, "democracy belongs to us all, and freedom is like a beautiful kite that can go higher and higher with the breeze. And to all I say, No matter what your circumstances or where you are, you are part of this day, you are part of the life of our great nation." Furthering this balancing act he expresses in the last few sentences of his Inaugural "A President is neither prince nor pope, and I don't seek a window on men's souls. In fact, I yearn for a greater tolerance, and easygoingness about each other's attitudes and way of life."³⁸ Trying to paint a picture of neutral governance beside the clear portrait of reliance on a Christian view of morality and of God, Bush makes tolerance of different beliefs a priority.

Yet, it is clear that even if Americans tolerated the different beliefs of others, it is a Christian moral vision that informs how citizens manifest their common devotion to democracy. Bush concludes his inaugural saying:

And so, there is much to do. And tomorrow the work begins. And I do not mistrust the future. I do not fear what is ahead. For our problems are large, but our heart is larger. Our challenges are great, but our will is greater. And if our flaws are endless, God's love is truly boundless. Some see leadership as high drama and the sound of trumpets calling, and sometimes it is that. But I see history as a book with many pages, and each day we fill a page with acts of hopefulness and meaning. The new breeze blows, a page turns, the story unfolds. And so, today a chapter begins, a small and stately story of unity, diversity, and generosity -- shared, and written, together.³⁹

The dual emphasis on God's forgiveness for America and the characterization of her corporate story as being one of "diversity and unity" is both an appeal to Christian ideas about God's unending forgiveness and to an areligious common American creed. The idea that his forgiveness gives the people confidence to

³⁸ *ibid*

³⁹ *ibid*

write this story together as Americans--not only Christians-- paints a bigger picture of devotion to America than devotion to Christianity, the American creed is something that takes the devotion of all, regardless of religious affiliation. Yet, the moral vision of his administration is clear; the best way to fulfill the corporate obligation to America is to direct the nation by Christian principles.

Connecting Christianity and the Creed: How Do They Interact in Government?

The tension between a nation directed by Christian principles and a nation built on common devotion to democracy is further manifest in Bush's first State of the Union. Invoking the nation's founding, he declares:

I believe that family and faith represent the moral compass of the Nation. And I'll work to make them strong, for as Benjamin Franklin said: "If a sparrow cannot fall to the ground without His notice, can a great nation rise without His aid?" And I believe in giving people the power to make their own lives better through growth and opportunity. And together, let's put power in the hands of people.⁴⁰

Here, Bush again establishes the Nation's traditional devotion to Christian principles by appealing to Ben Franklin's inference that God's aid is the cause of the rising of great nations. This affirmation from Ben Franklin re-establishes the link between the American common national creed and the Christian belief system because the way in which America, and her common creed, originated is affirmed by one of her founders as totally dependent on God. Thus, to be consistent with and protective of the spirit of liberty which carried Americans to where they were at the time of this address, Bush insinuates, they must hold fast to their traditional Christian view of the world.

A devotion to "giving people the power" and establishing "faith and family" as the moral directors of the society are in tension, leaving Bush a difficult task in attempting to remain consistent in his appeals to the Nation. The tension is clear in a later statement in his first State of the Union where Bush exhorts his audience, "let all Americans remember that no problem of human making is too great to be overcome by human ingenuity, human energy, and the untiring hope of the human spirit. I believe this. I would not have asked to be your President if I didn't."⁴¹ This appeal to self-reliance to solve man-

⁴⁰ George Bush: "Address on Administration Goals Before a Joint Session of Congress," February 9, 1989. Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project. <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=16660>.

⁴¹ Ibid

made problems describes a secular dimension of the common creed, giving Bush the opportunity to appeal to a wider base that is not exclusively Christian. Here Bush is toeing the line between explicitly Christian language and a common-creed focused on democracy and tending toward self-reliance. What helps Bush maintain some consistency while appealing to both of these themes is the use of the term “man-made” here. Given this qualification, one could say that some problems require God’s help because they are not man-made, yet the emphasis of this rhetoric is certainly on the individual, not God, as the source of strength. Thus, Bush’s rhetoric in his first State of the Union created a more complicated picture of the relationship between the national common-creed and Christianity than was present in his Inaugural address.

However, Bush’s rhetoric from his second State of the Union address onward created a clearer picture of the common creed’s relationship to Christianity with Christian beliefs forming a type of foundation from which Americans perform actions that are faithful to the common creed. He notes in his second State of the Union that “The anchor in our world today is freedom, holding us steady in times of change, a symbol of hope to all the world. And freedom is at the very heart of the idea that is America. Giving life to that idea depends on every one of us. Our anchor has always been faith and family.”⁴² In Bush’s view America’s fulfillment of the goal of the common creed requires a certain reliance on faith to, like an anchor, hold her fast to it and consistent with its spirit. Therefore, the intertwining of Christian rhetoric with faith in the power of individual freedom works to achieve Bush’s goal-- to cultivate devotion to both the foundational belief system and to the national purpose. Yet, addressing Christian beliefs alone would not suffice to achieve this goal because of the presence of many minority religions in America. Instead, the love of freedom is a uniting force because it is something that can resonate with one’s experience of America regardless of religious beliefs.

Moreover, George H.W. Bush bolsters the Nation’s confidence in their pursuit of freedom by emphasizing their united, irreligious, identity. In his third State of the Union address, Bush affirms the American unity behind the common creed of freedom when he states:

⁴² Bush, George H.W., State of the Union, January 31 1990

Since the birth of our nation, "We the People" has been the source of our strength. What government can do alone is limited, but the potential of the American people knows no limits. We are a nation of rock-solid realism and clear-eyed idealism. We are Americans. We are the Nation that believes in the future. We are the Nation that can shape the future. And we've begun to do just that, by strengthening the power and choice of individuals and families.⁴³

This perspective, that the nation's strength derives from a belief in the American people over and against government, reinforces the American common creed established by Reagan by calling for Congress give people more freedom, so that their unlimited potential can be realized. To make this argument clear and historically defensible, Bush invokes the Constitution's preamble as a basis for this heavy reliance on individual liberty. This reference back to founding principles is essential to Bush's articulation of Reagan's idea of a common creed that emphasizes democracy based in individual freedom, not government control. After all, since the Progressive approach to government that emphasizes regulation had dominated in the fifty years before Reagan, Bush's rhetorical appeal is an attempt to call America back to its true identity in an attempt to, in the spirit of the Reagan administration, cut back the influence of the federal government.

Further emphasizing the centrality of the obligation to protect and promote freedom in his fourth and final State of the Union, George H.W. Bush again connected the promotion of the common creed with Christian language by commenting on the fall of communism thusly:

In the past 12 months, the world has known changes of almost Biblical proportions. And even now, months after the failed coup that doomed a failed system, I'm not sure we've absorbed the full impact, the full import of what happened. But communism died this year. Even as President, with the most fascinating possible vantage point, there were times when I was so busy managing progress and helping to lead change that I didn't always show the joy that was in my heart. But the biggest thing that has happened in the world in my life, in our lives, is this: By the grace of God, America won the cold war.⁴⁴

⁴³ George Bush: "Address Before a Joint Session of the Congress on the State of the Union," January 29, 1991. Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project. <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=19253>.

⁴⁴ George Bush: "Address Before a Joint Session of the Congress on the State of the Union," January 28, 1992. Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project. <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=20544>.

Attributing the victory of America over the U.S.S.R., the symbolic victory of democracy over communism, to God and characterizing the results of this victory as “of almost Biblical proportions,” Bush invokes a comparison between the miracles of the Bible and God’s work in helping topple the Soviet Union. As he has done throughout his presidency, Bush connected Christian beliefs, in this case the miracles of the Bible, to America’s uniting creed-- the promotion and preservation of freedom, represented by the end of the Soviet Union. This connection of the common creed with biblical ideas maintains consistency with the way Reagan framed the American struggle against Communism by viewing the conflict from the perspective of Christian democracy against godless Communism. Additionally, Bush’s connection between the victory of democracy and the Christian faith helps identify Christianity with the American identity by associating it and no other religion with this patriotic moment of celebration.

To further highlight the unity of the common creed with Christian beliefs, George H.W. Bush connects the perpetuation of American democracy with the miraculous in the conclusion to his last address on the state of the Union, he declares:

The power of America rests in a stirring but simple idea, that people will do great things if only you set them free. Well, we're going to set the economy free. For if this age of miracles and wonders has taught us anything, it's that if we can change the world we can change America. We must encourage investment. We must make it easier for people to invest money and create new products, new industries, and new jobs. We must clear away the obstacles to growth: high taxes, high regulation, red tape, and yes, wasteful Government spending. And so, we move on together, a rising nation, the once and future miracle that is still, this night, the hope of the world.⁴⁵

Once again invoking the miraculous nature of both Communism’s fall and the continuation of American government, George H.W. Bush remains consistent with his characterization of the unity between America’s devotion to freedom and Christian beliefs. His emphasis on the American nation as “the once and future miracle that is still” depicts America’s continued protection and promotion of freedom as an act attributable to God. Yet, he also remains consistent with the appeal to the power of the promotion of freedom outside this religious context through the reference to freedom in the beginning of this statement as “the power of America.” No matter what religious context his listeners were in, they all could identify

⁴⁵ ibid

with this statement; the idea that the realization of freedom's unique capabilities was a power of America, utilized through the cooperation of all Americans to protect and promote that freedom, was inherently religiously-neutral. Therefore, this type of appeal could be useful in inspiring devotion to a national common creed apart from religion, if taken out of the religious context by future presidents.

Clearly articulating the relationship Reagan promoted between Christianity and the common creed, Bush established Christianity as foundational and essential to the adherence to it. Through his Inaugural and four State of the Union Addresses, Bush indicated that while the actualization of the American common creed depends on the citizens, the continued success of those beliefs is attributable to God. Characterizing God as a "Father" early on, Bush established that the character of this deity he appealed to was that of the Christian God. Yet, despite his clear prioritization of Christianity over other religious outlooks, Bush also follows Reagan in appealing to something outside of a religious context in an effort to gather even more citizens into the national unity. By appealing to the national common creed outside of a religious context, Bush allowed it to serve as a uniting force for all Americans, regardless of their beliefs. This function would become a staple of the common creed in the presidencies of those who came after him.

CHAPTER THREE

BILL CLINTON'S PLURALIST GOD STRATEGY

The Pluralist God Strategy? Is Clinton Consistent with Bush and Reagan?

When Bill Clinton took office in 1993 he, like Bush before him, created his own unique application of the God Strategy. Unlike either Bush or Reagan, Clinton's use of the God Strategy gradually reduced the Christianity-specific language and replaced it with more general religious appeals. However, these religious appeals often served the same function as Christian language had served for Bush, the promotion of the common creed--the protection and promotion of freedom.

Yet, as Clinton established this more pluralistic emphasis, which I will call "The Pluralist God Strategy," he tried to maintain an appearance of consistency with the pattern set by Bush by referencing a Christian conception of God in the context of the American founding by declaring:

When our Founders boldly declared America's independence to the world and our purposes to the Almighty, they knew that America, to endure, would have to change; not change for change's sake but change to preserve America's ideals: life, liberty, the pursuit of happiness. Though we marched to the music of our time, our mission is timeless. Each generation of Americans must define what it means to be an American.⁴⁶

This reference to "the Almighty" in the context of America's national history follows the pattern that Bush used to appeal to America's traditional religious heritage. However, instead of appealing to a Christian idea to utilize Christianity as a vital pillar that is essential to American defense and promotion of freedom, Clinton made the cornerstone of America's "timeless" mission-- the protection and promotion of individual liberty-- the secular, common creed idea that "Each generation of Americans must define what it means to be American." This more pluralistic focus on acting out the American common creed is reinforced when Clinton emphasizes later in his Inaugural that the idea of America is "an idea ennobled

⁴⁶ William J. Clinton: "Inaugural Address," January 20, 1993. Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project. <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=46366>

by the faith that our Nation can summon from its myriad diversity the deepest measure of unity.” For the deepest unity to come out of their diversity, the things over which Americans diverge must be of lesser importance to them than their unity. Therefore, this statement implies that the issues over which Americans differ, including religion, would be of lesser importance to all of America than her common creed-- the promotion and protection of freedom, the thing that unites the nation.

