DIVINE AMBITION

TRACING THE POWER OF AMERICAN CIVIL RELIGION THROUGH PRESIDENTIAL CAMPAIGN RHETORIC

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IPR Statement:

The candidate confirms that the work submitted is Kristi Boone's own and that appropriate credit has been given where reference has been made to the work of others

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Abstract

If the United States is a nation predicated on the idea of religious freedom, how can it also foster a political climate which utilises consistent religious rhetoric as a benchmark for selection of a president? For some scholars, the very history of the country is irrevocably tied to a theory of American Civil Religion. Unfortunately much of the scholarship on the topic is either highly systematic content analysis, useful but lacking the nuance and context required to offer true depth of understanding of the current manifestation of the theory, or cherry picked to a degree that it invites significant critique. Nevertheless, the connection between political discourse, religion, and civic responsibility continues to be entwined in public life and therefore in need of continued study.

To avoid these pitfalls and develop an accurate, current understanding of American civil religion, this project examines religious rhetoric and narratives incorporated into campaign speeches by leading presidential candidates in the 2008, 2012 and 2016 election cycles, with the aim of locating how such language legitimises and frames candidate's presentation of what it is to be and serve America. Because Presidential candidates hold a captive audience of citizens and present their positions from a uniquely powerful position, I utilise an established methodology, Critical Discourse Analysis, which is 1) meticulous in its focus on structure and language to ensure the project is designed to reveal the nuances and contextual elements which are lacking in current scholarship, and 2) designed to reveal discourses of power through that language, as is a necessary consideration when the stakes are so high. By ensuring the sampled speeches are structured and balanced in terms of party affiliation and contextual setting, the pitfall of cherry-picking that befalls much of the existing scholarship on the topic is avoided. Thus, through this research, a well-developed, current narrative of American civil religion emerges, along with a clearer picture of both the underlying discourses of power that shape it, and the techniques that are being used to affect it.

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Chapter 1 : Introduction

> America, we cannot turn back. We cannot walk alone. At this moment, in this election, we must pledge once more to march into the future. Let us keep that promise - that American promise - and in the words of Scripture hold firmly, without wavering, to the hope that we confess. Thank you, and God Bless the United States of America.
>
> (Obama 2008)

1.1 Path to the Project

As I sat in the audience of the 2008 Democratic National Convention listening to the words of presidential candidate Barack Obama, I was struck by his almost pastoral approach to speaking to the American electorate. Not just by his tone and delivery which are reminiscent of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., but by the language of the speech. Obama's religiosity was overt and his speaking style and chosen metaphors were full of biblical references, delivered with a cadence reminiscent of the pulpit on Sunday.

In my work as a field organiser for the Obama campaign I spent a lot of time in conversation with strangers trying to understand their priorities and intentions toward the election. In this capacity, the conversation often turned to religion. Sometimes by curious undecided voters, but also by suspicious voters seeking confirmation or refutation that Obama's faith was sufficiently 'American'. Since the early days of his campaign, there had been countless religiously tinged stories circulating about him[1]; many tainted with bigotry and almost all verifiably false. It was also the early days of social media influence on campaigning and discerning between factual reporting and what *appeared* to be factual was only just emerging as a fundamental need of the discourse. So these one-to-one conversations were to be expected.

[1] During his campaigns, Obama was the target of various faith related rumours, viral videos and articles circulated via social media, email and in conservative media coverage. These painted him as, at various times, a Muslim terrorist sympathizer, a foreign, Muslim interloper posing as an American, and a Christian zealot seeking vengeance on white oppressors. A brief recap of some of the most pervasive and debunked narratives can be found here: https://www.factcheck.org/2017/01/eight-years-of-trolling-obama/.

But one inconsistency perplexed me. Public and media discourse perpetuated a narrative that religion was the exclusive territory of the Republican party, but based on what I witnessed daily, that was not the case. Democratic and unaffiliated voters cared about these issues as much as those on the right, and Obama was certainly discussing faith and using the bible in speeches as much or more than his opponents.

Once I noticed these contradictions, I could not turn away from the inconsistencies. I began giving more critical attention to campaign rhetoric and voter feedback around me, and with more engaged observation it seemed obvious that religious metaphors, narratives, and persuasive tools were being utilized in diverse contexts on both sides of the political divide, not just by evangelical Republicans.

The use of religious themes as persuasive devices in a bipartisan political context could potentially create high stakes implications when tied to an agenda or ideology, which of course, they inevitably are when the speaker is running for President. The goals may vary, but since God is invoked for both sides, such rhetoric was, at the very least, impactful, and if wielded for nefarious ideology, potentially troubling.

But wait, the United States is a nation predicated on the idea of religious freedom, underpinned by the separation of church and state. Shouldn't this be out of bounds? The Bill of Rights, a 1791 addendum to the US Constitution (1787), itemises the 'unalienable rights' referred to in the Declaration of Independence (1776) for clear protection, including prohibiting the establishment of a national religion and ensuring free exercise of all religious belief (Rosen and Rubenstein 2021). This would seem to imply that God should not be making an appearance in presidential politics beyond personal religiosity. But every rally begins not only with singing of the (relatively secular) national anthem, but with the Pledge of Allegiance, a vow of devotion that originated as a marketing slogan[2] and evolved into doctrine recited by every primary school student:

> I pledge allegiance to the flag of the United States of America.
> And to the republic for which it stands,

[2] The Pledge of Allegiance was originally published in 1892 by a magazine which offered an American flag with every subscription. The author of the pledge, writer/publicist/ preacher/socialist Francis Bellamy, wrote the pledge to accompany the celebration of Columbus Day and to affirm his racially discriminatory notion of what true Americans were and were not--non-white immigrants. The original pledge did not include the phrase 'under God' in the last line, however. That was added by Congress and the Eisenhower administration in 1954 as a political statement, juxtaposing the US against the 'Godless' Communist Soviet Union (Crawford 2015).

> One nation, under God, with liberty and justice for all
>
> (Bellamy 1892)

The collective recitation of the pledge creates a uniformity of identity amongst a crowd at a political event, unified as Americans under God's supervision.

It is difficult to describe the way that the anthem and the pledge prime the audience at a political rally. The combination of being crowded into a space with like-minded citizens, singing together and then reciting the pledge, means participants are both attentive and eager to belong to a kind of patriotic ideal. In my experience, I felt strange, yet hopeful. Optimistic that the candidate was about to speak directly to me and could change my life by bringing the country into the best version of itself. And if we, the receivers of the message, were convinced of the worthiness of the candidate before us, we felt empowered, influential, and ready for instructions on how to facilitate their promotion to the most powerful political position in the world. The implied agency in that dynamic is intoxicating.

1.2 Motivation for Study

This is the potential power employed by the person delivering a message to a willing audience during a presidential campaign season. When those words are supported, legitimised, and relatable to the audience via the sacred connection with God, shared belief systems and identity- the authority and impact can be immense. Alexander notes,

> Candidates experience and channel the energy of human contact. These intense, face-to-face encounters look a lot like old-fashioned rituals. The emotions they generate are connected to civil discourse, and culture and emotion are digitized and circulated. The sounds and images of audiences whistling and applauding and of beaming, back-slapping, and fist-pumping candidates reflect collective psychic energy to the candidate and upward, via communicative institutions, into the broader civil sphere.
>
> (Alexander 2010, 19)

Having experienced this phenomenon at numerous political events, worked behind the scenes to create such atmospheres, recruited volunteers, and discussed voting decisions with countless people, I became determined to understand how this power is wielded, by whom, and why. This impact justifies the importance of developing a

thorough understanding of the messages being delivered and the possible discourses that frame and direct it. This project aims to do just that.

1.3 General Aims

One theory of how religious fervour melds with patriotism is that a phenomenon exists in the context of the United States called American civil religion. Robert Bellah's theory claims that an American civil religion (ACR) exists which interweaves certain historical events and figures with religious narratives; owing to the nature of the country's founding by parties fleeing religious persecution and the premises on which the founding documents were written. With each civic ritual, crisis, speech, or prayer delivered with characteristics of this historical narrative, a belief that being American is a blessing from God with certain mandates is reinforced (Bellah, [1967] 2005). This interweaving creates a comingling of what it means to be Godly and what it means to be an American. Bellah claims this civil religion is ingrained in American society and therefore colours political discourse (1967, 1976a, 1976b, 2008b).

In Chapter 2, I will discuss the development and critique of this theory as well as approaches taken to its study over the years, clarifying where this research fits in the discourse about Bellah's civil religion. Most significant of the overall aims of this project is to utilise the recent rhetoric of presidential campaign discourse, cycle by cycle, to determine if a version of Bellah's American civil religion still holds sway in the United States and how that civil religion manifests. Additionally, I will consider what contextual narratives may influence the way religious language is used. Influences such as political parties, personal biographical information, issues relevant to the specific election cycle, and other intersectional considerations such as race and gender all can affect the way the language is presented. Understanding these narratives in relationship to the language and speakers can also reveal any discourses of power that may flow through the rhetoric.

In addition to my personal motivation for this work, it is also the case that scholarship on this topic is limited in several ways, which will be discussed in depth in Chapters 2 (Theory) and 3 (Methodology), but I will give a limited overview here for context. Often the approach to analysing political speech is software assisted content analysis, which does produce interesting conclusions on large samples, but lacks the detail and nuance that linguistic and discourse related analysis provide.

Some deeper qualitative work exists (Hill 2016, David 2011, Hart 2010, Healey 2010, Frank 2009), but almost exclusively focuses on presidential rhetoric delivered after candidates take office and with samples with conspicuous gaps, some omitting entire presidencies or focusing heavily on those who fit the narrative they are exploring. None focus on the span of elections addressed in this research. One can understand the focus on elected presidents to an extent, after all Bellah's initial paper focused heavily on inaugural speeches and historically important addresses of the first two hundred years of the nation's history ([1967] 2005). But I assert that Bellah's approach was formed in a vastly different era, when exposure of communication between political leaders and their public was limited and that in the current environment, the campaign is where these messages are forged, shaped, and linked to other discourses. Therefore, campaign speech is essential for understanding the evolution of the theory as it exists now, it is where future channels of power are negotiated. Scholars have begun to explore campaign speech for traces of religious rhetoric and civil religion, but their methodological choices limit the applicability of their results.

This is a gap my project seeks to fill by developing a current accounting of the commingling of religious rhetoric and American identity in Presidential campaign speech—campaigns by both political parties, separately and in contextual conversation with one another during the presidential election fight. The sampled speeches were chosen deliberately, considering balance in terms of party affiliation and contextual setting, ensuring that this research avoids the pitfalls that undermine previous research on this topic. Each election cycle and candidate are discussed in relation to impactful sociological and media discourses which may affect their messaging, which contributes to a more accurate understanding of the version of civil religion they convey to their audience.