Concluding his first Inaugural, Clinton makes another appeal that is partially consistent with the styles of Reagan and Bush before him by referencing the Bible. Quoting as “scripture”⁴⁷ the exhortation of Galatians 6:9 “let us not be weary in well doing: for in due season we shall reap, if we faint not,”⁴⁸ he calls for the American people to be vigorous in keeping with the common creed by promoting freedom domestically. This brings a Christian insight to bear on the subject of how dedicated Americans ought to be toward promoting and protecting freedom, something Reagan and George H.W. Bush did as part of their invocations of faith. Yet, Clinton’s citation of the bible in this speech is also subtly different from the references of Reagan and Bush. Clinton refers to the quote as “Scripture” which, though not bereft of Christian meaning, also functions as a more general appeal to holy texts, this compares with Bush’s frequent use of the term “Bible” or Reagan’s citation of “Proverbs”⁴⁹ which has a much narrower religious application, to solely Jewish and Christian writings. By using broader terms to refer to the Holy text of Christianity, Clinton attempts to extend his appeal to a distinctly Christian sentiment to application in Americans of all religious beliefs. While certainly not an inclusive or pluralist appeal, this way of referencing scripture is part of a trend for Clinton that progressively generalizes his appeals to religion to the point that his appeals in the latter half of his presidency are general enough to be inclusive of all religions.

Further attempting to adhere to the strategy set before him by Bush and Reagan, Clinton articulates his appeals to the common creed in light of an enduring national identity. In his first State of

⁴⁷ Ibid

⁴⁸ Galatians 6:9, KJV

⁴⁹ Ronald Reagan: "Address Before a Joint Session of the Congress on the State of the Union," February 6, 1985. Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project. <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=38069>.

the Union Clinton appeals to “old values” as the foundation for a unifying pursuit of the priorities set by America’s national beliefs about freedom.

Our Nation needs a new direction. Tonight I present to you a comprehensive plan to set our Nation on that new course. I believe we will find our new direction in the basic old values that brought us here over the last two centuries: a commitment to opportunity, to individual responsibility, to community, to work, to family, and to faith. We must now break the habits of both political parties and say there can be no more something for nothing and admit frankly that we are all in this together.⁵⁰

Including faith as one of the values that drives his understanding of America’s common creed, Clinton shows that his more pluralistic religious appeals are indicative of his view of American values, reflected not merely in Christianity but in the increasing diversity of faiths represented in the nation. In line with this more diversified understanding of national religion, Clinton appeals to a Hindu practice to explain his approach to cutting back federal programs and emphasize faithfulness to the common creed through pursuit of democracy at home. Declaring that, “We’re going to have to have no sacred cows except the fundamental abiding interest of the American people,” Clinton attempts to relate to a diversified religious audience in a way that was not emphasized by either Reagan or Bush. Pulling in a new religious perspective through the invocation of a Hindu faith tradition, Clinton acknowledges Hindu involvement in the mission which is the focus of his speech, the promotion and protection of freedom.

We’re All in This Together: Cooperation is Key But Do Beliefs Matter?

Clinton goes so far as to explicitly invoke this idea of cooperation in spite of religious differences in his second State of the Union. Clinton appeals to an example of this national unity to illustrate the power of the “American spirit” of unity through diversity. He describes,

When the earth shook and fires raged in California, when I saw the Mississippi deluge the farmlands of the Midwest in a 500-year flood, when the century’s bitterest cold swept from North Dakota to Newport News, it seemed as though the world itself was coming apart at the seams. But the American people, they just came together. They rose to the occasion, neighbor helping neighbor, strangers risking life and limb to save total strangers, showing the better angels of our nature. Let us not reserve the better angels only for natural disasters, leaving our deepest and most

⁵⁰William J. Clinton: "Address Before a Joint Session of Congress on Administration Goals," February 17, 1993. Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project. <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=47232>.

profound problems to petty political fighting. Let us instead be true to our spirit, facing facts, coming together, bringing hope, and moving forward.⁵¹

Through his call to be “true to our spirit,” Clinton argues that the essential American spirit is one of unity. Therefore, allowing Christianity to be pictured as the lens through which America sees its common creed would run counter to his strategy, by emphasizing only a part of America instead of the united whole. Instead, Clinton will continue to focus on the things that bring Americans together in pursuit of freedom.

Still, Clinton balances his focus on the irreligious common creed with laudatory remarks about Christianity, attempting to draw Christians in to the mission that he advocates for the promotion and protection of democracy. Clinton appeals to the nation to join in good works, like the churches do, when he states:

We can't renew our country unless more of us—I mean, all of us— are willing to join the churches and the other good citizens, people like all the—like ministers I've worked with over the years or the priests and the nuns I met at Our Lady of Help in east Los Angeles or my good friend Tony Campollo in Philadelphia, unless we're willing to work with people like that, people who are saving kids, adopting schools, making streets safer. All of us can do that. We can't renew our country until we realize that governments don't raise children, parents do.⁵²

Referencing “churches” and “ministers” here Clinton makes sure not to eliminate the Christian aspect of his appeal. Yet, with the call for “all of us” to join people that are working to renew this country, he provides a reason for his address of a broader religious landscape. Needing to capture the attention and the devotion of people from a wide variety of religious perspectives, he appeals to unity outside of the particularities of people’s religious belief to exert the efforts that will help America live out her common creed. Bill Clinton indicates as much when he continues his address by emphasizing the necessity of significant new American contributions to freedom worldwide and domestically saying, “This year we must also do more to support democratic renewal and human rights and sustainable development all around the world,” and then promoting welfare reform that “restores the basic values of work and responsibility” at home. Given these sizable tasks, unity is essential and Clinton takes on a rhetorical

⁵¹ William J. Clinton: "Address Before a Joint Session of the Congress on the State of the Union," January 25, 1994. Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project. <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=50409>.

⁵² Ibid

strategy that fits that aim by emphasizing America's common democratic creed through reference to religious groups and more generically.

Clinton continued to balance this inclusive, national perspective with words that would identify with Christians. An exemplary instance of this is Clinton's third State of the Union address which referenced "faith-terms" more than any address by a President after Carter ⁵³ and invoked the biblical idea of a "New Covenant" thirteen times. In his exposition of a "New Covenant" in this address, Clinton makes a lengthy and laudatory reference to a church-planting couple in Maryland, furthering his attempt at a broader religious appeal while catering toward Christian voters by stating:

The next two folks I've had the honor of meeting and getting to know a little bit, the Reverend John and the Reverend Diana Cherry of the A.M.E. Zion Church in Temple Hills, Maryland. I'd like to ask them to stand. I want to tell you about them. In the early eighties, they left Government service and formed a church in a small living room in a small house, in the early eighties. Today that church has 17,000 members. It is one of the three or four biggest churches in the entire United States. It grows by 200 a month. They do it together. And the special focus of their ministry is keeping families together. Two things they did make a big impression on me. I visited their church once, and I learned they were building a new sanctuary closer to the Washington, DC, line in a higher crime, higher drug rate area because they thought it was part of their ministry to change the lives of the people who needed them. The second thing I want to say is that once Reverend Cherry was at a meeting at the White House with some other religious leaders, and he left early to go back to this church to minister to 150 couples that he had brought back to his church from all over America to convince them to come back together, to save their marriages, and to raise their kids. This is the kind of work that citizens are doing in America. We need more of it, and it ought to be lifted up and supported.⁵⁴

Focusing on "two things" that the Cherry's did to impress him, Clinton indicates what his priorities are.

The first, founding a new church in a crime-ridden area, places emphasis on addressing the problem of crime by helping the people that are vulnerable to falling into that lifestyle. The second, leaving a meeting to help reunify families prioritizes another emphasis of Clinton's program, promoting policies that strengthen families, a building block of the nation. Even in showing how a distinctly Christian organization is truly exemplary in modeling these priorities for America, Clinton includes rhetoric that makes an appeal to general religion, drawing the attention of audience members of many beliefs. Specifically, the reference to a meeting of "religious leaders" in this paragraph accomplishes his intention

⁵³ Domke and Coe, 44

⁵⁴ Clinton, State of the Union, January 24 1995

of appealing to a broader audience by implying that the White House meeting of key figures of faith was not exclusively Christian, but included multiple faiths.

Yet, Clinton gets far more clearly inclusive of other faiths when he, in the same address, applauds America's "religious leaders" for "the fact the United States has more houses of worship per capita than any country in the world." He goes on, encouraging religious leaders that they can

Ignite their congregations to carry their faith into action, can reach out to all of our children, to all of the people in distress, to those who have been savaged by the breakdown of all we hold dear. Because so much of what must be done must come from the inside out and our religious leaders and their congregations can make all the difference, they have a role in the New Covenant as well.⁵⁵

While the particularities of their beliefs are not cast as relevant in this exhortation, the religious leaders' ability to use their beliefs instrumentally to motivate specific actions is emphasized as a crucial part of Clinton's "New Covenant," a reinvigoration of America's common creed by bringing those in distress up, increasing their ability to participate equally in America's democratic mission. In this essential endeavor, quibbling over particular doctrines would be divisive. If what really matters is action in the world for the democratic cause, as Clinton frames it, the days of explicitly promoting one religion must come to an end in favor of mitigating the divisive possibilities of religion. Clinton hints at the need for a common vision later in this address by stating "The old way divided us by interest, constituency, or class. The New Covenant way should unite us behind a common vision of what's best for our country." This common creed, a common thread that unites all of the presidents in the God Strategy canon thus far, motivates Clinton to alter the Strategy for a more effective unity.

Yet despite his appeals for unity and introduction of more sect-neutral ways to refer to faiths, Clinton still holds on to the advantage of the God Strategy in appealing to a large, mobilized Christian voting bloc and pull them into the mission of primary importance, that of promoting the common creed. In this spirit, Clinton concludes his 1995 State of the Union:

⁵⁵ William J. Clinton: "Address Before a Joint Session of the Congress on the State of the Union," January 24, 1995. Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project. <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=51634>.

We all gain when we give, and we reap what we sow. That's at the heart of this New Covenant. Responsibility, opportunity, and citizenship, more than stale chapters in some remote civic book, they're still the virtue by which we can fulfill ourselves and reach our God-given potential and be like them and also to fulfill the eternal promise of this country, the enduring dream from that first and most sacred covenant.⁵⁶

Through introducing this closing statement with a reference to sowing and reaping, an analogy used by Jesus in the gospels, Clinton again hones in on his Christian audience. Yet, this appeal is made alongside broader calls for unity, emphasized by the use of “we all” repetitively at the beginning of the statement. The goal of these appeals was to focus attention on unity around the American common creed. This creed is “the eternal promise of this country” which is superior to any individual religious beliefs because it derives from “that first and most sacred covenant,” the Declaration of Independence. As such, Clinton prioritized fidelity to the Declaration over and above religious beliefs as a uniting and primary mission of all Americans. (compare to Reagan)

Clinton continued to shift his religious rhetoric to be more overtly inclusive of other faiths than Christianity as an attempt to cultivate unity behind the American common creed. In his fourth State of the Union address Clinton attempted to appeal to other faiths than Christianity in more easily identifiable ways than before, as every reference he makes to “churches” is accompanied by a reference to “synagogues.” Moreover, in all three instances of these terms, they are used to emphasize the role of religious groups in addressing national problems such as educating children, reducing crime, and reducing drug use. The primary fact to be gleaned from his references to “churches and synagogues” in his fourth State of the Union is that Clinton’s appeals are all focused on right action—action that promotes the American democracy. In contrast to Reagan’s appeal to a “Judeo-Christian tradition” which positively asserts a uniting national religious tradition that narrows the scope of his religious references, Clinton’s references to “churches and synagogues” represent an expansion of his picture of national religion, contrasting clearly with the fact that Clinton solely referenced “churches” in his prior speeches. Therefore, the particular faith Americans belonged to is irrelevant. The first instance of Clinton’s reference to these two places of worship provides a great example of the truth of my argument. In it he charges Americans:

⁵⁶ Ibid

All strong families begin with taking more responsibility for our children. I've heard Mrs. Gore say that it's hard to be a parent today, but it's even harder to be a child. So all of us, not just as parents but all of us in our other roles—our media, our schools, our teachers, our communities, our churches and synagogues, our businesses, our governments—all of us have a responsibility to help our children to make it and to make the most of their lives and their God-given capacities.⁵⁷

Therefore, the reference to “churches and synagogues” demonstrated how Clinton’s use of the God Strategy was modified by the need to pursue national unity through promoting actions that would advance the American common creed. As such, the reference to “churches and synagogues” is in line with the idea that the responsibility belongs to “all of us, ” not just Christians.

In order that Americans may work together in this powerful and unified way, Clinton appealed to beliefs that they all shared--the common creed based on freedom and democracy. Bill Clinton very clearly emphasizes this common creed when he depicts the American identity by saying,

We Americans have forged our identity, our very Union, from the very point of view that we can accommodate every point on the planet, every different opinion. But we must be bound together by a faith more powerful than any doctrine that divides us, by our belief in progress, our love of liberty, and our relentless search for common ground.⁵⁸

The conception of the American common creed present in the above statement is essential to understanding why Clinton addresses religious diversity more fully in his implementation of the God Strategy than either of the previous two presidents. Since Clinton indicates that America is united by, among other things, a “relentless search for common ground,” it makes sense that more inclusive appeals with the goal of gaining common understanding and unified action would be emphasized in his messages to the nation. Therefore, Clinton’s depiction of America’s common creed justifies his distinctive approach to religious rhetoric.

In his second inaugural address, Clinton makes more overt his advocacy of a common national belief system. Calling this set of beliefs “our creed,” Clinton explicitly identifies the nation with a valuing of certain freedoms when he says of Martin Luther King Jr.:

⁵⁷ William J. Clinton: "Address Before a Joint Session of the Congress on the State of the Union," January 23, 1996. Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project. <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=53091>.

⁵⁸ Ibid

Thirty-four years ago, the man whose life we celebrate today spoke to us down there, at the other end of this Mall, in words that moved the conscience of a nation. Like a prophet of old, he told of his dream that one day America would rise up and treat all its citizens as equals before the law and in the heart. Martin Luther King's dream was the American dream. His quest is our quest: the ceaseless striving to live out our true creed. Our history has been built on such dreams and labors. And by our dreams and labors, we will redeem the promise of America in the 21st century.⁵⁹

Using Dr. King's example, Clinton opens his second term with a push for the elimination of prejudice and the creation of opportunities to give people more equal chances. Giving this agenda the air of a religious faith by comparing Dr. King to "a prophet of old," Clinton reinforces the idea that Americans are expected to give deep devotion to the democratic agenda.

Divisive Faith: Putting a Negative Light on Faith

This mission of making the common creed the primary source of religious devotion for Americans leads Clinton to further shift his application of the God Strategy by recognizing the harmful potential of religion while heralding religious diversity as an inherent good. The first example of this change lies in Clinton's treatment of the "curse" of prejudice later in his second Inaugural where he notes, "Prejudice and contempt cloaked in the pretense of religious or political conviction are no different."⁶⁰ This shift toward looking at the divisive nature of religious prejudice shows religion to be in some ways an obstacle to the unity that the American common creed aims at. However, given the reality that religion is a defining fact in many people's lives, Clinton's response to this potential divisiveness is to appeal to unity through diversity as the exemplary quality of America. Clinton continues later in this Inaugural, "All over the world, people are being torn asunder by racial, ethnic, and religious conflicts that fuel fanaticism and terror. We are the world's most diverse democracy, and the world looks to us to show that it is possible to live and advance together across those kinds of differences."⁶¹ Therefore, an essential component to the promotion of democracy abroad, one of the tenets of America's common creed, is her citizens' ability to look past religious differences to their national domestic goals. Though Clinton

⁵⁹ William J. Clinton: "Inaugural Address," January 20, 1997. Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project. <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=54183>.

⁶⁰ Ibid

⁶¹ Ibid

continues to appeal to faith-based themes often, putting him within the canon of the God Strategy, he has come to address religion as a divisive element in opposition to the common creed.

The tension between the divisions that Clinton sees religion creating and the unity he tries to appeal to in order to bolster the common creed presents a new problem that Bush and Reagan did not face, the necessary division of Christianity and the common creed. Acknowledging this unique problem in his sixth State of the Union, Clinton states,

What we have to do in our day and generation to make sure that America becomes truly one nation—what do we have to do? We're becoming more and more and more diverse. Do you believe we can become one nation? The answer cannot be to dwell on our differences but to build on our shared values. We all cherish family and faith, freedom and responsibility. We all want our children to grow up in a world where their talents are matched by their opportunities.⁶²

Addressing a new problem of rising religious diversity, Clinton appealed to the old rhetoric of “faith and family.” As it has been shown, Clinton’s idea of “faith” over the course of his presidency has been stated in progressively more pluralistic terms, so these words addressed a greater array of belief systems than when they were uttered by Bush or Reagan. This argument is further demonstrated in that the only reference to faith-based groups in this speech is found in Clinton’s demand for “religious communities” to unite against the moral problem of cloning human beings. The address of “religious communities” is a clear shift toward inclusive rhetoric from referring exclusively to “churches” early in his presidency or even his references to “churches and synagogues” in his fourth State of the Union; “religious communities” would include every variety of religion, allowing Clinton to more effectively promote national unity and emphasize the common creed.

This use of faith-based rhetoric represents a shift toward more pluralistic appeals to align more closely with his purpose of uniting this factional America for a common creed based in democracy and individual freedom. Clinton indicates as much when he concludes this State of the Union by noting, “with shared values and meaningful opportunities and honest communication and citizen service, we can unite a diverse people in freedom and mutual respect. We are many; we must be one. In that spirit, let us lift our

⁶² William J. Clinton: "Address Before a Joint Session of the Congress on the State of the Union," January 27, 1998. Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project. <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=56280>.

eyes to the new millennium.⁶³ Since the necessity for America is unity, not fidelity to Christianity, Clinton's increasingly pluralist "God Strategy" continues to be consistent with his goal of creating unity around freedom.

Practiced Political Pluralism: Religion is Good, in General

Highlighting the legal and political manifestations of a more pluralist endorsement of religion, Clinton shows more practically how his pushes for unity behind the common creed should be manifest. Clinton's eighth State of the Union address demonstrates this by lauding religious diversity. Praising Congressional diversity, Clinton notes that, "We have Members in this Congress from virtually every racial, ethnic, and religious background. And I think you would agree that America is stronger because of it."⁶⁴ Also referring to initiatives recommended by "the Pope and other religious leaders" and the contribution to the fight against poverty and drugs by "faith-based organizations" Clinton made sure to keep with the previous pattern of the God Strategy in appealing to Christianity while more heavily emphasizing the plurality of religious views. The reference to the Pope associated a positive initiative with Christianity while its situation next to "other religious leaders" made clear that Clinton is commending many religions, not just Christianity. In both the reference to "faith-based organizations" and that to "the Pope and other religious leaders" however, the focus is on how religious people helped address the issue of inequality, through the reduction of other countries' debts and fighting poverty at home respectively. Therefore, with his praise of these organizations, Clinton drew attention to the new emphasis of equality that he gave to the common creed. Viewing "opportunity for all" and a "community of all Americans" as enduring values, he attempted to show people of varied religious backgrounds, "a community of all Americans" contributing to this picture of equal opportunity.⁶⁵ Hence, yet again Clinton used an inclusive approach to shift the focus of religious people toward how to contribute to the vitality of freedom and democracy in America.

⁶³ Ibid

⁶⁴ William J. Clinton: "Address Before a Joint Session of the Congress on the State of the Union," January 27, 2000. Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project. <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=58708>.

⁶⁵ Ibid

Indeed, this idea of a universal community united behind a common American creed ultimately influenced Clinton's very general portrayal of religion. The most overt example of how Clinton's God Strategy demonstrated itself as distinct is a statement of unity between all "ancient faiths" which he makes in his last State of the Union address, "Modern science has confirmed what ancient faiths have always taught: the most important fact of life is our common humanity. Therefore, we should do more than just tolerate our diversity; we should honor it and celebrate it."⁶⁶ This shift from recognizing diversity to celebrating it is a sizable change of the God Strategy from a focus on promoting the common creed through Christian beliefs about God, as Bush did, to Clinton's approach of using diversity to better emphasize the superiority of Americans' common beliefs about democracy over all other beliefs.

Thus, the gradual shift in Clinton's rhetoric from acknowledging Christianity uniquely to acknowledging all ancient religions established a new pattern for invocations of faith that was different from that set by Reagan and followed by George H.W. Bush. This pluralist manifestation of the God Strategy offered a new way to address increasing religious disunity in light of the common creed's need for united devotion. Yet, Clinton also continued to use faith references to more subtly curry the favor of active religious voters. With a new president entering office, the question of whether Clinton's pattern would be taken up or left behind for continuity with the strategies of Bush and Reagan would prove to be decisive for the fate of the God Strategy.

⁶⁶ Ibid

CHAPTER FOUR

George W. Bush's Adjustments to the Pluralist God Strategy

One Step Forward Two Steps Back? Would George W. Bush's Use of Religious Rhetoric Represent a Regression Back to the Pattern of Reagan?

The inauguration of George W. Bush presented a potential challenge to the increasingly pluralist nature of the God Strategy. After all, the son of former President George Bush had, in a campaign interview, declared that his favorite philosopher was “Christ, because he changed my heart.”⁶⁷ Yet, this president continued the trend set by Clinton of emphasizing pluralist appeals to multiple religions while prioritizing the national common creed as more important than individual religious beliefs. As I follow his speeches chronologically, I will show the ways in which George W. Bush expanded the authority of the common creed in his addresses and made references to religions other than Christianity more explicit.

In his first Inaugural address, George W. Bush emphasized the primacy of the common creed from the beginning. Framing his inauguration in the light of common creed ideals that transcend individual differences to unite America, George W. Bush declared that:

We have a place, all of us, in a long story, a story we continue but whose end we will not see. It is a story of a new world that became a friend and liberator of the old, the story of a slaveholding society that became a servant of freedom, the story of a power that went into the world to protect but not possess, to defend but not to conquer. It is the American story, a story of flawed and fallible people united across the generations by grand and enduring ideals. The grandest of these ideals is an unfolding American promise that everyone belongs, that everyone deserves a chance, that no insignificant person was ever born.⁶⁸

⁶⁷ Domke and Coe, 29

⁶⁸ George W. Bush: "Inaugural Address," January 20, 2001. Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project. <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=25853>.

First and foremost, Bush placed emphasis on the fact that America is a “servant of liberty” and that all Americans have a part in that story. As such, he placed the common creed of protecting and promoting freedom front and center as he began his time in office. To further support the importance of the common creed, Bush went on to assert that the tie which unites individual Americans, despite their flaws, is their common set of beliefs. Crucial to what marks this appeal as consistent with the pattern set by Clinton is the focus on the idea that “everyone belongs.” Given that premise, it would be unsurprising to see Bush also make very general and pluralistic appeals to religion in an attempt to use the “God Strategy” while fostering this inclusiveness in the way America does government domestically.

But, he did not stop at establishing the domestic importance of America’s democratic creed. Instead, George W. Bush continued to elevate the American common creed as something that is changing the course of other countries and, ultimately, the whole of humanity by declaring:

Through much of the last century, America's faith in freedom and democracy was a rock In a raging sea. Now it is a seed upon the wind, taking root in many nations. Our democratic faith is more than the creed of our country. It is the inborn hope of our humanity, an ideal we carry but do not own, a trust we bear and pass along.⁶⁹

Explicitly identifying these American priorities, as I have throughout my argument, as a “creed,” Bush made certain to emphasize that faith in freedom is essential to the American identity. However, he did not stop there. The declaration that “it is the inborn hope of humanity” further elevates the importance of America’s common creed and provides an argument for the importance of American activity to assist the growth of democracy worldwide, as missionaries

⁶⁹ ibid

for the creed. Indeed according to Bush, if America were to deny fledgling democracies help, they would be denying them a hope that is inherent to humanity-- the hope of freedom. Thus, in the opening lines of his first Inaugural, George W. Bush elevated the importance of America's common creed both at home and abroad.

Moreover, Bush further prioritized the common creed by using religious rhetoric to emphasize that this creed is something far greater than Americans are individually. Initially, he accomplished this by giving the common creed credit for the honorable character of Americans stating that, "Americans are generous and strong and decent, not because we believe in ourselves but because we hold beliefs beyond ourselves. When this spirit of citizenship is missing, no Government program can replace it. When this spirit is present, no wrong can stand against it."⁷⁰ Therefore, irrespective of government, Americans' common dedication to freedom is what holds the nation together, and it is on this that the American government ultimately relies for its efficacy. Subsequently, he referred to a supreme being as an authority for his mandate of cooperation in promoting and protecting the common creed of freedom and democracy by emphatically concluding his Inaugural:

We are not this story's author, who fills time and eternity with his purpose. Yet, his purpose is achieved in our duty. And our duty is fulfilled in service to one another. Never tiring, never yielding, never finishing, we renew that purpose today, to make our country more just and generous, to affirm the dignity of our lives and every life. This work continues, the story goes on, and an angel still rides in the whirlwind and directs this storm.⁷¹

Thus the appeal to increase the national faithfulness to the common creed by increasing the generosity, justice, and respect for life in America is buttressed by a general religious appeal to a

⁷⁰ Ibid

⁷¹ Ibid

divine being. The author of eternity and purpose, this divine being is ultimately responsible for the fact that Americans cling to democracy and that democracy has proven so successful. His favor gives authority to the common creed, making it something Americans must adhere to. However, one key feature of this divine being is that he is so unspecified that he could belong to any of the major monotheistic religions. This more religiously inclusive invocation of deity made clear that Bush was sticking closer to Clinton's pattern than the approach of George Bush Sr., who invoked God with a prayer that addressed Him with the Christian moniker "Father."⁷² Simultaneously, George W. Bush also acknowledged that a faith in democracy is a much more suitable object to rally around than a particular set of religious beliefs because though Americans "are not this story's author." Americans can only be certain that they have fulfilled their part in the story if citizens serve one another by affirming "the dignity of every life." Thus, George W. Bush asserted the primacy of the common creed through an invocation of faith by showing that the fulfilling of America's national duty is the only sure way to fulfill the purpose of the deity who authors the American story.