To ensure thorough engagement with this complex context, I utilised established methodology anchored in linguistics and power dynamics, Critical Discourse Analysis. Hence the research is designed to engage the nuances that support and contribute to language choice, with the aim to establish the current manifestation of Bellah's civil religion, as well as underlying discourses of power.

1.4 Research Questions

To that end, this project will utilise the methods and framework specified in the sections that follow to address the following research questions:

- Given the intertwining of faith and patriotism in the United States, does the use of religious language in recent campaign speech reflect or support the continued existence of a civil religion; and if so, does this reflect Bellah's theory of American civil religion as envisioned in his 1967 essay or has a new, different interpretation of civil religion developed in the United States?
- What can analysing religious language in campaign speech tell us about the discourses and agendas that the language supports and legitimises? Are those underlying discourses reflective of the power structures which support their candidacy such as political parties?

1.5 Current Scholarship & Methodology

1.5.1 Approaches in existing research

Most academic engagement with ACR tends to selectively include examples that confirm the existence of civil religion in political discourse with an imbalanced approach to the consistency of the sampled medium (i.e. speeches, documents, or legal actions/policies). The resulting discourse on American civil religion tends to be fascinating, but cherry picked and undermined by wildly varied supportive examples. Most recently Gorski (2017) and, indeed even Bellah himself, are guilty of this gap in sampling. Bellah focuses primarily on liberal thinkers who coalesce to his more utilitarian viewpoint of the benefits of civil religion ([1967] 2005). Gorski analyses the state of Civil Religion in the United States for over a century without accounting for one of the most overtly religious Presidents in American history, Jimmy Carter (Gorski, 2017). Others err in the opposite direction- including every speech for fifty or more years in software driven content analysis that omits the nuanced engagement required to understand orally delivered persuasive rhetoric (Chapp and Coe 2019, Coe and Chapp 2017, Coe and Chenoweth 2013, Coe and Domke 2006, Coe and Reitzes 2010). The methodology of this project, to be discussed in Chapter 3, was deliberately chosen to avoid these pitfalls and to result in a more balanced profile of how this language manifests in each election cycle.

1.5.2 Scope

A logical question arises when considering investigating campaign speech, do the speakers actually write the script? If not, how does one account for the speechwriter? After reviewing hundreds of peer reviewed works related to this project, the answer is both simple and complex: speechwriters are not a factor. In nearly every piece of research related to campaign speech or religious rhetoric in political speech, the speechwriter is either unacknowledged or barely mentioned and there is a reason for that: part of the brief of a political speechwriter is to be invisible.

Writers for candidates from Obama to Romney to McCain all speak to the necessity of absorbing the persona of their speaker to the degree they disappear into the text. Obama Speechwriter Jon Favreau 'channels Mr. Obama, his ideas, his sentences, his phrases' in order to write for him (Parker 2008). McCain speechwriter and advisor Mark Salter notes a similar relationship and in addition to writing McCain's speeches, assumed another invisible role, he was ghost-writer on his books (Bash 2018). There are certainly strategic and structural elements of speechwriting, which is likely the most significant contribution to the process a writer makes. Fortunately for researchers, prominent structural strategies of political speeches are fairly universally adopted, most often they follow 'Monroe's Motivated Sequence'[3], which is a five step, problem, and solution structure, incorporating devices such as storytelling, repetition, and personal connection to create a connection with the audience. This tendency holds true for candidates as diverse as Clinton and Trump in 2016 (Lehrman 2019). Additionally, the linguistic and stylisation of speech structure are picked up with a linguistic analysis like the one used in this project. Hence the most innovative aspect of political speech is the speaker themselves, who are accounted for in the contextualisation, background and religiosity and election specific discourse sections in each election's respective chapter.

Another elusive factor to consider is that the speechwriting process is collaborative. Speechwriters often sit with the candidate to brainstorm, then shape the content and style of the speech. Mitt Romney, for instance is a notorious 'tweaker' of his speeches to the extent that they are often changed significantly from the draft version right up

[3] Monroe's Motivated Sequence involves the following five steps: (1) Get attention (2) Establish the need (3) Satisfy the need (4) Visualize the future (5) Action/Actualization (Lerhman, 2019).

to the delivery point (Rucker 2012). This means that even if we had access to drafted versions of the speeches in question as written by the speechwriter, we would have no way of tracking what modifications are made, both intentionally before delivery and improvisationally, as they are being spoken. Hence the most stable medium for analysing the words as they are delivered is the transcript of the speech as delivered, which is the unit of analysis chosen for this project.

This brings us to a second elusive factor of political speech, one with a bit more quantifiable structure: the audience. If we look at speeches as a literary form: with author, content, form, and audience, then the medium of political speech is surely one where Barthes' 'death of the author' continues to be relevant, along with its assumptions about the malleability of the audience [4] (Barthes 1977). It is important to clarify here, however, that in this situation, the author is not the speaker, for the speaker is the conduit for delivery. The power of a political speech lies in the words as delivered by the speaker, to be received by the audience, who is free to 'derive meaning from it' (or not!) (Brooker 2021, p. 13). This is a variable relationship, with the text possibly containing influences of policy, strategy, context, even media or political discourse. The audience receiving it contains its own variables: whether localised audience or mediated audience, party affiliation or undecided voter, not to mention any number of intersectional considerations of each receiver of a speech. Certainly there are numerous ways to measure audience impact and/or reception, all of which are flawed in some way. Do we gauge impact by applause? By television ratings? By media coverage or article hits? How about by polling, or donations? And perhaps most important in this context, by votes? The precision just is not there. It is a limit which must be acknowledged.

What we do have is the stability and record of the transcripts, sourced from the American Presidency Project at the University of California at Santa Barbara[5], informed by considered research of contextual factors and influential discourses. Thus the scope of this project will encompass those things, with a distinct awareness

[4] Barthes seminal essay 'The Death of the Author' radically impacted understandings of intention, content, and reception of literary (and really all creative) work. He notes, 'it is language which speaks, not the author; to write is, through a prerequisite impersonality (not at all to be confused with the castrating objectivity of the realist novelist), to reach that point where only language acts, 'performs', and not 'me' (Barthes, 1977). This disconnection from the creator shifts the power of the form to the text and its impact becomes owned by the speaker (in the case of this research) and the consumer of the text, the changeable and often unquantifiable audience.

[5] https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/

that there are additional opportunities to be seized in the future by scholars of political science, media studies, communications, and other disciplines, which only reinforces the significance of this inquiry.

1.5.3 Rationale for choosing Critical Discourse Analysis

Because it focuses deeply on the language, Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), allows analysis to go *beyond* the language. CDA requires an accounting of the wider lens of each relevant word and phrase in a structured manner, allowing discourses and narratives to emerge via patterns and repeated rhetorical devices and techniques. The lexical elements are then deeply contextualised, literally, and theoretically. In examining the language of such powerful speakers, including candidates like Obama and Clinton, who broke through norms to become the 'first' in their respective nominations, the project demands a methodology that takes discourses beyond the speaker's linguistic content into account.

By selecting a sample which covers a specific and thus far unstudied time span: 2008-2016, and speakers of equal standing ideologically and in prestige (both officially nominated candidates of the major political parties in each cycle), there is balance of political affiliation, stakes, common issues and, critically, a need for the speakers to present themselves as 'Americans' for evaluation by the voting public—not simply as Democrats or Republicans. How they choose their words reflects not only their goals and background, but assumptions about the electorate and their positionality in relation to the audience as well as others who may be named or alluded to in a speech. Critical discourse analysis allows us to unpack all these elements.

1.6 Thesis Structure

This chapter begins to introduce this research by outlining the motivation for this study, establishing its need, uniqueness in terms of approach, sample, and importance. I have also addressed positionality, outlined the aims and research questions, and established the rationale, scope, and methodology choice, including a path to exploring the wider discourse, all of which will be expanded as the thesis progresses.

From here, this document will move into Chapter 2, which will dig deeper into the history and context of politics and religion in the United States. First, I will engage

thoroughly with the evolution of Bellah's American civil religion, contextualising his theoretical assertions with appropriate historical background. Followed by discussion of the literature critiquing and modifying his theory, as well as his shifting perspective over time. Chapter 3 will establish current scholarship on campaign speech analysis as it relates to civil religion and the candidates which are part of this research. I will discuss the scholarship with this work joins, exploring the gaps that exist in current literature which this thesis works to fill. The chapter then transitions into the methodological uniqueness of this research, evolution of my approach and then outlines the specific framework and procedures that were used in the speech analysis. Chapter 4 moves into the data hewn from the research, beginning with the 2008 election between candidates Barack Obama and John McCain accounting for issues such as the impact of race on Obama's presentation of specific issues, including religion. Chapter 5 engages the 2012 election between Obama and Mitt Romney, which brings in some interesting data and findings given Romney's Mormon faith and the choices made to shore up his Christian credentials. The chapter also engages in the differences between Obama's presentation as a candidate and as a president, which has an impact on how he frames civil religion. Chapter 6 breaks down the 2016 election between Hilary Clinton and Donald Trump, where impactful discourses of religion and gender as well as characteristics of nationalism issues emerge. Chapters 7 and 8 will discuss the findings of the research and conclusions, respectively, as well as future opportunities, including how the 2020 election (which was beyond the scope of this project) might impact future scholarship.

1.7 Conclusion

If, as Bellah asserts, there is 'a religious dimension for the whole fabric of American life, including the political sphere', then as the potential leader of the nation, the president has the potential to be its priest, with all the authority, sway and power that implies ([1967] 2005, p. 42). Therefore, we have an obligation to understand much more deeply how they are wielding that power in an enduring discourse of civil religion. It is with this understanding of urgency to engage more thoroughly with this discussion than current scholarship allows, that this undertaking begins.

Chapter 2 : American Civil Religion

2.1 Introduction

For nearly twenty years, the Pew Research Center has documented the relationship between religion and public life in the United States and through their polling, they note signs of decreasing identity with Christianity (Wormald 2015). Yet despite this overall trend, when it comes to choosing a president, voters still place a premium on religious beliefs and expect religious elements in political campaigns. Pew noted that 67% of Americans consistently agree with the statement, 'it is important that the president has strong religious beliefs' (Heimlich 2012). This seeming contradiction between religious identity in public life in the United States (declining) and the preferred presentation of presidential candidates (overt religiosity is desired) warrants further exploration. There seems to be a different expectation for the presentation of religion in public life when that life overlaps with civic responsibility and leadership. In fact, after a downtick in presented religiosity by Presidential candidates in 2012, 53% of Republicans and 31% of Democratic voters pushed back—noting a problematic lack of discussion of religion in the 2016 election, and considered that decline a negative development in American society (Mitchell 2020). Adding to the complexity of the double standard is a shift toward non-denominational and agnostic identity in the country that corresponds to the shift away from Christian identity (Center 2019). If the electorate desires a candidate who engages with religion, then, how should that candidate speak of it? When electoral candidates invoke the power of faith in persuasive speech, what agenda does that language serve? This research endeavours to investigate these questions.

In approaching this research, I surveyed a great deal of scholarship, much of which will be explored in this chapter and the next, but first I will outline the scope and approach to that review. Exploring religion and politics engages several disciplines, sociology of religion and political science (and their constituent subdivisions), and by focusing on language, I brought in communications and linguistics. Thus this work is, by nature, interdisciplinary. My research engages Civil Religion in the United States, focusing on Bellah's American civil religion and scholarship that spins off or engages with his theory. For the sake of clarity, discussion of the theory and context of American civil religion will be addressed in this chapter, then in Chapter 3 I will

explore scholarship that focuses on religious rhetoric in political speech in the United States, to provide appropriate context to my own methodological choices.

In the sections that follow, I will review the relevant theory framing this work. In Section 2.2, I will detail the unique circumstance of the United States, engaging relevant scholarship framing that context and outlining key events and concepts stemming from the origins of the American colonies, including American exceptionalism. Section 2.3 will begin with Rousseau's conception of the concept of civil religion, in order to frame Robert Bellah's early work on religion and the political which led to his seminal work, *Civil Religion in America* (1967). Bellah's work underpins the rest of the chapter and this research project and I detail his theory and the historical events and political actors who anchor it to the history of the United States. After establishing Bellah, Section 2.4 will move into other scholarship that engages his theory, including those who significantly modify its application moving forward. The chapter closes with Bellah's own revisiting of the work, decades after its publication.

2.2 The Distinctive Political Context of the United States

2.2.1 Key Narratives

As the previous section illustrates, religious identity is a prominent feature in modern American public life and in current political discourse. But the connection between civic structures and religion harkens to events that occurred before the nation's founding documents were written. Gorski notes that the United States 'was founded at least twice, once by the New England Puritans and then again by the American revolutionaries, both real enough, but somewhat mythologized as well' (2017, p. 38). Puritan settlers of the original North-eastern colonies were fleeing religious persecution by the Church of England. Their initial leaders were often clergy and their group identity were tied to organised religious practices, values, and doctrine. Most prominent among those leaders was John Winthrop, whose declaration of 'new England' established a narrative that would echo for centuries,

> The Lord will be our God and delight to dwell among us, as his owne people and will commaund a blessing upon us in all our wayes, soe that wee shall see much more of his wisdome power goodnes and truthe then formerly wee have beene acquainted with, wee shall finde that the God of Israell is among us, when tenn

> of us shall be able to resist a thousand of our enemies, when hee shall make us a prayse and glory, that men shall say of succeeding plantacions: the lord make it like that of New England: for wee must Consider that wee shall be as a Citty upon a Hill, the eies of all people are uppon us.
>
> (Winthrop 1630)

Winthrop's declaration of the new Puritan colony as a 'city on a hill,' blessed directly by God and with a mandate to exemplify faithful life and community to others laid the groundwork for what is known as American exceptionalism, a concept Cavanaugh notes has two meanings: one with Judaeo-Christian roots (following the Winthrop declaration above) and one rooted in the Enlightenment (2011, p. 89). This project primarily deals with the theological meaning of American exceptionalism, which is anchored in God's providence and the idea of the United States as a New Israel, with a citizenry blessed with both sacred gifts and obligations; conversely, the more secular version asserts that there is a 'universal applicability of the American value of freedom' (Cavanaugh 2011, p. 89). The idea of a 'New Israel' is rooted in the Biblical book of Genesis, wherein Abraham is promised to have many descendants who will be blessed by God as his chosen people. Genesis, 12 reads, 'I will bless you and make your descendants into a great nation. You will become famous and be a blessing to others. I will bless those who bless you, but I will put a curse on anyone who puts a curse on you. Everyone on earth will be blessed because of you' (NIV, 12: 1-3). This language is alluded to in Winthrop's speech and governing philosophy and correlates with his notion of the *City on a Hill* (1630).

American exceptionalism is a concept which can be problematic in an increasingly globalised world. Cavanaugh notes the dangers for a nation that assumes it is exceptional mutating into a kind of entitlement akin to viewing the 'nation as messiah' which snowballs into a mandate for military incursion on nations which do not fall into their norms (Cavanaugh 2011). It is a troubling notion, the idea of a mandate to shape a diverse nation (or the world if applied to foreign policy), to their own standards and beliefs. Conversely, Gorski poses a more conservative view of the concept, which is American exceptionalism as more of a 'founding myth' (Cavanaugh 2011, p. 92, Gorski 2017). It is this definition that is more applicable to the context of this research. Additionally, it is important to note here that U.S. presidential campaign speech is a decidedly insular discourse. It is the essence of 'preaching to the

choir,' which makes problematic concepts like exceptionalism appear to be accepted norms and understandings of history and less a proactive mandate. Were the focus of this research on US foreign policy, or an examination of official presidential speech exclusively (not campaign speech), then an interpretation of exceptionalism more in line with Cavanaugh's ominous predictions might be more relevant because it is an externally facing discourse. It should also be noted, however, that as this project progressed, a version of exceptionalism could be argued as underwriting populist and nationalist narratives that emerges in the rhetoric of some candidates.

2.2.2 Relevant Scholarship

Bellah's work is certainly not the only perspective of the concept of civil religion, but his work was early and canonical, thus it is the anchor point of this project's engagement with the concept. Most of this chapter will be focused on Bellah's key works and on scholarly engagement and modifications to his theory. However other scholars, while not engaging heavily with Bellah's iteration of civil religion warrant mention and acknowledgement and their works contribute to a more thorough understanding of the unique context of the United States. I will first discuss Braunstein's (2018) conception of how narratives intersect with American identities, and Marti's (2019) work detailing the impact of race, social class, and ethnicity on American narratives of patriotism and identity. Marti's work focuses primarily on the presidency of Donald Trump and its intersection with these factors; thus it will also feature in Chapter 7, but his work provides nuanced contextual understanding of the United States, thus it will also be included in this section. Also related to the 2016 election but worth mentioning here is Whitehead and Perry's (2018) research on Christian nationalism, and two works which engage with civil religion and violence by Marvin & Ingle and Cavanaugh (2011). The latter two works provide an interesting juxtaposition to the aspirational aspect of Bellah's civil religion and provide relevant framing for the unique American context, though ultimately, they are not fully concordant with the direction of this research.

Braunstein recognises the importance of narrative within American identity. In particular, she notes a division between different visions of the direction of such narratives, including Bellah's American civil religion: is the future one where the 'best days are ahead of us' or where the nation is in decline, in danger of losing whatever hope is attached to America's destiny (Braunstein 2018, p.173). She notes these

narratives (such as American exceptionalism) are based on both shared identity as Americans and one's individual identity, and are tinged with subtle religious elements, all of which form a 'scaffolding for the interpretive worlds in which groups of citizens embed themselves and from within which they evaluate what is in their best interest, who their allies and enemies are, the credibility of authorities and information and. . . the democratic virtue of other citizens' (2018, p. 174). This can be a unifying or a dividing force depending on who wields it and for what purpose, as will become evident as this thesis progresses.

In engaging with narratives of the colonies, it seems logical to engage with the impact of colonialism itself- yet often the origin story of the thirteen colonies is not placed within that contextual lens. The 'American legitimising myth', as Gorski (2017) refers to it, is selective in its recall of colonial impact. Marti's work fills this gap, bringing contextual framing of the colonies, the Revolutionary War, and the crafting of the founding documents. Marti accounts for the impact and perspectives of Native Americans, addresses the framing of slaves and other ethnicities in the founding documents and the intersectional perspectives of the writers of those documents (2019).

As early as 1790 (the Constitution was ratified in 1781) the Naturalization Act of 1790 clarified who was eligible for American citizenship as, 'being a free white person' who was deemed to possess good moral character' which excluded 'Native Americans, indentured servants, free blacks, slaves and later, Asians' (Marti 2019, p. 82). This standard not only ascribes racial boundaries to the American identity, but also moral ones. When those margins define who is and is not considered part of the American narrative, the door is opened to interested parties who would bolster these barriers according to their own beliefs and priorities. When more hostile narratives of American identity emerge within the context of white supremacy outlined by Marti, there is 'a contradiction between the principles of freedom lauded by the Founding Fathers and the cruelty inflicted on people of colour through failure to see them as potentially equal participants with full benefits of citizenship and self-determination' (2019, p. 27).

Whitehead & Perry's work explores how the framing of identity and narrative can move in problematic directions, including toward Christian nationalism. They note Bellah's work on civil religion as a significant resource, but because the focus of their

research is Christian nationalism, they present a version of civil religion that is more anchored in the Old Testament, 'in which God demands justice, mercy, and humility from his people, and from civic republicanism, a dynamic political philosophy emphasizing that civic virtue and a strong constitution that separates institutional powers are critical for maintaining free human societies that "Providence," the "Creator," or "Nature's God" demands our exemplary fairness, beneficence, and faithful stewardship if we are to retain our blessed inheritance' (2018, p. 11). This perspective implies an American destiny in jeopardy which must be defended, whereas Bellah's religious mandate is more aspirational; setting a standard to strive for rather than a gift in danger of destruction. While some ideological elements of Whitehead and Perry's perspective are aligned with Bellah's, principally the mandate to live up to the 'providence' bestowed on the nation by narratives such as Winthrop's, the adaptation of these narratives to frame insider/outsider narratives drives them beyond Bellah's conception of civil religion (Bellah, 1967, Whitehead and Perry 2018, Winthrop 1630).

This narrative can legitimise conflict and/or violence against outsiders at the behest of an American mission: outsiders who are positioned beyond the geographical boundaries of the United States, and those within who may not fit certain narratives. As noted earlier, Cavanaugh engages with the idea of American exceptionalism being weaponised (2011). Marvin and Ingle also see the seeds of religion in the founding of the nation used to legitimise violent domination, citing the American flag as the sacred symbol to which believers kneel, defend, and when required, kill (1999). There are, however, limits to their inquiry. Firstly, their conception of civil religion is extremely limited, lacking the stability of Bellah's theory with its historical benchmarks and precedents, and aspirational mandate to live up to an exceptional blessing (Bellah 1967). This is a lack Marvin and Ingle acknowledge, because they do not ascribe to the conception of 'a powerful civil religion' (1999, p. 3). Instead they see an American nationalistic myth embodied by the American flag, and its citizens bonded through violent defence of it (Marvin and Ingle 1999). However I would assert that because the infrastructure of an enduring and complex civil religion is lacking, discussing, and attributing violence to worship of the flag is reductive. It certainly lacks the complexity to replace Bellah's theory.