In George W. Bush's first State of the Union, he further proves his adherence to the Pluralist God Strategy. By grouping churches, mosques, synagogues, and any other religious gatherings together under the term "religious activities," Bush, like Clinton before him, groups divergent religions to emphasize how they are faithful to the common creed without drawing attention to their specific belief systems. Bush thus continued to adhere to Clinton's use of the God Strategy when noting that,

Government cannot be replaced by charities or volunteers. Government should not fund religious activities. But our Nation should support the good works of these good people

⁷² George Bush: "Address on Administration Goals Before a Joint Session of Congress," February 9, 1989. Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project. <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=16660>.

who are helping their neighbors in need. So I propose allowing all taxpayers, whether they itemize or not, to deduct their charitable contributions. Estimates show this could encourage as much as \$14 billion a year in new charitable giving, money that will save and change lives.⁷³

Putting all faiths on even footing with each other and non-faith-based charities, Bush placed the emphasis on what was being done for their common mission of promoting the American democracy, in consistency with the common creed. George W. Bush further drives this point home by recognizing the Mayor of Philadelphia, John Street, for the utilization of faith-based groups to promote the vitality of democracy in his city. Bush praises him saying, “Mayor Street has encouraged faith-based and community organizations to make a significant difference in Philadelphia,” and then exhorting his audience of politicians with the statement “I look forward to coming to your city, to see your faith-based programs in action.” Here, like in Clinton’s “God Strategy,” the beliefs being propagated by these organizations are irrelevant, it is what they are doing to help people function better in the democracy.

At the conclusion of this speech, however, George W. Bush makes a subtle, yet distinctly Christian appeal by connecting faithfulness to the common creed to a faithful Christian life with the following closing challenge to elected officials:

We all came here for a reason. We all have things we want to accomplish and promises to keep. *Juntos podemos*—together we can. We can make Americans proud of their Government. Together we can share in the credit of making our country more prosperous and generous and just and earn from our conscience and from our fellow citizens the highest possible praise: Well done, good and faithful servants.⁷⁴

⁷³George W. Bush: "Address Before a Joint Session of the Congress on Administration Goals," February 27, 2001. Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project. <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=29643>.

⁷⁴ Ibid

Making an analogy between the responsibility of political representatives and the responsibility of followers of Jesus by quoting without citing the beginning of Matthew 25:23, George W. Bush subtly spoke “the language of the faithful ⁷⁵” to Christians, sending a signal that they can trust him by letting them know that he identifies with them without overtly abandoning his very inclusive approach to religion. This approach is in keeping with the balance struck by Clinton in his third State of the Union address where he referenced religion generally while invoking the Christian idea of a “New Covenant” thirteen times. In both cases, the objective was to curry the favor of a mobilized Christian base, as the God Strategy has always done, while maintaining an increasingly pluralist rhetoric that harmonizes with the common creed by allowing for greater appeals to unity.

Under Attack! How would the Pluralist God Strategy Fair in the Face of a Religious Enemy?

After the attacks of September 11 2001, Bush’s application of Pluralist God Strategy faced a new challenge in the rising of a devoutly Islamic enemy. How would he reconcile the need to rally national support against Al-Qaida with his previous rhetorical strategy of appealing to the positive role of all faiths? In his second State of the Union, George W. Bush maintained the Pluralist God Strategy in the face of a Muslim adversary by singling Al-Qaida out as an aberration to Islam, noting that most Muslims hold the common creed of liberty when he says:

All fathers and mothers, in all societies, want their children to be educated and live free from poverty and violence. No people on Earth yearn to be oppressed or aspire to servitude or eagerly await the midnight knock of the secret police. If anyone doubts this, let them look to Afghanistan, where the Islamic "street" greeted the fall of tyranny with song and celebration. Let the skeptics look to Islam's own rich history, with its centuries of learning and tolerance and progress. America will lead by defending liberty and justice because they are right and true and unchanging for all people everywhere. No nation owns these aspirations, and no nation is exempt from them. We have no intention of

⁷⁵ Domke and Coe, 19

imposing our culture. But America will always stand firm for the nonnegotiable demands of human dignity: the rule of law; limits on the power of the state; respect for women; private property; free speech; equal justice; and religious tolerance.⁷⁶

In creating common ground between Americans and Muslim people in Afghanistan, Bush emphasized that the most important beliefs that drive Americans--their common creed of freedom and democracy--are beliefs that the vast majority of Muslim people welcome. America's fundamental tenets of civil belief "are right and true and unchanging for people everywhere." Therefore, the American crusade against terrorists was not framed as one of religious intolerance but of advancement of freedom and democracy. Having shown that Islam is indeed compatible with the American common creed, Bush narrowed the national focus to the ideological conflict between the American common creed and Al-Qaida's creed of tyranny, thus mitigating the focus on the religious aspect of the war. This agenda is further manifest by Bush's address of Iran in this speech. Making a clear distinction between an Iranian government and its people based on their differing responses to the American common creed, Bush noted that, "Iran aggressively pursues these weapons and exports terror, while an unelected few repress the Iranian people's hope for freedom." Thus, the conflict with terrorists is not a conflict of faiths or peoples, but of ideas.

Indeed, the example of Afghan acceptance of liberty and the emphasis on Islam's history of "tolerance" allows Bush the ability to emphasize the importance of religious tolerance to America's domestic activities. Muslims' history of tolerance shows that they will not see this conflict as an opportunity for religious war, the religious war is brought by a smaller radical group. The establishment of this knowledge is crucial to promoting a growing unity behind the

⁷⁶ George W. Bush: "Address Before a Joint Session of the Congress on the State of the Union," January 29, 2002. Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project. <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=29644>.

American common creed because if Bush emphasized the Islamic nature of America's enemy, anti-Islamic sentiment could have grown into a divisive menace, ripping Islamic citizens from the American community as the internment camps separated Japanese citizens during World War II. As such, George W. Bush, like Clinton before him, de-emphasized Christianity, in this case by emphasizing ideologies in conflict instead of religions, in order to promote a national focus on the common creed .

Yet, George W. Bush also used this speech to push a normative vision for American involvement in protecting the ideals of the common creed-- freedom and democracy. By attempting to focus the common creed devotion on the protection of American freedoms instead of the selfish utilization of the license they give, Bush called for an even deeper, more substantive belief in liberty that demands action when he declared:

For too long our culture has said, "If it feels good, do it." Now America is embracing a new ethic and a new creed, "Let's roll." In the sacrifice of soldiers, the fierce brotherhood of firefighters, and the bravery and generosity of ordinary citizens, we have glimpsed what a new culture of responsibility could look like. We want to be a nation that serves goals larger than self. We've been offered a unique opportunity, and we must not let this moment pass. My call tonight is for every American to commit at least 2 years, 4,000 hours over the rest of your lifetime, to the service of your neighbors and your Nation.⁷⁷

By advocating a "new culture of responsibility" behind a "creed" of "sacrifice," George W. Bush made clear that the American common creed could fill the void left by increased religious indifference, offering an ability to be part of something deeper than the individual. Thus George W. Bush's appeal for religious toleration, the choice of inaction in response to religious differences, was made more bearable by his offer to find meaning in service to common American ideals. To further emphasize the religious notion of American individuals' commitment

⁷⁷ Ibid

to the common creed, Bush uses the word “sacrifice,” an inherently religiously-laden term,⁷⁸ to characterize their selfless effort. Thus, the common-creed came to take on an even more overtly religious nature through the call to a time-consuming “sacrifice,” a giving of life to protect it.

In closing this pivotal address to nation in crisis, Bush falls back on the inclusive rhetoric of the Pluralist God Strategy by emphasizing a national unity and common experience of God through a common national struggle when he said, “Beyond all differences of race or creed, we are one country, mourning together and facing danger together. Deep in the American character, there is honor, and it is stronger than cynicism. And many have discovered again that even in tragedy—especially in tragedy— God is near.”⁷⁹ In this instance, the American common creed is seen as unifying Americans on a level that religious people would see as even more deep and meaningful than common sacrifice, a common experience of God. By infusing the common creed with this religious energy and asserted unity, George W. Bush further emphasizes its supremacy over any difference or alternate allegiance. He further drives this prioritization of the common creed home by appealing to the magnitude of the conflict between the American creed and that of Al-Qaida:

In a single instant, we realized that this will be a decisive decade in the history of liberty, that we’ve been called to a unique role in human events. Rarely has the world faced a choice more clear or consequential. Our enemies send other people’s children on missions of suicide and murder. They embrace tyranny and death as a cause and a creed. We stand for a different choice, made long ago on the day of our founding. We affirm it again today. We choose freedom and the dignity of every life. Steadfast in our purpose, we now press on. We have known freedom’s price. We have shown freedom’s power. And in this great conflict, my fellow Americans, we will see freedom’s victory.

⁷⁸ David Domke and Kevin Coe “The God Strategy: The Rise of Religious Politics in America”

⁷⁹ George W. Bush: “Address Before a Joint Session of the Congress on the State of the Union,” January 29, 2002. Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project. <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=29644>.

In a conflict of beliefs between “tyranny and death” and “freedom and the dignity of every life,” the Pluralist God Strategy is a way in which America distinguished herself from the tyranny of her enemies. In response to hardened ideology that refused to accept any other beliefs than its own, Bush’s rhetoric in his second State of the Union demonstrates that not even a conflict with a devoutly religious enemy would pull America from its growing pluralist understanding or its growing unity around the common creed.

*Put Your Money where Your Mouth Is! How does the Pluralist God Strategy
Affect George W. Bush’s Advocacy on Bellwether Issues?*

Given the essential role of the use of the Pluralist God Strategy in cultivating devotion to the American common creed in a time of war, Bush’s third State of the Union took a further step in replacing explicitly Christian appeals with more pluralist arguments. An issue spoken about in his third State of the Union address that makes this approach very clear is abortion. Instead of appealing to religious notions, such as a Creator or God, or blessing (as his father had done), Bush relied on an understanding of the American common creed iterated in his previous State of the Union, that it “values every life.” Expounding on this idea of religious-neutral value, Bush noted:

By caring for children who need mentors and for addicted men and women who need treatment, we are building a more welcoming society, a culture that values every life. And in this work, we must not overlook the weakest among us. I ask you to protect infants at the very hour of their birth and end the practice of partial-birth abortion. And because no human life should be started or ended as the object of an experiment, I ask you to set a high standard for humanity and pass a law against all human cloning.⁸⁰

⁸⁰ George W. Bush: "Address Before a Joint Session of the Congress on the State of the Union," January 28, 2003. Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project. <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=29645>.

While Reagan addressed this issue from the religious perspective of “our Judeo-Christian tradition,”⁸¹ and George H.W. Bush invoked the idea of blessing, George W. Bush chose to abandon the paradigm of associating America with a unified religious tradition by instead appealing to the value of life that derives from America’s democratic society. This shift reflects even more emphatically on a shift of religious rhetoric to be less sectarian in efforts to strengthen allegiance to the common creed. The discarding of religious arguments in this arena also could be seen as creating a “welcoming society” by creating an environment where people will not have their beliefs challenged by those addressing the nation.

Religion and The Common Creed

Yet, despite Bush’s clear efforts to capture the pluralist appeal of Clinton’s strategy, he also adds back in more direct references to God to adapt the God Strategy in a way that gives the American common creed more authority during the War on Terror. Describing Americans, Bush notes that:

Americans are a free people who know that freedom is the right of every person and the future of every nation. The liberty we prize is not America's gift to the world; it is God's gift to humanity. We Americans have faith in ourselves, but not in ourselves alone. We do not know we do not claim to know all the ways of providence, yet we can trust in them, placing our confidence in the loving God behind all of life and all of history.⁸²

Therefore, faithfulness to the common creed was conceived, like it was by the first Bush, as faithfulness to God. Given their knowledge that “freedom is the right of every person” and that “it is God’s gift to humanity,” the protection and promotion of freedom at home and abroad

⁸¹ Ronald Reagan: "Address Before a Joint Session of Congress on the State of the Union ," January 25, 1988. Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project. <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=36035>.

⁸² George W. Bush: "Address Before a Joint Session of the Congress on the State of the Union," January 28, 2003. Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project. <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=29645>.

acquires a new, elevated significance. However, this emphasis on God as a source of authority for America's common creed is still compatible with the increasingly pluralist appeals George W. Bush is making. The relationship between a clear religious reliance on God and his appeals to a pluralist audience is complicated. Bush has taken the more pluralist rhetoric of Clinton and reinserted reliance on God. The resulting God Strategy sees general references to God as primary sources of authority for the common creed. After all, according to George Gallup Jr., of Gallup Inc., "So many people in this country say they believe in the basic concept of God, that it almost seems unnecessary to conduct surveys on the question."⁸³ Thus, general references to God can provide a Christian appeal while tolerating and encouraging other views as well.