To refocus on the opening historical frame for this section, I return to the founding of the colonies. The Puritans in Massachusetts Bay (the eventual name of Winthrop's 'new England') openly declared their intention to govern as what would be viewed today as a theocracy (Morgan 1987, 145-151). Dissent against this agenda led to the creation of neighbouring Rhode Island. Other colonies held different majority faiths: Catholicism in Maryland, strict Anglicanism in Virginia and, to a more tolerant extent, in New York. And while economic factors also drove the division and structure of the initial colonies, territorial establishment of the religion of choice was among the most influential factors (NA 2009). Despite this presumption of tolerance, there are other aspects of inclusion to be considered in this narrative of the founding of the nation. It was not until nearly a decade after the writing of the US Constitution (1781) that government-sanctioned religion was overruled by the creation of the Bill of Rights, which contains the first ten amendments to the constitution. The first of these ensures the free exercise of religion and contains the anti-establishment clause clarifying that there is to be no one religion elevated over another (Congress 1789).

Marti outlines several aspects of the American narrative which were exclusionary from the beginning, detailing an American identity that is rooted in racism, noting that 'attempts to define a 'true' American extend to the founding documents, which assert that 'all men are created equal', yet 'in the Founding Fathers' America, all people did not deserve the dignity of equality, a fact enshrined in the infamous 'Three-Fifths Clause', which counted the enslaved as three-fifths of a person' (Jefferson, 1776, Marti 2019, p. 25). The founding fathers who crafted the founding documents, many of whom owned slaves themselves, presented a narrative of freedom that because of who was diminished (non-whites) and omitted (women, non-property owners) was exclusionary despite its profession of equality. This dynamic of who is entitled to inclusion in the American identity narrative and who is *not* is as established in Winthrop's City on a Hill (1630) or Jefferson's Declaration (1776).

The fledgling United States, a nation anchored in a diversity of religious systems, each individual faith group having fled persecution in their originating country, was negotiating becoming a collective whilst in a defensive stance. So it is unsurprising that the American colonies had religion interwoven in all aspects of civic life. Religious belief also shadows formative events of the country's history, including the

Revolutionary War (1776-1781) which led to the unification of the colonies, and the Civil War in the 1860s in which the nation severed and reunited. Hence, the next section moves into how that interweaving of religion and civic life manifests, how it works and why it remains impactful. And while there are several potential entry points to discussing the topic, understanding American civil religion must begin with Rousseau and with Bellah.

2.3 The Evolution of American Civil Religion

2.3.1 Defining civil religion

The term 'civil religion' originates with Rousseau's *The Social Contract (1762),* in which he details his perception of the inevitable clash that would occur when societies of humans develop, begin to regulate themselves communally and religious belief develops (Rousseau 1920). The core elements of Rousseau's civil religion are an all knowing, conscientious deity; belief in an afterlife separate from the present; blessings to the good and punishment to the bad amongst citizens; and a tolerance for multiple belief systems, all within a structured societal context. These elements are deliberately vague, deist, and free of sectarian association (Karant, 2016, p. 1041). His assertions in this work pioneer a discourse on the clash between religious belief (individual and organized religious groups), civil authority and human made social structures (Rousseau 1920, Karant 2016, p.1041). But his civil religion stands staunchly against organised religious entities (particularly the Roman Catholic Church) and non-believers and paired with his authoritarian viewpoint on enforcement of social norms, his perspective on civil religion is difficult to reconcile with a modern democratic republic like the United States. Nevertheless, his establishment of the term civil religion in the general discourse of religion and politics ensures Rousseau's civil religion continued impact on theories such as Bellah's and beyond.

While American sociologist Robert Bellah pays heed to Rousseau's part in coining the phrase and its significance in the sociological study of religion, Bellah's civil religion is quite different. Bellah anchors his concept of American civil religion with the language of founding documents like the Declaration of Independence, in the comments and contributions of early American leaders and in the repetition of religious language and themes in the speeches of American Presidents, all of which

are core elements of this democratic republic (1967, [1978] 1998). Bellah's civil religion is, therefore, decidedly anchored in the context of the United States. Though the concept of civil religion is certainly transferrable, for purposes of this project the aim is exploring civil religion in the context of the United States, specifically as expressed in presidential political campaigns. Thus, the focus here will be on Bellah's theory, scholarly engagement and critique of it, and modifications and applications of the theory over time, in order to present adequate contextual understanding of the discourse in which this research is placed.

2.3.2 Bellah's civil religion

In order to thoroughly establish Bellah's work on American civil religion, it is necessary to begin with his earlier work. In his paper *Religious Evolutions*, which predates his ground-breaking essay *Civil Religion in America (1967),* Bellah grappled with the compatibility of organised religion and civil society over time, observing that while the variables involved in religious life - God, the religious person and 'the structure of man's ultimate religious situation' - rarely change in terms of their relationship to society, religion itself, which Bellah defines as the 'symbolic forms and acts which relate man to the ultimate conditions of his existence', evolves (1964, p. 359).

Methodologically Bellah outlines a historic timeline of the sociological evolution of religion from 'primitive' to 'modern,' and he marks a primary shift in consciousness from a perceived 'world acceptance' in early religions, to 'world rejection,' which continues to be the narrative today (1964). World rejection is indicative of a shift toward objectification and criticism of the social order, and an awareness that the world and humanity are flawed and, very much in line with Durkheim's view of religion, that the sacred other is elevated beyond the reach of those in the mortal world (Bellah 1964, Durkheim and Swain 2012). The relevance of this shift for Bellah, is the resulting need for legitimation of societal constructs by a sacred power. Social structures of a society are of the lesser mortal world, those which can be legitimised by connection with the sacred authority of most of the society are elevated in public perception. Such legitimation is what makes these structures worthy of obedience and grants credibility to their authority over society. In later work, he expands on that relationship, noting that human-made laws and institutions are most credible and

successful when sanctioned by a greater, legitimising force, which is often religion (Bellah [1978] 1998).

Bellah found that over time, the evolution of religious symbols and practices may vary from sect to sect, but that core players and principles, particularly world rejection and consequently, the need for legitimation of social structures, remain consistently present. While his conclusion offers some insight into the relationship between societies, religious belief, and practice, Bellah seems to struggle to locate a functional relationship between society and religious belief in this early work, citing repeated divisions between governance and civic life and religious groups due to competing priorities, hierarchies, and accessibility (1964). Historically, religiously led societies are rarely successful because the objectives of sectarian religious groups and the state often compete, leading to social change that usually fundamentally modifies the other. Though he notes repeated conflicts between papal and civil authority in the early modern period, Bellah also agrees with Weber that the Protestant Reformation led to fundamental shifts in access to the sacred, and consequently shifted the hierarchal conceptions of society, opening access to those beyond the elite and destroying the political system, such as it was (1964). He notes, 'With the acceptance of the world not as it is, but as a valid arena in which to work out the divine command and within himself as capable of faith in spite of sin' the relationship of the believer with the world they create shifts, though how much is entirely context dependent (Bellah 1964, p. 369). Bellah finds that even through the modern era, the competitive relationship between organised religion and the state persists, with few exceptions. In writing his seminal essay on *Civil Religion in America* (1967), Bellah declares the United States is such an exceptional case, because God and religion underpin the foundation of the republic from its founding, eliminating the potential conflicts that hamper other iterations of religiously influenced statecraft (1967, p. 44).

I noted at the beginning of this discussion that Bellah defines religion as 'symbolic forms and acts which relate man to the ultimate conditions of his existence' (1964, p. 359). When this definition of religion and the concept of legitimacy are combined with the founding narrative of the United States, a civil religion that is specific to that unique context emerges that encompasses 'certain common elements of religious orientation that the great majority of Americans share. This public religious dimension is expressed in a set of beliefs, symbols and rituals that underpin the

United States political structure' (Bellah 1967, p.42). This is what Bellah calls the American civil religion, and the elements and invocation of its characteristics and narratives continue to legitimate many political actors in the United States today.

There are several key elements of Bellah's civil religion, first among them is that the God which legitimises American civil religion is unitarian and accessible to all citizens and the 'beliefs, symbols and rituals' associated with belief in that God are integrated into civil society (1967). In the context of Bellah's civil religion, unitarian refers to a universalised conception of a higher being, not the theological concept of Unitarianism or the modern Unitarian/Universalist church. He notes, 'This religion - there seems no other word for it - while not antithetical to and indeed sharing much in common with Christianity, was neither sectarian nor in any specific sense Christian' (1967, p. 46). This is apparent in the deliberately general religious terminology utilised in the language of Presidents whom Bellah engages (1967, [1978] 1998). First U.S. President George Washington does not say 'God,' he refers to an 'almighty being'; he speaks of religion and morality, but not of a religion (Bellah 1967, p. 44). President Adams does the same, referring to Americans as 'a moral and a religious people' (Bellah [1978] 1998, p. 199) Some critics have called this more unitarian language deist[6] because they are referring a higher power instead of a specific reference to God, but the archetypes that recur in Bellah's American civil religion are usually Judeo-Christian in nature and not ambiguous enough to be called deist. However, when civil religion is referred to in the public sphere by the political actors Bellah quotes in his analysis, their language is usually deliberately non-specific; speaking of 'God' (not Allah, or Jehovah, for example), the 'creator,' acts of prayer, and using other sacred but inherently ambiguous words like 'morality' (Bellah 1967).

This is not to say that the politicians speaking or writing these words are not acting on behalf of their personal, authentic religiosity. However, there is a critical distinction between the assertion of civil religion- which is more general and politically relevant

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[6] Deism typically refers to a post-enlightenment perspective on the sacred; allowing for a God that is non-interventionist, scepticism of the miracles and questioning of the divinity of Christ. This type of religiosity is sometimes attributed to Jefferson. (Grasso 2008, p. 44) Also notable, however, is ceremonial deism, which accounts for the legal system's interpretation of civil religious elements in early documents such as the Declaration of Independence and the legal questions occasionally raised by ambiguous 'God' language in political speech and memorial displays (Epstein 1996, p. 2095-96). Bellah's civil religion does consider these deist elements, however the bulk of his theory rests on a decidedly biblical narrative that takes the discourse beyond simple deist belief.

because it underpins the structure of American society and government - and personal religiosity, which is often practiced privately, is more specific and (technically) constitutionally irrelevant to the political sphere (Bellah 1967, [1978] 1998). American civil religion is a concept that anchors the political and historical discourse of the United States *regardless* of the individual actor who may invoke it. As a result, the personal beliefs of the individual may be an influential factor that contributes to the impact, delivery, and context of that person, but does not necessarily undermine the impact of the language of American civil religion.

Civil religion may not be sectarian, and it is not beholden to the personal religiosity of the political actor, but I argue that these elements do help anchor and form the delivery of American civil religion. This link will be discussed in depth in the findings and in each election chapter when contextualising each candidate. Over the majority of its political history, churches and civil religion rarely compete in the United States because churches often find that the values of civil religion are aligned with their own missions. This orientation toward common morality can sometimes lead to the adoption of the civil religion framework as a tool for a particular religious agenda, though as this research bears out, I argue that promotion of such agendas to the exclusion of some members of the citizenry takes such action beyond the boundaries of civil religion and into a kind of religious nationalism.[7] For instance, in discussing the 2016 election Martin observes of certain evangelical leaders,

> Pastors described the white men who led the Revolution and authored the Declaration of Independence and the U.S. Constitution as fervent God-fearing believers who envisioned a Christian nation founded on biblical ideals. The logic of this 'founders' rhetoric' situates the conservative Protestant narrative at the center of the American story and positions the United States as 'one nation, under God
>
> (Martin 2020, p. 317)

This framing of narratives referenced by Bellah as anchoring civil religion has been paired with deliberate othering of certain races and immigrant citizens of the country. Though cloaked in the language of civil religion, promotion of such

[7] Possible agendas that can stem from this type of coalition between civil religion and organized church bodies will be explored in Chapters 6 and 7.

an exclusionary agenda falls outside the parameters of Bellah's conception of the concept.

In Bellah's framing of the theory, the divine being is a non-denominational God, rendering them without clear linkage to any particular sect, accessible to all citizens. By virtue of its links to the common national history of the United States, true civil religion exists for the majority of American society regardless of their personal religiosity and organisational affiliation (if any). This is possible because American civil religion is anchored in events which take place over centuries of American history, some of which are mythologized and reinforced by ritual, ceremony, and memorials. The following section outlines those which establish the groundwork for Bellah's theory.

2.3.3 Historical benchmarks of American civil religion

The Declaration of Independence, written by Thomas Jefferson in 1776 with contributions from several other future Presidents, opens with the announcement 'We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty, and the pursuit of Happiness;' legitimising the republic with God's blessing (1776). The declaration further refers to the 'Laws of Nature and of Nature's God' as justification for man's independence.

Declaration signatory and constitutional contributor Samuel Adams called the United States a 'Christian Sparta' (1780). The use of such language to legitimise the American Revolution helped reinforce religious belief as legitimiser for the government structures the colonists were building, following the precedent set earlier by Winthrop. As the first president, former revolutionary General George Washington called for a 'day of public thanksgiving and prayer,' sanctioned by congress and declared a national holiday to be celebrated annually (Bellah 1967, p. 45). The establishment of Thanksgiving associated a shared ritual that continues in the United States to the present day, and one that celebrates the narrative of the 'city on a hill.' The accompanying myth to Thanksgiving focuses on the arrival of the Puritans at Plymouth, Massachusetts.

By establishing an annual celebration of this event, Washington has subtly reinforced all that goes with it: the narrative of Puritans fleeing Britain in search of religious freedom. For Bellah, these declarations and rituals sow the seeds of civil religion, and their repetition serves to reinforce the relevance of narrative that continues beyond the declaration of war with England, whose king was oppressing the practice of non-Anglican beliefs (Bellah 1967, p.45). Bellah asserts that the American Revolution is, to Americans, akin to the Exodus narrative in the Bible, casting the colonists as Hebrew slaves throwing off their oppressors, with the English as Egyptians, and George III as Pharaoh (1967, p. 47). While it may seem hyperbolic, this comparison has held through centuries of rhetoric, as noted by multiple scholars (Hill 2016, Gorski 2017, Bellah 1967).

In Washington's first inaugural address as President, he declared his hope that the 'Almighty Being who rules over the universe. . .may consecrate to the liberties and happiness of the people of the United States, a government instituted by themselves for these essential purposes, and may enable every instrument employed in its administration to execute with success the functions allotted to his charge' (cited in Bellah 1967, p.44). With these words, Washington not only seeks God's blessing for the citizens of the United States, but also links basic rights and governmental functions as tools that have been legitimised by, and indeed almost exist as a mechanism for, God's will. Such language from the first president of the republic sets a powerful precedent by establishing a clear link between God and the United States Government and, consequently, creates a decidedly muddled separation between religion and the state. As the first American president, Washington also established the office of the presidency as an entity that borders on sacred and is, at the very least, priestly in both position and moral obligation, declaring that 'of all the dispositions and habits which lead to political prosperity, religion and morality are indispensable supports. Reason and experience both forbid us to expect that national morality can prevail in exclusion of religious principle' (cited in Bellah, 1967, p. 44). After Washington left office, second President John Adams continued in his stead, noting 'our Constitution was made only for a moral and a religious people. It is wholly inadequate to the government of any other' (cited Bellah [1978] 1998, p.199). Bellah finds more evidence of civil religion by the founders in his analysis of remarks from President Thomas Jefferson and Benjamin Franklin.

In addition to the founders, Bellah anchors American civil religion in relation to several historical events in American history, the most pivotal of these is the parallel he draws between the New Testament and the American Civil War (1861-65). President Abraham Lincoln emerges as the figure whom Bellah feels most represents the American civil religion, explicitly comparing Lincoln to Jesus (Bellah 1967, pp.47-48). Lincoln described the abolishment of slavery as a 'divine mandate,' called the suffering of war a punishment for resisting God's will, and the nation's sacrifice as penance for the sin of slavery.

In his correspondence, Lincoln expressed it thus,

> 'We must believe,' Lincoln wrote in a letter to a British correspondent, 'that He permits [the war] for some wise purpose of his own, mysterious, and unknown to us; and though with our limited understandings we may not be able to comprehend it, yet we cannot but believe, that he who made the world still governs it.
>
> (Guelzo 2005)

Lincoln's later assassination by a white supremacist cast him as a martyr for the nation, dying on the mantle of freedom just as the country was reborn whole, cleansed of the sin of slavery by the recently passed 13th Amendment (1865). It is a narrative Bellah compares to the biblical sacrifice of Jesus Christ, who died on the cross to save humanity from sin, allowing for redemption and rebirth in heaven (Bellah 1967). This narrative embeds sacrifice as another element of American civil religion, adding more symbols and rituals to ingrain civil religion in the American zeitgeist: Gettysburg National Cemetery, Arlington National Cemetery, and memorials on the National Mall in Washington D.C. all cement the nobility and Americanness of sacrifice in service of absolving the country's original sin. Invocation of slavery as the nation's original sin is a trope that would be repeated by generations of Presidents, including Barack Obama in a speech addressed in this project.

Though Bellah does (rather dramatically) cast Lincoln as the saviour of the country, he is careful to specify that 'American civil religion is not the worship of the American nation, but an understanding of the American experience in the light of ultimate and universal reality' (Bellah 1967, p. 54). Instead, he clarifies:

> Behind the [American] civil religion at every point lies biblical archetypes: Exodus, Chosen People, Promised Land, New Jerusalem, Sacrificial Death, and Rebirth. But it is also genuinely American and genuinely new. It has its own prophets and its own martyrs, its own sacred events and sacred places, its own solemn rituals, and symbols. It is concerned that America be a society as perfectly in accord with the will of God as men can make it, and a light to all nations.
>
> (Bellah 1967, p. 54)

American civil religion continued to be a factor through the 20th century, and Bellah traces its use in speeches by Presidents Kennedy and Johnson in his initial publication on the theory in 1967. But over time, his perspective on the political functionality of civil religion has evolved, both in terms of his own perspective on the theory and in answer to the enormous response his paper received. I will discuss these developments in Section 2.5.

In his engagement with Bellah's work, Lüchau emphasises another central element of Bellah's civil religion. In addition to the conception of a God which is 'inoffensive,' 'inclusive' and integrated with society, and legitimation; he notes that there must be an implication of prophecy (Luchau 2009, p. 376). Bellah's civil religion is aspirational. Along with the demonstrative history of being blessed and events and rituals that echo sacred narratives there is an obligation for political leaders to live up to the implication of those associations and exhibit a 'prophetic potential,' a mandate to ensure the grace granted the nation is available to everyone (1967). In nearly all Bellah's examples of how the nation's history is intertwined with religious references, there is this implication of living up to this standard. As he notes in his analysis of Kennedy's rhetoric there is, 'namely, an obligation, both collective and individual, to carry out God's will on earth. This was the motivating spirit of those who founded America, and it has been present in every generation since' (1967, p. 43).

In scholarly critiques of Bellah's theory of civil religion, the element of the nation's aspirational mandate creates division and is the one area of Bellah's work which remains contentious, whereas debates over the theory's continued relevance have largely been put to rest (Gorski 2017, Wuthnow 2011a, Roof 2009, Medhurst 2002,

Coe and Reitzes 2010, Coe and Domke 2006, Coe and Chenoweth 2013, Coe and Chapp 2017, Chapp and Coe 2019). Bellah does not prescribe *how* to implement this goal of living up to the elevated conception of nationhood implicit in American civil religion, though the biblical references he chooses, 'Exodus', 'Chosen People', 'New Jerusalem,' suggest a unified, communal aspiration of civic leadership (Bellah 1967, 2008a, 2007a, [1978] 1998, 1976a, 1976b, 1992). As my discussion moves into additional perspectives on Bellah's theory, other conceptualisations of this aspect emerge including Wuthnow's significant innovation of incorporating a liberal and a conservative path, along with early critiques of the applicability of the theory, questions about its use in a presumably secular state, and how it manifests in recent years.

2.4 Scholarship and Critique of Bellah's American Civil Religion

Bellah's theory of civil religion has generated consistent interest over the years since he first proposed it. My aim in this section is to examine some of the major debates that his theory has given rise to in terms of four main critiques. First, I examine a proposed counter theory to Bellah's civil religion, created on the basis that it lacks sufficient structure for study (Hart 2002, 1977). Second, I address the critique of Stauffer who addresses a clash in priorities he sees in Bellah's theory between its idealism and a more pragmatic utilitarianism that he feels underwrites the aspirational mandate of American civil religion (1975). A third cluster of critiques address the tension between theories about the existence of civil religion and the US Constitution and concerns about manipulation of civil religion for nefarious purposes, a discussion which is relevant here, before the research chapters begin, but perhaps even more so in the findings later in the project (1994, Gorski 2017, Mathisen 1989). Finally, I discuss the critique provided by Wuthnow, whose adjustments to Bellah's work into two distinct paths of implementation, the liberal prophetic path and the conservative priestly path, has been most influential for the framing of the theoretical contribution of my thesis, which seeks to establish whether these two paths continue to be forged by political rhetoric in the most recent elections, or whether a different course has been set (Wuthnow 2011a, Wuthnow 1988a, Wuthnow 1988b). The final section will return to Bellah, to discuss how his

perspective on his original thesis evolved over decades of continued work and feedback (2007a, 2006, 1976a, 1976b, 2008b).