Yet, a more overt Christian invocation of God is not in any concrete way brought to bear on how Americans live out the common creed. In maintaining the common creed as a secular unifying force, Bush holds to the path set by Clinton. If anything, reliance on God is made to serve the already granted priorities of freedom and democracy. Bush indicates the basis for America's actions at home and abroad when he notes that

America is a nation with a mission, and that mission comes from our most basic beliefs. We have no desire to dominate, no ambitions of empire. Our aim is a democratic peace, a peace founded upon the dignity and rights of every man and woman. America acts in this cause with friends and allies at our side, yet we understand our special calling: This great Republic will lead the cause of freedom.⁸⁴

Thus, America's unique mission that drives her involvement in Afghanistan and elsewhere is the promotion of freedom. By articulating this mission as America's "special calling" Bush again sent a religious signal to Christians who see calling as something comes from God. Yet, the word

⁸³ Domke and Coe, 11

⁸⁴ George W. Bush: "Address Before a Joint Session of the Congress on the State of the Union," January 20, 2004. Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project. <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=29646>

“calling” also can have a non-religious meaning similar to the word “purpose, ” allowing it to play a role in evoking American purpose for both Christians and other Americans. Thus, Bush continued to show how he integrated God invocations and faith-invocations into a rhetoric that was also, if not primarily, focused on drawing non-Christians toward the common creed.

Bush further emphasized his need to appeal to people of all religious background as a necessity arising from American values when he addressed the need for the promotion of America’s values in young children. Keeping consistency with his pattern of elevating the common creed above religious beliefs, Bush declared,

We are living in a time of great change in our world, in our economy, in science and medicine. Yet some things endure: courage and compassion, reverence and integrity, respect for differences of faith and race. The values we try to live by never change, and they are instilled in us by fundamental institutions such as families and schools and religious congregations. These institutions, these unseen pillars of civilization, must remain strong in America, and we will defend them. We must stand with our families to help them raise healthy, responsible children. When it comes to helping children make right choices, there is work for all of us to do.⁸⁵

The enduring values of “respect for differences of faith and race” direct the focus of this statement toward what religious congregations, no matter what their tenets of belief, can teach children to live by a societal standard that is understood and irreligious. Grouped with schools and families, it is clear that the main role of these religious congregations is to educate, and that they all can do it regardless of their beliefs. However, while the beliefs of these “religious congregations” are not important, their existence is essential. As “unseen pillars of civilization,” these institutions are depicted as having a central function in training people to live out the American common creed, promoting democracy with responsible actions.

⁸⁵ Ibid

Another way in which Bush manifested his agenda to show that religious groups, regardless of their beliefs could bolster America's ability to be faithful to the common creed is through attempts at legislation. Allowing grant money to be dispersed regardless of religious affiliation to religious charities, Bush continued his emphasis on promoting actions in every faith to strengthen America's promotion of her common creed. He asserted,

It's also important to strengthen our communities by unleashing the compassion of America's religious institutions. Religious charities of every creed are doing some of the most vital work in our country: mentoring children, feeding the hungry, taking the hand of the lonely. Yet Government has often denied social service grants and contracts to these groups, just because they have a cross or a Star of David or a crescent on the wall. By Executive order, I have opened billions of dollars in grant money to competition that includes faith-based charities. Tonight I ask you to codify this into law, so people of faith can know that the law will never discriminate against them again.⁸⁶

Here again, the appeal to "religious charities" is not sectarian in the least, the focus being how "every creed" has charities that are contributing toward the protection and promotion of freedom. The references to "cross" and "Star of David" made clear the goal of inclusivity, which was punctuated with the remark that "people of faith can know that the law will never discriminate against them again." All this was promoted in a style similar to that of Clinton, focusing on what the religious groups achieve for America's common creed, not on promoting specific tenets of belief. Indeed, later in this address, Bush promoted another use of this faith-infused approach to promoting American democracy without preferring any belief system when he encouraged a policy that would help released prisoners get mentoring from "faith-based groups." This faith-infused approach to domestic issues sent the signal that Bush cared about the contribution of religion to society and a politically mobilized religious right was apt to take this political recognition as identifying with them, by furthering their political priorities. However, Bush was

⁸⁶ Ibid

identifying with Christians in these speeches in a much more general and pacific way, appealing to other religions simultaneously.

This pacific tendency in George W. Bush is evident through how he addresses the issue of marriage in the very same speech. Instead of appealing directly to a unified, bible-based moral identity as Reagan had done, Bush buttresses his argument for this bellwether issue with reference to its importance to society and the authority of previously established law when he stated that:

A strong America must also value the institution of marriage. I believe we should respect individuals as we take a principled stand for one of the most fundamental, enduring institutions of our civilization. Congress has already taken a stand on this issue by passing the Defense of Marriage Act, signed in 1996 by President Clinton. That statute protects marriage under Federal law as a union of a man and a woman.⁸⁷

After having appealed to the common creed by noting that marriage is essential for the continued strength of America, Bush appealed to legal authority by citing DOMA. Neither of these first appeals in any way engage the religious motivations behind the marriage debate, allowing them to be unifying appeals to why marriage is good for America. However, Bush's final justification for preserving traditional marriage reveals what distinguishes his address of religious issues from the Reagan-Bush Sr. strand of the God Strategy. When asserting that "Our Nation must defend the sanctity of marriage. The outcome of this debate is important, and so is the way we conduct it. The same moral tradition that defines marriage also teaches that each individual has dignity and value in God's sight,⁸⁸" George W. Bush refused to identify what this "moral tradition" is. This periphrastic way of referring to what Reagan called "our Judeo-Christian tradition⁸⁹"

⁸⁷ Ibid

⁸⁸ Ibid

⁸⁹ Ronald Reagan: "Address Before a Joint Session of Congress on the State of the Union," January 25, 1988. Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project. <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=36035>.

allowed for an accommodation of all beliefs. The use of the term “moral tradition” here is particularly astute because even atheists and agnostics would identify with morals and thus see this appeal as a way in which religion and the idea of “God” can be used instrumentally to cultivate a morality based on the premise of valuing humanity. While taking the side of conservative morality, Bush had made its case to the widest array of beliefs possible, a hallmark of his strategy.

Invocations of Faiths

In his second Inaugural however, Bush shifted from making more general, holistic appeals to the various religions in America to addressing them specifically. In this shift, he remained consistent with the goal of emphasizing the common creed, not these religions, by referencing several of them in the same breath and viewing them, not in terms of their beliefs, but in terms of their contribution to freedom. George W. Bush invoked Judaism, Christianity, and Islam when he noted:

In America's ideal of freedom, the public interest depends on private character, on integrity and tolerance toward others and the rule of conscience in our own lives. Self-government relies, in the end, on the governing of the self. That edifice of character is built in families, supported by communities with standards, and sustained in our national life by the truths of Sinai, the Sermon on the Mount, the words of the Koran, and the varied faiths of our people. Americans move forward in every generation by reaffirming all that is good and true that came before, ideals of justice and conduct that are the same yesterday, today, and forever.⁹⁰

Emphasizing tolerance at the very top of this statement, Bush set up his specific laudatory references toward Judaism, Christianity, and Islam-- three religions among which there is a great deal of tension. Appealing to tolerance, Bush attempted to pacify the tension between these beliefs in favor of a common goal. Aiding in this broad appeal for toleration, Bush's inclusive

⁹⁰ George W. Bush: "Inaugural Address," January 20, 2005. Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project. <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=58745>.

praise went even further than these three, primary faiths to include “the varied faiths of our people,” thus depicting the “private character” that he is prioritizing as grounded in something deeper than religion. About this deeper foundation, George W. Bush provided clarity, “ideals of justice and conduct” are the deeper foundation for the American common creed of freedom, they cannot be moved. This argument was bolstered by the assertion that these ideals “are the same yesterday, today, and forever,” a quotation of Hebrews 13:8 which notes that “Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever.”⁹¹ Therefore even in his increasingly specific appeals to religions other than Christianity, Bush spoke in words that were familiar to Christians, borrowing words from a biblical excerpt to justify his argument.

A New Set of Values

The use of this pluralistic appeal to elevate the common creed and hone America’s focus on it is further made evident, as Bush subtly placed freedom in the position of authority over America’s actions by concluding this, his second, Inaugural Address by describing the source of American confidence thusly:

We go forward with complete confidence in the eventual triumph of freedom, not because history runs on the wheels of inevitability—it is human choices that move events; not because we consider ourselves a chosen nation—God moves and chooses as He wills. We have confidence because freedom is the permanent hope of mankind, the hunger in dark places, the longing of the soul.⁹²

Thus, regardless of whether God is with America, her confidence rests in freedom. Her permanent confidence is in the common creed and not religion. Since the common creed is a natural hope of mankind, America can be confident that it will triumph, whether God has chosen

⁹¹ Hebrews 13:8, KJV

⁹² George W. Bush: "Inaugural Address," January 20, 2005. Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project. <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=58745>.

her or not. This choice not to use God as a source of authority for the American mission puts even more focus on the protection and promotion of freedom, because it is freedom that is held as giving America faith.

With this strong emphasis on the primacy of freedom permeating his religious rhetoric, Bush's fifth State of the Union address focused primarily on the values that are most conducive to freedom. These appeals take on a character that is essentially irreligious through the use of words like "culture" and "values" to justify positions on bellwether issues that had before been argued for on religious terms. A prime example is how Bush defends the pro-life agenda via an irreligious appeal to "a culture of life" by saying,

Because a society is measured by how it treats the weak and vulnerable, we must strive to build a culture of life.... To build a culture of life, we must also ensure that scientific advances always serve human dignity, not take advantage of some lives for the benefit of others. We should all be able to agree on some clear standards. I will work with Congress to ensure that human embryos are not created for experimentation or grown for body parts and that human life is never bought or sold as a commodity. America will continue to lead the world in medical research that is ambitious, aggressive, and always ethical.⁹³

While previously in his presidency he referred to a "moral tradition" to emphasize this idea of human dignity, at this juncture Bush merely appeals to cultural necessity. Since American society must be evaluated highly, as a beacon of freedom, America must create a culture of life. This instrumental use of life grounded the appeal to respect it in America's national reputation instead of religion. Arguing for the pro-life agenda in this way furthered Bush's elevation of the common creed by using national interest as a justification that can substitute for moral systems to direct conduct. Similarly, in this address Bush also refers to the "values of our country" as a substitute for a religious appeal to justify action. Pushing for the continued expansion of American freedom

⁹³ George W. Bush: "Address Before a Joint Session of the Congress on the State of the Union," February 2, 2005. Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project. <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=58746>.

domestically, Bush noted that, "Because one of the deepest values of our country is compassion, we must never turn away from any citizen who feels isolated from the opportunities of America. Our Government will continue to support faith-based and community groups that bring hope to harsh places.⁹⁴" By giving national values the position of religious beliefs, Bush shifted his rhetoric even more so toward the idea of a civil religion, where the American common creed is a kind of religion, driving Americans into shared values and objectives.

Affirming this hypothesis, Bush emphasized America's national unity as coming from a shared, American morality when he argued that, "Because one of the main sources of our national unity is our belief in equal justice, we need to make sure Americans of all races and backgrounds have confidence in the system that provides justice.⁹⁵" Making "national unity" the source of authority for his appeal to equality, Bush shifted from the view of the Declaration of Independence, which saw equality as deriving from a Creator, to the position that national unity is a sufficient justification for treating people as equal.

Thus, Bush has solidified a different approach to the God Strategy, using whatever religious, moral, or cultural notions are general enough to unite people and focus them on the common creed, America's national religion and permanent justification for action. In concluding his fifth State of the Union, Bush drives home the sole purpose of America in promoting freedom and the uniting confidence in freedom by saying:

In all this history, even when we have disagreed, we have seen threads of purpose that unite us. The attack on freedom in our world has reaffirmed our confidence in freedom's power to change the world. We are all part of a great venture: To extend the promise of freedom in our country, to renew the values that sustain our liberty, and to spread the peace that freedom brings.⁹⁶

⁹⁴ Ibid

⁹⁵ Ibid

⁹⁶ Ibid

Like missionaries, Americans are to derive their values from a prime source, in this case freedom, which they then spread. This common purpose calls Americans to be unified in belief and action behind the common creed. The picture of renewing values and spreading them gives the movement of freedom a very evangelistic tone, making the propagation of the common creed the only focus of America's corporate efforts. Bush then ended with a statement of assurance that the common creed is divinely sanctioned by saying that the direction of a higher power, "the road of providence...leads to freedom."⁹⁷ As such, recourse to the common creed can justifiably supplant appeals to religions in general or specifically because, as referenced in his 2005 State of the Union address, the continuance of freedom is the only certain thing about the divine agenda.