This first critique of Bellah offers an alternative to his work. Roderick Hart found that the malleability of Bellah's thesis defied modern understandings of what constitutes a 'religion' and was difficult to apply beyond an analogical, more simply comparative approach to religion and politics, lacking the kind of complexity required to be of significant scholarly use. Instead, he endeavoured to construct a more concrete concept, and crafted a theoretical 'contract of civic piety,' which sought to create more clearly defined elements of the phenomenon that Bellah calls civil religion (Hart 1977, p. 38). For Hart, the negotiation of these issues takes place via a 'bridge' of 'civic piety', which serves as an agreement between three entities: government, organised religion, and the citizenry (Hart 2002, 1977). This contract assumes the following principles, written literally as a contract between parties:

> A) Religion is capable of providing an ultimate meaning system for its adherents; B) Government is able to exert coercive power on the affairs of its citizens and C) Both government and religion wield considerable rhetorical power both within their respective sectors and across sectors.
>
> (Hart 1977, p. 43)

Initially this modification seems to be primarily a structural bolstering of Bellah's initial assertions, but there are caveats which render these two different approaches disconnected and Hart's approach unsuitable for engagement with current political rhetoric. Hart's contract requires a complete separation between the parties (government/organised religion/citizenry) which is impractical in the American context. He also requires an agreement that political rhetoric refrain from being overly religious and that religious organisational rhetoric refrain from being too political as part of the 'contract', which is unenforceable. Finally, he requires that neither the government nor the religious organisations make this agreement known to the third party—the general citizenry, which is impossible given both organisations are composed of citizens with free will to express their perspectives (1977, p. 44). Hart paints himself into a corner by establishing a structure that is too rigid for practical application. Nonetheless there was a definite desire in the discourse of civil religion for more structure when engaging with Bellah's theory. Bellah's paper engaged primarily with the rhetoric of presidents of the past and certain iconic figures deemed

prophetic such as Martin Luther King Jr. and Benjamin Franklin, thus limiting the scope (Bellah 1967). Hence Hart's push toward incorporating more analytical benchmarks was welcomed by some.

Though largely supportive of Hart's contract of civic piety even decades after its 1977 publication, Goldzwig notes that there are numerous stakeholders missing from this contract negotiation, including speakers and groups displaying 'sectarian, partisan and overtly ideological proclivities,' who are outside the scope of Hart's impacted parties and wield considerable influence in the civil religious space (2002, p. 103). Medhurst is even more scathing of Hart's alternative to Bellah, noting the impracticality of keeping entities such as 'citizenry' and 'government' in separate spheres of influence, and that the notion of autonomous and independent 'organised religion' and 'citizenry' or 'government' is futile (2002).

Having outlined Hart's alternative to Bellah's civil religion. I will now discuss the second critique by Stauffer, who finds fault with what he sees as Bellah's assumption that American civil religion is an aspirational mandate for the nation, as opposed to a clash between two competing agendas: civil religion vs. utilitarianism (Stauffer 1975). In reference to civil religion, Bellah notes that utilitarianism is the underlying motive for a republic style government and that the aspiration of achieving the greater good that utilitarianism implies works to strengthen the ambition to govern effectively. This is part of the mandate of Bellah's understanding of American civil religion, a government that works to live up to the American civil religion would inherently be working for the greater good. Stauffer, by contrast, sees these as competing and unattainable goals, noting that Bellah 'assumes that a substantial degree of moral and civil religious consensus is attainable in a contemporary America, as opposed to ongoing conflict between celebratory and prophetic interpretations of the nation's meaning' (1975, p. 393). Stauffer does not see either of these perspectives working toward a utilitarian agenda. This is a notion that harkens back to Rousseau's ideas of religious belief and its inherent conflict with civic duty (Stauffer 1975, pp.390-395). Rousseau's view is that religious notions such as sectarian religious views are in direct and fatal conflict with the utilitarian values of proper governing. This is divisive, but still relevant to Stauffer's criticism of Bellah. However, as was addressed in 2.3.1, Rousseau's conceptual influence is acknowledged in Bellah's work as influential but not necessarily applicable to a modern republic, let alone the United States in the 20th

century (Bellah 1967, Rousseau 1920). If this holds true, then Stauffer's concerns lose some supportive heft.

Still, Stauffer insists that Bellah fixates on the idealistic potential of civil religion instead of addressing this conflict, Bellah projects 'despair and loss of direction' onto America in his later writings (1967, p. 393). This is a criticism that I agree with in many respects, and I do not think one must subscribe to Stauffer's thoughts on the utilitarianism clash to see this flaw in the development of Bellah's thesis; it becomes clear on further reading of Bellah's own later work (addressed later in this section) that his focus on civil religion as a tool for social reform inevitably leads to disappointment at the failure of the United States to live up to the inspiration provided by its civil religious founding (Bellah 1987, Bellah and Sullivan 1981, Bellah 1976b, Bellah 1976a).

The third cluster of critiques address the tension between the existence of civil religion and the presumption of a constitutional separation of church and state, and concerns about manipulation of civil religion for nefarious purposes. Mathisen suggests that there is an inherent clash that presents significant challenges to the validity of Bellah's civil religion theory: the conflict between civil religion, constitutionally declared religious freedom and a perceived church/state separation (Mathisen 1989). Bellah touches on the issue in his 1967 paper but clarifies it further a decade later ([1978] 1998). He acknowledges that there is no mention of God in the United States Constitution, and notes that the most significant religious element in any government document is the First Amendment, which includes the anti-establishment clause that prohibits the establishment of a state sanctioned religion, as well as free exercise for individual religious practice (Congress 1868), Bellah ([1978] 1998). However, he counters critics that use these facts to push against the existence of civil religion by questioning the concept of a church/state separation: 'the phrase separation of church and state has no constitutional standing. . . it certainly does not mean nor has ever meant that the American state has no interest in religion, and it certainly does not mean that religion and politics have nothing to do with each other' (Bellah [1978] 1998), p.195). In short, while there are rules about the practice and establishment of religion, the idea that they never commingle is a misconception and the supposed 'separation of church and state' is something of a myth.

Bellah argues that the concept of a 'wall of separation' is a damaging oversimplification of a complex relationship between several moving parts—parts which relate to religion in a much more nuanced way ([1978] 1998, p. 195). A complex understanding of religious freedom is required to grasp the second clause of the First Amendment, which protects free exercise of religion (Congress 1791). For Bellah, free exercise is juxtaposed to the separation of church and state concept because it protects and emphasises the use and practice of religious ideas in every facet of public and private life- both as a national citizenry and as individual practitioners; thereby facilitating and reinforcing American civil religion ([1978] 1998, p. 195-96). Because the amendment ensures both the free exercise of individuals and the protection of the citizenry from state sanctioning of a single sect by virtue of the anti-establishment clause, religion is irrevocably tangled within the political sphere of the United States; the idea of a true separation between the state and religion is a myth in the US context. God may not be in the Constitution by name, but religious belief certainly breathes within it. In his work on civil religion, Gorski articulates this argument well, 'Civil religion recognises the importance of an institutional separation between church and state. What it rejects…is a total separation between religion and politics' (2017, p. 17).

Porterfield acknowledges civil religion as an important discovery in terms of understanding motives and possible tools for the academic study of law, rhetoric, and religion in the United States (Porterfield et al, 1994). He notes that civil religion has value as a tool for unification in times of crisis, but that it is also vulnerable to distortion and manipulation by groups and actors seeking to use it to legitimise particular agendas (1994, p. 7). Any political use of civil religion as a mechanism to sway the public wields significant power, and Porterfield notes that manipulation of civil religion by organisations such as the National Rifle Association, who associate God and country with celebrations of weaponry and military enthusiasm in their promotional media, calling such machinations 'perversions or, at best, low forms of civil religion' (Porterfield 1994, p. 7).

Gorski's work on civil religion also reflects this concern, thus he outlines characteristics which would move civil religion away from the version proposed by Bellah (which he positions as a more centred path) and towards support for the more extreme ideologies Christian nationalism and radical secularism (2017). His work

does much to establish the continued relevance and invocation of civil religion in the decades since Bellah's original work, but he also spends a great deal of time discussing the dangers of such rhetoric and prescribing a more functional political path forward for the United States. I will engage with Gorski's work much more as the project progresses but suffice to say at this point, that it is apparent that the publication of Gorski's book occurring prior to Trump's rise to power has impacted the relevance of such a directive. Many of Gorski's cautionary points came to fruition in the 2016 election.

The persuasive power of civil religion to legitimise agendas is part of why American civil religion continues to be a critical area of research. When an ingrained, almost subconscious principle like civil religion exists amongst the core beliefs of a population, whichever agenda is legitimised by it must be monitored. Porterfield argues that American civil religion can never be deemed obsolete (1994). She discusses the double-edged nature of religiously legitimised statecraft using the pioneering document of religious freedom in the United States: The *Declaration of Independence* (1776). She notes that the Declaration is a document which 'emphasize[s] the plurality of religious belief it accommodates and the causal relationship between its lack of religious specificity and its inclusiveness' (Porterfield 1994, p. 11). To simplify, the same power that creates negative religious freedom (freedom from) also allows for free exercise of religion (freedom *to*)- the concept is as ambiguous as it is contradictory and is therefore open to wide interpretation. Her primary comment on civil religion is that when used as a tool of power and persuasion is that it must be monitored closely, which is why we continue to examine its manifestation today. When Bellah outlined his theory, it was accompanied by a clear mandate to live up to the ideals in the documents his civil religion was associated with: life, liberty, equality, community, freedom these are key elements of the founding documents and of Bellah's civil religious narrative (1967). When the power of American civil religion is associated with ideologies which are in opposition to these ideals, it may cease to be civil religion at all.

The fourth area of critique and the most prominent and enduring of all Bellah's critics is Wuthnow (1988a, 1988b, 2011), who tacitly agrees with most of the thesis while also recommending a structural change to the concept of American civil religion. His development of Bellah's thesis is the most relevant to this project. Wuthnow insists

that American civil religion must account for the ideological element associated with political parties in the modern American electoral system, acknowledging the power of religious language as a political tool for persuading voters (1988a, 1988b, 2011). But since the 1980's and the rise of the Reagan-led religious narrative of the conservative Republican party, Wuthnow claims there have been two distinct and oppositional versions of civil religion working in concert to embed civil religion into the American zeitgeist despite their marked differences (1988a, 1988b).

It seems pertinent at this point to clarify the different understandings of the terms conservative and liberal, noting the different ways they are applied in Wuthnow's and other work, as well as in this thesis. There are the common parlance definitions of the terms, conservative being defined as 'tending or disposed to maintain existing views, conditions, or institutions' and liberal (ascribing to liberalism) 'a political philosophy based on belief in progress, the essential goodness of the human race, and the autonomy of the individual and standing for the protection of political and civil liberties' (Merriam-Webster 2022). These are the definitions I tend to use descriptively in this work. However there are other contextual definitions which should be understood. In Wuthnow's work, he is using the terms as they associate with political party's associated principles as of the time of his writing: the Republican party being known as conservative and Democratic party being known as liberal. These associations continue today, though how faithfully they adhere to the common definitions of the terms of conservative and liberal is changeable, with standards and specific issue associations that evolve over time. Hence when using this terminology, as is unavoidable, I will endeavour to be specific in terms of contextual association. However, when engaging with the speech transcripts in later chapters, the speaker's understanding of the terms is an additional and elusive consideration. For now, I move back into Wuthnow's work.