Having established that the American devotion to freedom is the primary focus of the nation that should drive all of the citizens' actions individually, what use does Bush have for continuing to appeal to religion? As Bush continued to appeal to religious themes in his sixth, a seventh, and eighth State of the Union address, the true usefulness of religion in including different groups in a given political agenda was illuminated. In his sixth State of the Union, George W. Bush utilized an appeal to the nobility of Islam to ensure Muslim Americans unity with the rest of the nation in promoting the common creed. Bush astutely pulled American Muslims into the common mission while addressing the problem of Islamic terror when he stated:

No one can deny the success of freedom, but some men rage and fight against it. And one of the main sources of reaction and opposition is radical Islam—the perversion by a few of a noble faith into an ideology of terror and death. Terrorists like bin Laden are serious about mass murder, and all of us must take their declared intentions seriously. They seek

⁹⁷ Ibid

to impose a heartless system of totalitarian control throughout the Middle East and arm themselves with weapons of mass murder.⁹⁸

Using the term “radical” to distinguish between terrorists, who adhered to an ideology of mass murder, and the more noble Muslims who lived a “noble faith,” Bush gave Muslims a reputation to live up to, and showed that he respected them as people. Moreover, by distinguishing Muslims from terrorists in this two-sided ideological struggle between freedom and terror, Bush established that Muslims are a part of the side of freedom, working to establish the common creed. Together, Americans, whether or not they would claim the religious label as these terrorists, unite for something bigger--the spread of freedom and democracy. To emphasize this purpose of promoting freedom against terrorists, Bush continued, “the terrorists hope these horrors will break our will, allowing the violent to inherit the Earth. But they have miscalculated: We love our freedom, and we will fight to keep it.”⁹⁹

Even Bush’s direct invocations of God are useful in this strategy of pulling people into unity behind the domestic and global promotion of the common creed. In the aforementioned speech, Bush invoked God as an example of American common belief by declaring “Americans believe in the God-given dignity and worth of a villager with HIV/AIDS or an infant with malaria or a refugee fleeing genocide or a young girl sold into slavery.”¹⁰⁰ This belief about God is indicative of an assumption that the common creed makes, that multiple religious faiths are commendable. Since the common creed is best fought for when there is total unity, the common creed belief system does not come up with a definitive idea of what God prefers. As such, it

⁹⁸ George W. Bush: "Address Before a Joint Session of the Congress on the State of the Union," January 31, 2006. Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project. <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=65090>.

⁹⁹ Ibid

¹⁰⁰ Ibid

simply assumes that God agrees with the tenets that are most conducive to the promotion of freedom. This assumption allows Bush to say that Americans as a whole have this belief about human dignity, which comes from God, since the citizens presumably adhere to this American common creed. Given the supremacy of the common creed in directing action, references to God can serve to speak the language of religious people while not advocating any national belief system outside the common creed.

Facing terrorist threats from Sunni and Shi'a Muslim groups, Bush remained consistent with his purpose to frame the struggle with terrorism as one of America's common creed against the terrorists' ideology, not a fight against Muslim religionists. In his seventh State of the Union, Bush continued to distinguish between these terrorists and peaceful Muslims, calling the new threat "Shi'a and Sunni extremists,¹⁰¹" and emphasizing their devaluing of life, which contrasted sharply with America's "culture of life."¹⁰² Bush focused Americans even more on the ideological element of this struggle by characterizing these extremists as "different faces of the same totalitarian threat" that Al-Qaida represented. Showing that this ideological tension created conflict, not just between America and radical Islam, but inside the Islamic religion itself, Bush narrated that,

In Iraq, Al Qaida and other Sunni extremists blew up one of the most sacred places in Shi'a Islam, the Golden Mosque of Samarra. This atrocity, directed at a Muslim house of prayer, was designed to provoke retaliation from Iraqi Shi'a, and it succeeded. Radical Shi'a elements, some of whom receive support from Iran, formed death squads. The result was a tragic escalation of sectarian rage and reprisal that continues to this day.¹⁰³

¹⁰¹George W. Bush: "Address Before a Joint Session of the Congress on the State of the Union," January 23, 2007. Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project. <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=24446>.

¹⁰² Bush, George W., State of the Union, February 2 2005

¹⁰³ George W. Bush: "Address Before a Joint Session of the Congress on the State of the Union," January 23, 2007. Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project. <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=24446>.

Thus, this new threat is once again an opportunity for Bush to focus the American attention on advancement of the creed of freedom against a terrorist ideology. Instead of focusing on the religious element of the national struggle, as the Cold War depiction of a godless Communism did, Bush's focus on ideology placed the national focus on the common creed, the American ideology, instead of on a particular religious perspective. Framing American military involvement in this ideological light, Bush drew in the Christians as well with another vague reference to scripture saying, "American foreign policy is more than a matter of war and diplomacy. Our work in the world is also based on a timeless truth: To whom much is given, much is required."¹⁰⁴ Referencing Luke 12:48, which notes that "For unto whomever much is given, of him shall much be required,"¹⁰⁵ Bush is able to continue grasping the strategic advantage of the "God Strategy" by making an appeal to biblical words that Christians could interpret as an endorsement of Christianity while simultaneously making the principle applicable to people of any faith by calling it a "timeless truth" instead of scripture. Therefore, in the rising of new threats Bush found the opportunity to re-emphasize the primary role of the American common creed in the conflict through using religious appeals to draw people of different beliefs into firm allegiance to the common creed ideology.

In his final State of the Union, Bush articulated the relationship between America's common creed and religion through a narrative of the constitutional convention by noting that,

The strength—the secret of our strength, the miracle of America, is that our greatness lies not in our Government, but in the spirit and determination of our people. When the Federal Convention met in Philadelphia in 1787, our Nation was bound by the Articles of Confederation, which began with the words, "We the undersigned delegates." When Gouverneur Morris was asked to draft the preamble to our new Constitution, he offered an important revision and opened with words that changed the course of our Nation and the history of the world: "We the people." By trusting the people, our Founders wagered that a great and noble nation could be built on the liberty that resides in the hearts of all men and women. By trusting the people, succeeding generations transformed our fragile, young democracy into the most powerful nation on Earth and a beacon of hope for

¹⁰⁴ Ibid

¹⁰⁵ Luke 12:48, KJV

millions. And so long as we continue to trust the people, our Nation will prosper, our liberty will be secure, and the state of our Union will remain strong.¹⁰⁶

When Bush referred to the idea that liberty “resides in the hearts of all men and women,” he tapped in to the religious element of the common creed. This personal belief in and devotion to individual liberty is what motivated the creation of the U.S.A.. However, just as important to the America Bush was talking to was the institutional commitment to a democratic form of government, the ideological common creed. As the common creed continued to influence religious rhetoric, the call for an individual belief and devotion to liberty would continue to supplant references to faith traditions as a buttress for the strong institutional commitment to democracy. Thus, the ideological and religious common creed manifestations work in tandem, causing the common creed to be able to direct America’s ideological struggle against terror through appeal to its ideology while also motivating her citizens to devote their lives to helping create a free society at home through appeal to its religious element of personal devotion.

Thus, Bush continues the pluralist trend of Clinton and gives the common creed a more religious character than before by emphasizing a devotion to it that required more of citizens than ever before. Moreover, by responding to a religious enemy by framing the conflict in terms of ideology, not religion, Bush maintained pluralistic approach to invoking faith, allowing him to call for a broader unity around the common creed. Emphasizing unity through diversity, Bush allowing Christianity to be joined by other faiths in his rhetoric. In fact, he invoked a greater variety of faiths than any of the presidents before him. This effort to be inclusive also influenced Bush’s advocacy for bellwether issues in that, though he maintained consistency with the God

¹⁰⁶ George W. Bush: "Address Before a Joint Session of the Congress on the State of the Union," January 28, 2008. Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project. <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=76301>.

Strategy by taking the side of Christians on these issues, he did not use Christian faith invocations to do it, but instead appealed to more secular justifications. In seeking unity, Bush framed bellwether issues in light of what would be best for American culture instead of basing his argument on a religious foundation. Therefore, the distinctly Christian elements of the God Strategy continued to erode, whereas the supremacy of the common creed continued to increase.

CHAPTER FIVE

Barack Obama's Explicit Articulation of the Common Creed

The Common Creed as a Revelation about God

Given George W. Bush's decision to, with minor diversions, maintain a consistent trend toward prioritizing the American common creed and pluralizing religious references, Obama even more emphatically focuses on the common creed, which he refers to as either "the promise of citizenship" or "our common creed." Looking at his use of the common creed chronologically, it will become evident that, even more so than Bush, Obama has utilized the God Strategy as a tool to bring many different religious groups together in unity under the banner of the common creed.

One way in which Obama attempted early on to include believers of all stripes in his common creed agenda was by drawing on God's authority to justify the common creed commitment to individual freedom. In his first Inaugural address, Obama tied this common creed to the authority of God saying,

This is the price and the promise of citizenship. This is the source of our confidence, the knowledge that God calls on us to shape an uncertain destiny. This is the meaning of our liberty and our creed; why men and women and children of every race and every faith can join in celebration across this magnificent Mall, and why a man whose father less than 60 years ago might not have been served at a local restaurant can now stand before you to take a most sacred oath.¹⁰⁷

Thus, the American common creed, the devotion to liberty that allows people to shape this "uncertain destiny," is called for by God. The statement that God calls for this free pursuit of destiny is a uniting force that brings the nation together across racial and religious barriers.

¹⁰⁷ Barack Obama: "Inaugural Address," January 20, 2009. Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project. <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=44>.

Therefore, the American common creed is presented as a universal truth about God—God is in favor of individual liberty and democracy. This universal truth about God transcends religions as believers of Allah, Yahweh, Jesus, or others all are called on, as Americans, to shape their destiny.. As such, Obama continues the trend of elevating the common creed at the expense of specific religious faiths to the point of representing it as a transcendent truth about God.

Further affirming the transcendence of America’s common creed to all people no matter what boundaries separate them from each other, Obama referenced scripture to reaffirm unity behind the common belief system of America. Obama addressed this youthful nation, emphasizing the commonality between her citizens with the backing of scripture:

We remain a young nation, but in the words of Scripture, the time has come to set aside childish things. The time has come to reaffirm our enduring spirit, to choose our better history, to carry forward that precious gift, that noble idea passed on from generation to generation: the God-given promise that all are equal, all are free, and all deserve a chance to pursue their full measure of happiness.¹⁰⁸

Quoting 1 Corinthians 13:11 ¹⁰⁹, Obama called for Americans to set aside divisiveness as a “childish” thing and instead to reaffirm their unity. By referring to the New Testament as “scripture” Obama both communicates solidarity with Christians and makes a broader, less-religiously polarizing appeal to the unity of all. Using the bible as a means of establishing unity behind the American common creed, represented by the Declaration’s affirmation of equality, freedom, and the pursuit of happiness, Obama continues the instrumental use of the God Strategy to pull Americans of various faiths into the common national mission.

Characterizing the common creed in terms well-understood by Christians, Obama added another dimension to the religious nature of the American common creed when he praised American soldiers, with the words “ We honor them not only because they are guardians of our liberty, but because they embody the spirit of service, a willingness to find meaning in something greater than themselves. And yet at this moment, a moment that will define a

¹⁰⁸ Ibid

¹⁰⁹ 1 Corinthians 13:11, KJV

generation, it is precisely this spirit that must inhabit us all.¹¹⁰ Adding on to the concept of lifetime devotion to the common creed that Bush espoused in his State of the Union addresses during the Iraq War, Obama emphasized the idea of an inhabiting spirit that finds meaning in a purpose that's greater than the individual, that points them ultimately to devotion to democracy and individual freedom. This idea of a spirit-directed devotion is not an innovation. Rather, the rhetoric of a spirit that lives in people borrows from words that the New Testament uses to talk about the Holy Spirit. An example of this idea of an inhabiting spirit in the New Testament comes from 1 Corinthians 3:16 which says "Do you not know that you are God's temple and that God's Spirit dwells in you?"¹¹¹ Indeed, Obama has made manifest the idea of the devotion to democracy and individual freedom as a spiritual state of being, not just an ideological commitment.

Pluralism

This spiritual commitment to America transcends and includes all religious perspectives, being made stronger by the opportunity to unite difference. As Obama continues in this, his first, inaugural:

For we know that our patchwork heritage is a strength, not a weakness. We are a nation of Christians and Muslims, Jews and Hindus and nonbelievers. We are shaped by every language and culture, drawn from every end of this Earth. And because we have tasted the bitter swill of civil war and segregation and emerged from that dark chapter stronger and more united, we cannot help but believe that the old hatreds shall someday pass, that the lines of tribe shall soon dissolve; that as the world grows smaller, our common humanity shall reveal itself, and that America must play its role in ushering in a new era of peace.¹¹²

Thus, Obama's articulation of the strength of America lent itself to further pluralist religious appeals. Acknowledging Islam, Hinduism, and Judaism alongside Christianity as parts of the "patchwork" of America, Obama emphasized pluralism more directly than any of the presidents

¹¹⁰ Barack Obama: "Inaugural Address," January 20, 2009. Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project. <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=44>.