Wuthnow argues that there are two forms of American civil religion: a conservative and a liberal civil religion, both of which share Bellah's historical spine, but split at the point of implementation of the aspirational mandate (1988a). In Wuthnow's view, conservative political actors follow a 'priestly' point of view of America's civil religion and its requisite role in the world, rooted in what was originally a more millennialist perspective on the United States' role in the world. He observes that many evangelicals see the nation as embodying God's vision, viewing the country as the

chosen nation following a divine calling to fulfil a sacred mission on earth. Any wealth and power bestowed on the United States were viewed as resources for fulfilling its sacred obligation to lead the world by 'priestly' example (1988b, pp.247-8). This conservative civil religion follows Bellah's description of early American civil religion very closely, emphasizing the use of God in patriotic pledges and official language, drawing comparisons to a 'New Israel' and other biblical archetypes and America's role as the moral leader of the world (Wuthnow 1988a) (Bellah 1967).

Conversely, according to Wuthnow liberal political actors enact a 'prophetic' function of civil religion. Wuthnow compares the liberal vision to that of the Hebrew prophets in the bible and their focus on caring for vulnerable members of societies, fighting injustice, and working toward humanitarian ends (Wuthnow 1988b, p.254). Rejecting most of the classical biblical archetypes that Bellah noted (and that are utilized by the conservatives), liberal civil religion challenges Americans to act on behalf of humanity, working in support of a sacred obligation to social justice, civil rights, ecology and prevention of abuse or destruction of God's people. Faith provides hope and strength in the face of seemingly impossible odds facing such enormous social issues (Wuthnow 1988, p. 398).

The division in civil religion that Wuthnow describes is a useful addendum to the theory and it has been widely accepted in works that follow, with many scholars exploring how these two paths manifest in different political outreach and specific political actors such as Reagan, Obama and the liberal path more generally, reinforcing the tendency for American civil religious scholarship to focus on presidential speech (Weiss 2016, Stahl 2015, Schonhardt-Bailey et al. 2012, Roof 2009, Richard Benjamin 2015, Fontana 2010).

Despite this consensus, Wuthnow is careful to note a risk that accompanies this division between the two types of civil religion. Two divergent civil religions with separate divisive agendas could undermine the theory that a singular civil religion in the vein of Bellah, still exists (Wuthnow 1988a). Further, should these two divergent civil religions be so polarized that they alienate a substantial portion of the electorate, is the civil religion theory still a tool of legitimation in the political realm? If civil religion anchors the government structures of the United States, which version of civil religion is doing the legitimising—the conservative or liberal one? While both liberal

and conservative perspectives of American civil religion find their source in a higher power, they promote quite different agendas. Murphy notes this as a risk. If the conservative version is concerned with the preservation of traditional principles and resists change, and the liberal civil religion is progressive, then Murphy asserts only the liberal civil religion is acting with the social imperative that Bellah requires.- This means that according to Murphy, half the citizenry may hold a position is incompatible with Bellah's conception of civil religion, though the conservative perspective is aligned with the priestly path Wuthnow explores. Murphy's perspective brings the viability of Bellah's thesis into question, if it only applies to half the country, is it relevant? (Murphy 2008).. The next section explores what Bellah's reaction to the scholarly debate and the evolution of his own work many years later.

2.5 The Evolution of Bellah's Point of View

In this section, I will explore Bellah's reflections on his own work, its reception, and its place in continuing political discourse. In his later work, Bellah seems to lose faith in civil religion as a concept, primarily because he seems demoralized at its perceived failure to stand as a pillar for good. Coming up against the Vietnam war and moving through a darker and more divisive period in US politics in the 70s and 80s, Bellah expresses a more cynical view of the potential of the United States as a morally upstanding example for the world (1981, 1970, 1967, [1978] 1998, 1976a, 1974). As Murphy noted in the previous section, it is possible that Bellah's aspirational mandate for the nation only exists with a liberal implementation. I would take it further. Bellah weakens his own theory with melancholic clinging to idealism, choosing to make the moral compass he links to civil religion contingent upon a shift to more socially conscious political philosophy. This shifts his theory away from sociological analysis and more into the normative realm. In his later work, Bellah's concern that liberal individualism will destroy the basis of civil religion plagues his outlook on his own thesis, but his fixation on the negative undermines the usability of his earlier and significant work. By implying that the moral imperative of American society requires a drastic shift away from utilitarian values, he begins to derail the initial value of the thesis.

Sarna addresses current political rhetoric and American civil religion, though like Bellah he focuses on inaugural addresses, not campaign speech (Sarna in Hammond

et al., 1994). In analysing President Bill Clinton's inaugural address, he notes the continued relevance of religious language in the American political realm, as well as the applicability of the versions of American civil religion noted by Wuthnow. However, he notes an important risk of applying the concept,

> 'To point, as Bellah did, only to those elements of American civil religion that have drawn Americans together is, thus, to distort the story. The divisive attempts by various segments of American society to forge a civil religion in their own image is, unfortunately, no less a part of the story. Civil religion, like all religion on close inspection, works to promote both communitas and its opposite'
>
> (Sarna in Hammond et al. 1994, p. 22)

This is a point I would like to emphasise. A recurring issue in the application of Bellah's civil religion to political speech is a tendency to cherry pick the speeches studied to suggest that he supports a progressive liberal politics —a selectiveness that Bellah himself falls victim to in his original 1967 essay, and other scholars follow this same path. Indeed, as Marti notes, the historical narrative Bellah invokes as the infrastructure of his theory is rooted in a highly selective accounting of the country's founding (Marti 2019). Analysis of civil religion cannot be done objectively by seeking it in the most obvious places. If American civil religion is to continue to be relevant as a theory, it must be examined with an intentionally bipartisan focus of sample to avoid confirmation bias, not by looking for civil religion first. This project examines the language of all relevant candidates in a balanced manner, to see what it reveals about civil religion in America. The religious language will reveal the structure of the discourse, not the other way around. This project aims to address these issues, first, by selecting a sample set of speeches which cover a specific, (and thus far unstudied) time span: 2008-2016, and speakers of equal standing ideologically (in terms of political party allegiance) and in prominence (leading candidates only).

I have established that Bellah's theory of American civil religion is well grounded in historical events and the language of a prolific list of influential American leaders. The use of religious language in founding documents and incorporation of religious ritual and symbolism into government-created holidays, ceremonies and memorials reinforces civil religion in the American political discourse. The question is: what

form does civil religion takes in modern American political discourse and is that form is still anchored in Bellah's thesis?

In his 2008 editorial endorsement of Barack Obama, Bellah expressed hope that civic values as expressed by then-candidate Obama were a promise of possible redemption for the civil aspirations of the country, but he countered it with cautious scepticism (Bellah 2008b). During the campaign process, candidates for the Presidency may aspire to be Lincoln or Kennedy, but they are struggling for the limelight and for credibility with the electorate. Different candidates, from Obama to Trump utilize religious language to differing effects, to appeal to separate segments of an evolving electorate; an electorate that, like the candidates themselves, is a product of the American civil religion that served as the spine of its founding documents.

I argue that the value of American civil religion is not in weighing its authenticity as a concept, that is established. American civil religion as an idea has persisted throughout the history of the United States and has evolved in application, presentation. Perspective on the historic background of the thesis is necessary to put any results into perspective. Civil religion in America in 1776, 1860, 1960 and 2016 may be quite different in presentation, or it could be similar depending on the discourse and context through which it is viewed. As will be explored in Chapter 3, the methods by which American civil religion is understood and contextualised vary in both quality and consistency, creating a gap that this project aims to fill with balanced, thus far unexamined, sampling, and consistent methodology that accounts for not only the language choice, but contextual and linguistic factors that reveal underlying interests vying for the access and legitimacy the words provide.

2.6 Conclusion

My aim in this chapter was to outline and contextualise civil religion in the United States, anchoring it within existing literature and establishing the discourses surrounding Bellah's theory of civil religion. I first examined and the origins of the founding of the United States and how they contribute to political narratives relevant to this research, discussing impactful narratives of the nation's founding like American exceptionalism, then moving into origins of the term civil religion. I then moved into Bellah's early work engaging the historical evolution of religion and the political, which led to his seminal work, *Civil Religion in America* (1967), detailing

his theory and the historical events and political actors who anchor it to the history of the United States. Having established Bellah, I suggested that critique of Bellah's theory could be divided into four main types: first and second, those who criticise its practical application, though with different structural criticisms (Stauffer 1975, Hart 2002, 1977, Goldzwig 2002); third: engagement with constitutional questions and the risks of using civil religion on behalf of an agenda other than Bellah's altruistic one (Mathisen 1989, Hammond et al. 1994, Gorski 2017). Fourth, those who subscribe to its basic assumptions but feel it requires significant modifications to account for political ideologies: the prophetic and the priestly paths (Wuthnow 1988a, Wuthnow 1988b, Murphy 2008). I then closed with Bellah's own revisiting of the work after many years of scholarly and political evolution (2007b, 1970, 1967, 2007a, 1998, [1978] 1998, 1987, 1985, 1976a, 1976b, 2008b, 2002, 1992).

Because of the underpinnings of American civil religion, political actors can utilize religious language to legitimise their candidacy and agenda and secure immense power. Analysing a bipartisan sample of American political discourse for religious language could confirm Wuthnow's categories, show a more centrist (possibly more Bellah-esque) form of civil religion or something completely different. The methodology chosen for this project aims to determine this with a focus on a balanced and consistent of sample. My methodology and an exploration of existing scholarship related to campaign speech and civil religion will be outlined in the next chapter.

Chapter 3 : Methodology

3.1 Introduction

In this chapter I outline the research methodology I employed to analyse the selected presidential candidates' speeches. In section 3.2 will begin by continuing the review of literature related to this project by exploring existing scholarship analysing political speech as it relates to American civil religion. The first section will review a cluster of research led by Coe (2010, 2006, 2013, 2017), Chapp (Chapp and Coe 2019, 2013) and Hickel (2019) which explores the use of religious language in political speech in association with civil religion, addressing its strengths and shortcomings. This will be followed by an examination of two projects (Calfano and Djupe 2009, McLaughlin and Wise 2014) which explore religious language in political speech without focusing on civil religion, but whose innovations and discoveries in locating coded language communicated to religious groups inform my thesis. I will close the review with existing scholarship that includes some rhetoric of candidates in this project. After reviewing the literature on religious speech and American civil religion, it becomes clear that research, while useful, has been extremely wide reaching, but lacking the nuance and complexity required to truly engage with the power and application of American civil religion by political actors. Hence after reviewing the existing scholarship, I made the choice to go in a different methodological direction for my thesis, critical discourse analysis (CDA).

In sections 3.3 forward, I will detail the scholarship that informs critical discourse analysis, exploring the tenets and theoretical purpose of the approach and best practices for utilising it. Having established the context for my own methods in this research, I will explain the analytical framework employed in this research, outlining the processes, context and rationale for the sample selection and the analytical processing of the speeches themselves. I will close with a brief discussion of additional relevant factors before moving forward into the data chapters.