¹¹¹ 1 Corinthians 3:16, KJV

¹¹² Barack Obama: "Inaugural Address," January 20, 2009. Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project. <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=44>.

previously analyzed. By incorporating direct references to the names of faiths other than Christianity and including them as part of the national religious identity, Obama indicated the universality of the common creed and demonstrated again that devotion to America is a deeper commitment than devotion to religion. Thus, no matter what God people believe in Obama can be confident that He can play an instrumental role in promoting the common creed.

Concluding his first Inaugural, Obama grounded his appeal to continue the spread of freedom with an assurance that God will bless America's efforts. He closed,

America, in the face of our common dangers, in this winter of our hardship, let us remember these timeless words. With hope and virtue, let us brave once more the icy currents and endure what storms may come. Let it be said by our children's children that when we were tested, we refused to let this journey end; that we did not turn back, nor did we falter. And with eyes fixed on the horizon and God's grace upon us, we carried forth that great gift of freedom and delivered it safely to future generations¹¹³.

Thus, Obama began his tenure in office by signaling that God endorses the common creed. As such, he signals to the American people that his policies to protect and promote American democracy are aligned with the will of God. This attempt to align God with the national common creed is consistent with the trend set by Reagan, allowing Obama to attempt to harness some of the advantages of the God Strategy while appealing to his audience in a more overtly pluralist manner than Reagan, by addressing many different faiths.

Common Values

Obama continued to emphasize the common creed throughout his State of the Union addresses, appealing in his second State of the Union to a transcendent set of American values, much as George W. Bush did before him. Attributing the success of America to these uniting values, Obama declared:

In the end, it's our ideals, our values that built America, values that allowed us to forge a nation made up of immigrants from every corner of the globe, values that drive our citizens still. Every day, Americans meet their responsibilities to their families and their employers. Time and again, they lend a hand to their neighbors and give back to their country. They take pride in their labor and are generous in spirit. These aren't

¹¹³ Ibid

Republican values or Democratic values that they're living by, business values or labor values, they're American values.¹¹⁴

Thus, the American community is bolstered and brought together by a universal sense of values. To further emphasize this uniting character through religious appeals, Obama gives an example of American cooperation with Muslim peoples to strengthen America, "We're working with Muslim communities around the world to promote science and education and innovation."¹¹⁵ As such, despite the fact that Muslims adhere to tenets of faith that are drastically different than those espoused by most Americans, they have the same basic values of progress and are helping America grow a strong democracy. This statement shows that Muslims have a needed role in the promotion and protection of the American democracy and that Muslim Americans are united to the American mission by something deeper than any religious friction-- their commitment to the advancement of democracy.

More clearly establishing the position of Muslims in American society in his third State of the Union, Obama stated that "American Muslims are indeed part of the American family."¹¹⁶ Such a clear solidarity with American Muslims in a time of conflict with an Islamic threat represents a continuance of George W. Bush's pattern of framing the terrorist conflict as an ideological, not a religious, struggle. Utilizing this idea of the "American family," Obama makes his first explicit appeal to the American common creed by noting that,

We are part of the American family. We believe that in a country where every race and faith and point of view can be found, we are still bound together as one people, that we share common hopes and a common creed, that the dreams of a little girl in Tucson are not so different than those of our own children, that they all deserve the chance to be fulfilled. That too is what sets us apart as a nation.¹¹⁷

¹¹⁴ Barack Obama: "Address Before a Joint Session of the Congress on the State of the Union," January 27, 2010. Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project. <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=87433>.

¹¹⁵ Ibid

¹¹⁶ Barack Obama: "Address Before a Joint Session of the Congress on the State of the Union," January 25, 2011. Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project. <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=88928>.

¹¹⁷ Ibid

Thus the common creed, as it has been articulated throughout my argument, is held to be a unifying set of beliefs that transcends religious boundaries and motivates Americans to unite around freedom and democracy. Here, the freedom of a little girl in Tucson to fulfill her dreams is a freedom that the American common creed would universalize, and this “sets us apart as a nation.” The actualization of freedom leads America to inclusive strategies that attempt to bring everyone in on the promotion and protection of individual freedom and democracy.

Continuing to emphasize the role of inclusion in adherence to America’s common creed, Obama notes in his fourth State of the Union address that,

While it's ultimately up to the people of the region to decide their fate, we will advocate for those values that have served our own country so well. We will stand against violence and intimidation. We will stand for the rights and dignity of all human beings: men and women; Christians, Muslims, and Jews. We will support policies that lead to strong and stable democracies and open markets, because tyranny is no match for liberty.¹¹⁸

The reference to “Christians, Muslims, and Jews” here was a way of Obama re-emphasizing the role of inclusion in America’s common set of values. As Americans promote their common creed abroad by helping other nations establish democracy, religious inclusiveness will be a continued focus. In a time when religious conflict, in the form of terrorism, continues to ravage the world, Obama continued to respond with the idea that all religions are equally welcome, an approach that is reminiscent of how George W. Bush handled the War on Terror during his presidency. Further deemphasizing religious tension, Obama’s statement that “tyranny is no match for liberty” framed the continued struggles of America as ideological conflict between tyranny and democracy, as Bush described the War on Terror. Thus, Obama through the use of references to all primary Abrahamic religions downplays religious differences to continue the trend of increasing emphasis on the common creed.

The Common Creed

In his second Inaugural, Obama indicated that the common creed is a pursuit of a united

¹¹⁸ Barack Obama: "Address Before a Joint Session of Congress on the State of the Union," January 24, 2012. Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project. <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=99000>.

destiny, to attain the values of the American Declaration. Characterizing the common creed in terms of faithfulness to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness as described in the Declaration of Independence, he noted that,

Today we continue a never-ending journey to bridge the meaning of those words with the realities of our time. For history tells us that while these truths may be self-evident, they've never been self-executing; that while freedom is a gift from God, it must be secured by His people here on Earth. The patriots of 1776 did not fight to replace the tyranny of a king with the privileges of a few or the rule of a mob. They gave to us a republic, a government of and by and for the people, entrusting each generation to keep safe our founding creed.¹¹⁹

By depicting each generation's responsibility as "to keep safe our founding creed," Obama explicitly frames the securing of life, liberty, and pursuit of happiness in religious terms. This religious depiction of the Declaration justifies the continued pluralism of religious rhetoric on the grounds that America, from the beginning has had a national faith, a faith in liberty and democracy that superseded the individual religions within her borders.

Obama went on to reference America's commitment to freedom as a "creed" four more times in this address, articulating he believes would constitute faithfulness to the national belief system, expanding the scope that devotion to America applies to. He began by showing that one of the primary tenets of this civic creed is equality by noting, "We are true to our creed when a little girl born into the bleakest poverty knows that she has the same chance to succeed as anybody else, because she is an American; she is free and she is equal, not just in the eyes of God, but also in our own."¹²⁰ A key point of emphasis about Obama's reference to God here is that it is concessive. Obama is indicating that though God holds this child as equal, Americans must also promote her equality if they are to maintain faithfulness to their civic faith.

Next, Obama indicated that the American creed requires that America have policies that reward hard work. Stumping for these policies and for the protection of natural resources Obama said, "we will preserve our planet, commanded to our care by God. That's what will lend

¹¹⁹ Barack Obama: "Inaugural Address," January 21, 2013. Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project. <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=102827>.

¹²⁰ Ibid

meaning to the creed our fathers once declared.” Here, the notion of “God” is used to add gravity to the obligation to protect the planet. However, the focus of the passage, the place where Obama ends his statement, is the fulfillment of the creed. As such, God plays a secondary role in indicating the importance of the American obligation to take care of their natural resources. However, as was mentioned with George W. Bush, the use of this appeal to God is still critical because it helps bring religious people in on the common creed mission by aligning the things they value, action in accordance with God’s will, with the common creed.

Finally, describing America’s international commitments, Obama appeals to the creed a final time, saying

We will support democracy from Asia to Africa, from the Americas to the Middle East, because our interests and our conscience compel us to act on behalf of those who long for freedom. And we must be a source of hope to the poor, the sick, the marginalized, the victims of prejudice—not out of mere charity, but because peace in our time requires the constant advance of those principles that our common creed describes: tolerance and opportunity, human dignity and justice.¹²¹

Thus, Obama has articulated the protection and promotion of democracy to be a religious devotion to “tolerance and opportunity,” “human dignity and justice.” Here in his references to the creedal nature of American democracy, founded in the words of the Declaration, Obama makes explicit the tension that has been present since Reagan—the tension between attempts to appeal to religion and to cultivate a national faith. This too explains the increasing pluralism of appeals to religion. Since the common creed is increasingly the uniting force in these addresses, religious references take on the character of attempts to show compatibility between specific religious beliefs and the American creed.

Inclusion

Obama further manifested this strategy of using invocations of faith to include different religions in the purpose of protecting and living the American creed in his fifth State of the

¹²¹ Ibid

Union address. Depicting the bravery of police officer Brian Murphy, Obama slipped in a few subtle religious references, including a never-before included religious sect

When a gunman opened fire on a Sikh temple in Wisconsin and Brian was the first to arrive—and he did not consider his own safety. He fought back until help arrived and ordered his fellow officers to protect the safety of the Americans worshipping inside, even as he lay bleeding from 12 bullet wounds. And when asked how he did that, Brian said, "That's just the way we're made."¹²²

The reference to "Sikh temple" in the first sentence followed by "Americans worshipping inside" in the second helps reemphasize a primary point of the common creed--tolerance. What was of primary importance about the identity of the place is that its a "Sikh temple" but the defining characteristic of the people inside was that they are "Americans." Including the Sikh religion in his address, Obama further expands the inclusion of religions in political discourse through the inclusion of a different one in his own rhetoric. While Obama could have called it a house of worship, choosing to address the fact that it was a Sikh temple was the best way to utilize the facts of the situation to further his agenda of explicitly including more religions in his description of America. In this way, Obama was able to include a new and previously unaddressed group in his picture of America, uniting them to the common creed through his invocation of their unity with the nation when he used the term "we" to incorporate the aforementioned Sikhs and the entire nation under the same mission.

Further describing the idea of America's uniting common creed by pointing to the principle of citizenship. Obama concludes his fifth State of the Union Address by saying,

That's just the way we're made. We may do different jobs and wear different uniforms and hold different views than the person beside us. But as Americans, we all share the same proud title: We are citizens. It's a word that doesn't just describe our nationality or legal status. It describes the way we're made. It describes what we believe. It captures the enduring idea that this country only works when we accept certain obligations to one another and to future generations; that our rights are wrapped up in the rights of others; and that well into our third century as a nation, it remains the task of us all, as citizens of these United States, to be the authors of the next great chapter of our American story.¹²³

¹²² Ibid

¹²³ Ibid

This idea of citizenship, that all Americans are interdependent, included and responsible for the future of America, captures “what we believe”-- the American common creed. As such, Obama used citizenship as a concrete symbol of sharing in the common creed, inferring that citizenship in America inherently entails belief in these ideals. Identifying American citizens with the heroic story of Brian through the use of the phrase “that’s just the way we’re made,” Obama called people to unity despite “different views” in order to display the heroism that is in America as her citizens shape the next century.

Through these aforementioned closing paragraphs of his fifth State of the Union, Obama has shown that the promotion of the common creed with an effort to include people of all stripes can have a secularizing effect on the use of religious references. Instead of viewing the Sikh worshipers as identified with their religion, Obama depicted them as “American citizens,” and likewise instead of appealing to God as the author of the American story, as both Reagan and George H.W. Bush did, Obama entirely turned the story into one that is secularized and entirely dependent on unified human effort. By furthering the depiction of American civic religion as a higher, more important faith than any of the ways in which Americans worship God, Obama has established this sense of American unity to protect and promote democracy as the highest appeal. Thus, as he exhorts his audience to rise to the challenge of this century, he appeals to their duties as citizens as the highest calling, without appealing to a duty to God as support for them.

A Higher Duty

This pattern of repairing to American duties to the common creed as a motivating higher authority instead of invoking God maintains throughout Obama’s sixth and seventh State of the Union addresses. In his sixth State of the Union, Obama utilized this idea of acting out the American common creed, which he called “citizenship” as a compelling authority for signing people up to receive Obamacare when he stated:

Kids, call your mom and walk her through the application. It will give her some peace of mind, and plus, she'll appreciate hearing from you. After all, that's the spirit that has

always moved this Nation forward. It's the spirit of citizenship, the recognition that through hard work and responsibility, we can pursue our individual dreams, but still come together as one American family to make sure the next generation can pursue its dreams as well.¹²⁴

Appealing to “the spirit of citizenship” for the authority of his request, Obama invoked both individual freedom and democratic unity-- the two essential parts of the common creed. In an address where Obama only invokes God to formulaically ask for his blessing at the end of the speech, Obama appeals to this sense of citizenship to justify gun control, voting legislation, and applauding those involved in politics. By appealing to the meaning or demands of citizenship in this address, Obama again invokes the requirements of the common creed as the compelling authority for legal measures he wants to enact. He repeats this pattern to justify voting legislation saying,

Citizenship means standing up for everyone's right to vote. Last year, part of the Voting Rights Act was weakened, but conservative Republicans and liberal Democrats are working together to strengthen it. And the bipartisan Commission I appointed, chaired by my campaign lawyer and Governor Romney's campaign lawyer, came together and have offered reforms so that no one has to wait more than a half hour to vote. Let's support these efforts. It should be the power of our vote, not the size of our bank accounts, that drives our democracy¹²⁵

And also that,

Citizenship demands a sense of common purpose, participation in the hard work of self-government, an obligation to serve our communities. And I know this Chamber agrees that few Americans give more to their country than our diplomats and the men and women of the United States Armed Forces.¹²⁶

Thus, by appeal to citizenship Obama called for devotion to the national mission, much like Bush did with reference to the Iraq War. This dedication involves either participating in government or fighting for it. This is a costly endeavor but it is the result of citizenship. Thus, Obama has shown the beginnings of asserting citizenship, one's obligations to America, as the

¹²⁴ Barack Obama: "Address Before a Joint Session of the Congress on the State of the Union," January 28, 2014. Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project. <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=104596>.

¹²⁵ Ibid

¹²⁶ Ibid

appeal to authority in his speeches.

In his seventh State of the Union Obama maintained consistency with this pattern of appealing to common creed ideas for the authority of his challenges instead of appealing to God as a source of authority. The primary example of the common creed that Obama provided in this address is a collective, American set of values. Obama made sure to detach these values from any organized religious creed when he said,

You know, just over a decade ago, I gave a speech in Boston where I said there wasn't a liberal America or a conservative America, a Black America or a White America, but a United States of America. I said this because I had seen it in my own life, in a nation that gave someone like me a chance; because I grew up in Hawaii, a melting pot of races and customs; because I made Illinois my home, a State of small towns, rich farmland, one of the world's great cities, a microcosm of the country where Democrats and Republicans and Independents, good people of every ethnicity and every faith, share certain bedrock values.¹²⁷

The idea that there is not a divisible America, that everyone has in common “certain bedrock values,” makes an appeal to the common creed in the face of obvious American diversity and religious difference. Thus, what is seen as relevant about individuals is their shared values and beliefs, their common creed, not their different beliefs about God.

Given the use of the duties of citizenship or responsibilities to the common creed as higher duties than one's duties to religion, it makes sense that Obama would utilize appeals to this higher sense of duty in his speeches, and he has. Depicting Americans' shared values in his seventh State of the Union address, Obama emphasized the elements of toleration, both racial and religious, and military restraint as defining character qualities of America, noting that:

And there's one last pillar of our leadership, and that's the example of our values. As Americans, we respect human dignity, even when we're threatened, which is why I have prohibited torture and worked to make sure our use of new technology like drones is properly constrained. It's why we speak out against the deplorable anti-Semitism that has resurfaced in certain parts of the world. It's why we continue to reject offensive stereotypes of Muslims, the vast majority of whom share our commitment to peace. That's why we defend free speech and advocate for political prisoners and condemn the persecution of women or religious minorities or people who are lesbian, gay, bisexual, or

¹²⁷ Barack Obama: "Address Before a Joint Session of the Congress on the State of the Union," January 20, 2015. Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project. <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=108031>.

transgender. We do these things not only because they are the right thing to do, but because ultimately, they will make us safer.¹²⁸

Again, the appeal to “our values” harkens back to the common creed idea that Americans at their core share values that are more important than their differences. Moreover, locating these core values at “human dignity,” Obama condemned as disregarding of human dignity and even “persecution” the prejudicial treatment of religious minorities or gays, presumably by the religious majority-- Christians. This appeal to toleration through the use of the negative and religiously-laden term “persecution,” gives those who preference against religious minorities and gays the same moniker as the Romans who slaughtered Christians in antiquity. As such, Obama used the value of human dignity, which he painted as a common creed concern, to appeal for a pluralist outlook tolerating a variety of beliefs and lifestyles. Here the use of the religious imagery conveys solidarity, not with Christians but with religious minorities and homosexuals. Moreover, though Obama has called for unity around common mission he still uses references to Christianity to bolster the case for his foreign policy. Obama’s appeal to “join in the great mission of building America¹²⁹” invoked the war-time imagery associated with the term “mission¹³⁰” calling with unity like a band of soldiers fighting for a common cause. Contrasting this common mission with vitriolic campaign ads, Obama again emphasized the purpose of America as dependent on common beliefs, agreement, and unity. Despite this emphasis on unity, Obama appeals to a distinctly Christian authority, the Pope to justify his foreign policy, stating, “As His Holiness Pope Francis has said, diplomacy is the work of “small steps.” And these small steps have added up to new hope for the future in Cuba.¹³¹” As such, the reference to the Pope serves the same function as Obama used the Sikh temple for, the bringing in of religious people on a national purpose, a new paradigm for negotiations with Cuba.

¹²⁸ Ibid

¹²⁹ Ibid

¹³⁰ Domke and Coe, 42

¹³¹ Ibid

A Pluralist God Strategy?

Emphasizing unity to a pluralistic audience, Obama has tended to focus on common creed ideas even more exclusively than other presidents, primarily using references to religion to magnify the appeal to common values or toleration in a pluralist America. Using the duties of the American common creed as the primary authority behind what he asks of his audience, Obama has moved away from using religion as a source of moral authority and toward focusing on the independent authority of Americans' collective obligations to the nation. As such, Obama's use of religious rhetoric has drifted over time, even far enough for one to wonder if it fits the bill of the God Strategy enough to be labeled, along with Clinton and George W. Bush, as part of the Pluralist God Strategy.

Statistically speaking, Obama still fits within the parameters of the God Strategy when measured against Reagan and compared to the 38 presidents who are not considered as using the God Strategy. Across Reagan's eight State of the Union addresses and two inaugurals, he directly speaks the divine name 42 times, an average of 4.2 times per address. However, the spread of these invocations is certainly uneven, with his fourth State of the Union address containing 10 of these references while his first State of the Union address contained zero direct invocations of God. In contrast, Obama's references God directly 26 times in his Inaugural and State of the Union addresses, an average of 2.88 times per address. This difference in quantity is a noteworthy 31.2%. However, Domke and Coe provide evidence in their book The God Strategy that might account for a significant part of this disparity. They note that during the time period between 1933 and 2007, Republicans were 27% more likely to invoke God in their speeches than were Democrats.¹³²

¹³² Domke and Coe, 46

CHAPTER SIX

The Progression of the God Strategy

Thus, from Reagan to the present-day, the themes of appeals to specific religions and appeals to a common national creed were articulated in ways that led to an increased pluralization of appeals to religion in televised national addresses. Reagan provided the impetus for this pluralization by bringing references to faith to a place of increased prominence on the national stage, placing them alongside the theme of a sacred civic religion. Reagan distinguished his strategy by invoking specifically Christian faith-terms in his speeches in an effort to connect with an evangelical voting bloc. Solidifying his appeal to a politically active group of evangelical Christians, Reagan defended bellwether issues with language that identified him with their perspective, as was clear in his rhetoric regarding school prayer as well as his rhetoric about abortion, in which he insinuated that America was led by a unified Judeo-Christian tradition. When Reagan used the God Strategy, he was catering to a very specific Christian religious audience.

Similarly, George H.W. Bush depicted adherence to Christianity and the common creed as working cooperatively toward the same goal of national unity. Engaging in prayer during his Inaugural address, Bush depicted God as having an important role in the fulfillment of America's mission to promote and protect freedom. Moreover, like Reagan, Bush advocated for bellwether issues from the perspective of Christians, using the word "bless" to indicate his favor on women who do not choose to have abortions, even when it is convenient. Yet, George H.W. Bush also explicitly advanced a secular idea of national unity to make a mass appeal in an attempt to unite the entirety of the nation, showing favor toward a sense of national goals that he does not directly associate with Christianity. Promoting the American common creed, a

shared faith in freedom and democracy, as vital, Bush sets the stage for the further prioritization of this national belief system by subsequent presidents.

Articulating this strategy further, Clinton overtly celebrated differences, be they religious, ethnic, or cultural. In order to emphasize even further the common mission to work toward the protection of American liberty at home and its promotion abroad, Clinton began to alter his references to religion to promote this unity. Indeed, as Clinton in later speeches addressed the divisive nature of religious doctrines while celebrating the national diversity of faiths, he altered the emphasis of the God Strategy from clearly Christian appeals to more pluralistic appeals while continuing to use words that invoked faith to a appeal to people of any faith. A terrific example of this was when Clinton started to refer to places of worship, not as churches, but as religious centers or religious communities. The combination of this broadening of his religious appeal with rhetoric that emphasized cooperation toward a national goal placed the common creed--America's unified fulfillment of a national agenda to promote and protect democracy--in an elevated position compared to religion. Under Clinton, the national mission was conceived as something that was more severed from religion than it had been for George H.W. Bush or Ronald Reagan. The devotion to the American common creed was prioritized above and distinguished from specific religious faiths in an effort to cultivate a more thoroughgoing unity.

Far from following the pattern of his father, George W. Bush went out of his way to continue the trend of focusing on pluralism. While this view was also expressed in tandem with a greater emphasis on God than Clinton had, it continued the growth of the Pluralist God Strategy over time. Giving the Pluralist God Strategy momentum, Bush would use invocations of faith primarily to get religious people on the side of his agenda by trying to include as many different faiths in the community as possible. Moreover, the idea that it is not God but freedom that predestines America for success, an idea that concludes his Second Inaugural Address, further increases the prioritization of the common creed over and against a focus on religion. Instead, as America faced a religious enemy in Al-Qaida terrorists, Bush went out of his way to

emphasize the importance of Islam to America, a move that indicated the continued pluralizing of the God Strategy and a resilient emphasis on common American beliefs, even in the midst of a potentially religiously-driven conflict.

George W. Bush's advocacy of bellwether issues furthered this appeal to a unified, areligious national culture. For instance, instead of justifying the pro-life stance on religious terms, Bush appealed to a national "culture of life." By justifying this stance in terms of national values instead of religious values, George W. Bush extended the reach of the common creed to provide justification for the issues that politically involved evangelicals had historically fought for. Moreover, even when he advocated for bellwether issues by appeal to Christianity's values, Bush made his references vague so as to emphasize what this belief system does for the nation as opposed to indicating solidarity with its adherents. Defending marriage in the light that "The same moral tradition that defines marriage also teaches that each individual has dignity and value in God's sight." Bush vaguely invokes Christianity, but in a way that is open to interpretation such as to accomplish the goal of the Pluralist God Strategy, the appeal to a wider religious landscape.

The success of the Pluralist God Strategy shifted the focus of presidential rhetoric more toward common national values as each president following Clinton used it to cultivate unity behind his plans for the nation. Obama's presidency has shown this further adaptation of the Pluralist God Strategy to emphasize a "common creed," "citizenship," or "bedrock values" instead of more divisive religious appeals. Indeed, when Obama has utilized religious appeals, it has been to bring new groups into the picture of his national agenda by emphasizing their unique practices without emphasizing any of their values. In this way, Obama picked up on the strategy used by Clinton and George W. Bush and, seeing how religion can divide Americans from the common creed, chose not to use as many specific references to Christianity. Though Obama still attempts to speak in a way that communicates fellowship with Christians through

the quotation of scripture, Obama's rhetoric is statistically and qualitatively more pluralistic and less God-focused than Reagan's. As such, no longer are Christianity and the common creed viewed as united, as they were under Reagan and George H.W. Bush, but an understanding of the current God Strategy is that Christianity might alienate some people from the unified pursuit and protection of freedom. Thus, the Pluralist God Strategy has been made manifest as a way to emphasize the religious character of the American audience without allowing it to detract from appeals to national unity. By focusing more on the diversity of religions than on any particular one, this strategy makes use of religion by noting that the fact Americans have faith unites them, regardless of what religion they hold to.

The certainty of these findings may be mitigated by the exclusive analysis of Inaugurals and State of the Union addresses in this argument. After all, any of the aforementioned presidents may have used more or less religious language in front of different audiences, weakening the argument that there is a consistent shift toward pluralist rhetoric from Clinton onward. However, the use of the same categories of speeches for all of the presidents analyzed has, at minimum, shown how presidents have shifted their religious rhetoric during addresses that were sure to have more numerically significant national audience. As such, the aforementioned trend, though not necessarily true of all presidential addresses in this timeframe, gives crucial snapshots to indicate that presidents have come to see religious appeals as less and less strategic for bringing a American audience to unity.

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