3.2 Methodological Approaches to Campaign Speech and American Civil Religion

> The speeches of professional writers sound thin in actual contests. Those of the orators, on the other hand, are good to hear spoken, but look amateurish enough when they pass into the hands of a reader. This is just because they are so well suited for an actual tussle, and therefore contain many dramatic touches, which being robbed of all dramatic rendering, fail to do their own proper work, and consequently look silly.
>
> (Aristotle 2001)

The difference between words which are delivered on the page and those which are spoken orally is pivotal to the methodological choices made in this project. As discussed in Chapter 2, scholars have been writing about civil religion in the United States for decades and it has been both dismissed and championed over that time. A review of the scholarship of American Civil Religion in the vein of Bellah's thesis (1967) reveals that engagement with it has often been selective, and evidence has, at times, been cherry picked to reinforce the narrative. For example, it has now been twenty years since George W. Bush's election, yet discussion of religion and politics still often focuses on Bush and Reagan before him. However, in recent years, there has been some progress in terms of creating a more comprehensive understanding of presidential rhetoric and American civil religion.

Kevin Coe has engaged extensively with this topic, in collaboration with several other scholars, and has done much to hone the focus of mixed methods research of the frequency and impact of political rhetoric generally, and of religious language in presidential and campaign speech specifically (2010, 2006, 2013, 2017, 2019). Each project has a slightly different focus, but all contribute to a set of insights about the use of religious language in political speech, both as a form of civil religious communication and as a tool of political influence more broadly. Coe and Chenoweth conduct a wide reaching, software assisted, content analysis of political speech, focusing on speeches from Reagan to Obama, in an effort to establish 'conceptual coherence and methodological precision' for the discussion of civil religion and political speech (2013, p. 375). To seek that precision, they crafted a 'typology of Christian discourse' and applied it via content analysis software to US presidential speech over three decades, from 1981-2013 (Coe and Chenoweth 2013, p.375).

Elements of Coe and Chenoweth's typology are worth engaging with here, as they inform choices that were made in this project. In fact, they serve as the starting point for discussing the methodology used in this research. Their typology establishes four categories of words that became the codes for their content analysis: **God** (invoking the Christian God- Christ, Creator, etc.), the **Bible** (references to the book itself and key figures within it- literal mention only, metaphorical baggage not included. Ex: scripture, the Word, Genesis, Isaiah); **Manifestations** (faith, prayer, heaven, hymn, pulpit, sermon, holy, bless), **People** (discussions of Christians, distinguishing between leaders (pastors, prophets); and **Followers** (believers, etc) (Coe and Chenoweth 2013, pp.378-385). Coe and Chenoweth applied their codes to three decades of presidential discourse with the intention of establishing their typology categories: 'God', 'the Bible', 'Manifestations' and 'People and Followers' as a more structured foundation for future scholarship (2013, p. 376).

This is an interesting and relevant path to take, and my project initially took a similar track when it came to analysing campaign speech since 2008. I began my research using NVivo software to pull a similar list of codes (Table 1: NVivo codes**Error! R eference source not found.**). Though at the time, I had not yet seen Coe and Chenoweth's typology, it is unsurprising that these would be the words one would begin with in such research. But as my results from using these codes in NVivo began to come in, they were missing the most essential elements of civil religion as I had experienced them working in professional politics. The framing and delivery were not there.

Coe and Chenoweth focus exclusively on Christianity in their work, a choice that whilst understandable in terms of manageable scope, I find problematic. Given the evolution of US foreign policy in relation to predominantly Muslim countries, I suspected that an exclusive focus on Christianity for the sake of precision omits important perspectives that can be gleaned with a wider lens, i.e., that other faiths are tools in religious rhetoric both in relationship with and in juxtaposition to Christianity and/or civil religion, a concern which bore fruit in my analysis. My project accounts for all religious language regardless of faith. Though all may not be impactful to the findings as to the American civil religious narrative, the positioning of rhetoric related to other faiths may provide valuable insight as to the discourses of power and positioning of influential actors and organisations. The connection

between the candidate and the audience is not a mere listing of words with preloaded meanings. Civil religion exists as much, if not more so, in the spaces in between the overtly religious words—in the w*e's* and the o*ur's* that frame these terms, in the discursive context in which the speech is given, and in the case of Obama, *how* his words were spoken—often referred to as the Prophetic Voice (Frank 2009, Healey 2010).

Coe and Chenoweth's findings note two significant developments, first is that Obama's election changed the game in terms of who is delivering religious rhetoric, swinging toward the Democrats from the usually assumed religious Republicans, and second, that the rhetoric continued to shift toward religious pluralism and tolerance (2013). Unfortunately, the rigid nature of their methodology did not allow for development of Obama's impact on the discourse beyond mention and brief contextualisation within the shift toward a more pluralistic framing of faith in his speech. This is a gap that the authors acknowledge, noting that future research should develop both beyond the end of their analysis of Obama's impact timewise and in terms of depth of analysis of his speech (2013, p. 390). The lack of deeper engagement with the more complex aspects of Obama's religious rhetoric is a shortcoming of additional recent scholarship on civil religion and political speech, which often focuses on content analysis methods and large numbers of speeches rather than on sampling that enables deeper examination. This is a gap that this research occupies.

In more recent collaborative work, Chapp and Coe applied the typology of Coe and Chenoweth's earlier work to even larger quantities of data: all available campaign speech from 1952-2016, aiming 'to provide the broadest examination to date of religious language in campaign communication' (2019, p.402). They acknowledge Bellah's civil religion in their work as an accepted element contributing to its importance but are seeking a more comprehensive understanding of how religious language appears in a large sample of campaign speech. Their focus in this project was to clarify why candidates use religious language by adding an additional theoretical framework to the typology: 'historical expectations, audience religiosity, candidate attributes, and opponent strategy' (2019, p. 398). Their findings provide interesting context to this research. They note a marked surge in the use of God language in campaign discourse since Reagan, though not in the other categories of

the taxonomy and their sample showed that the use of such language skewed toward republican candidates overall (Chapp and Coe 2019, p. 411). This last observation is interesting perspective for the sample that will be addressed in this thesis. As Coe noted in his work with Chenoweth (2013), Obama's rhetoric changed the game in terms of this assumption. Though the content analysis done with Chapp (2019) confirms a Republican skew, the sample size stretching over sixty years is important. In this project, focusing on 2008-2016, the balance is much more evenly distributed between both parties' candidates.

In his independent work, Chapp takes his analysis a step beyond content analysis by incorporating qualitative interpretations. He develops thematic elements found in his research based on 'identity and focus', noting that 'American religious identity—at least in the realm of political discourse—is more a source of unity than a source of division' (2013, p. 14). My primary criticism of Chapp's work is his debatable assertion that, 'Candidates make religious appeals not to forward a particular issue agenda but, rather, to form a common social bond with prospective voters' (2013, p. 59). I would counter that while this may be the initial function of civil religion as a device, a closer inspection that includes linguistic strategies and analysis of the role of power and influence in framing such rhetoric (such as the approach I take in this research) reveals much more of a relationship to the political agenda. This research reveals connections between the language and discourses which are urgently in need of examination.

Coe's work with various collaborators (Chapp and Coe 2019, Coe and Domke 2006, Coe and Reitzes 2010, Coe and Chenoweth 2013, Coe and Chapp 2017) and to a different extent, Chapp's individual work on the subject of campaign speech, while useful in a general, wide lens capacity, lacks the nuance of an examination that goes significantly beyond the number of words used and by whom, and his later project is evidence of that consistent focus (and lack). To develop refined assessment of the state of civil religion, scholarship must include consideration of the positionality of the speaker with the audience, non-verbal elements of religious rhetoric, and a more localised examination of the context of the rhetoric's delivery. To return to Aristotle, 'The style of Oratory addressed to public assemblies is really just like scene painting' (2001, p. 102). We cannot very well engage only with the frequency of the colours of

paint and number of brush strokes on the canvas without considering the entire image.

The final scholar I will address in the context of using a content analytical approach is Hickel, who focuses on the way American civil religious rhetoric manifests in presidential speech by using a randomised sample of 72 nationally exposed speeches spanning a time frame from 1939-2012 (Hickel Jr 2019). His research indicates that Inaugural addresses, nomination acceptance speeches and other major speeches contain the most civil religious rhetoric. He also found some minor associations with political party positioning, though whether these associations show a tendency to increase or target civil religious speech in response to a partisan advantage or disadvantage is debatable (Hickel Jr 2019, p. 405-406). The interesting but somewhat ambiguous findings of Hickel's research lend further evidence to my assertion that content analysis is an approach with significant limits when applied to civil religious speech. However, some scholars have employed more qualitative approaches to the discourse, uncovering aspects of speech which are useful and innovative. I will now outline some those works that are relevant to my project, including coded language that signal religious audiences, and some clarity as to audience receptivity to religious language.

Calfano and Djupe outline a system of religious cues they call 'the code,' which 'signal the in-group status of a GOP Candidate to white evangelical voters…intended to pass unnoticed by other voters and therefore allow GOP Candidates to avoid broadcasting very conservative issue positions that might alarm more moderate voters' (2009, p. 329). These phrases would be obvious to certain sections of the evangelical electorate, but subtle enough for the more moderate voter to either miss completely, or at minimum, not be alienated by. Examples in context include the 'We have this land and we're told to be *good stewards* of it and each other,' and 'There is power, *wonder working power*, in the goodness and idealism and faith of the American people' (Calfano and Djupe 2009, 331). The italicised language is coded phrasing that would be picked up by evangelicals easily, but may be unnoticeable to the average voter, increasing the reach of the message. Exposure to this research pushed me to consider language that went beyond Coe and Chenoweth's typology and strict biblical references.

Coe and Chenowith did note that some religious rhetoric by political actors may be 'narrow-casted' in this way, versus 'broadcasted' to a wider audience, in order to avoid alienating voters (2013). While Chapp notes that generally, 'civil religion appeals. . . are nondenominational declarations of spiritualised American national identity' which aligns with many civil religion scholars including Bellah (2013, p. 3). The documentation of such subtleties justifies the need for more refined examination of the use and positioning of political rhetoric in the religious frame. While some of these types of 'coding' would be evident in a computerised content analysis, and there is some space for interpretive context with that approach, phrases such as 'wonder-working power' would likely fall out of such a sieve. Additionally, the power dynamics working beneath the use of such coding also warrants understanding and is marginalised with this approach.

There are other nuances that emerge from more qualitative approaches to this topic including discrepancies between perception of attitudes toward religious rhetoric and reality. Per McLaughlin and Wise, polling shows a fatigue in religious dialogue in political discourse, but their work points toward a more accurate assessment: that the public suffers from a burnout of 'conservative religious talk by republicans,' not religious rhetoric in general. This is likely owing to citizens, pundits and scholars conflating the two, yet the truth is that there are also many democratic politicians and voters who are religious (2014, p. 367). In fact, 'Linking politics and morality often requires appeals to (1) religion, because Americans are such an exceptionally religious people, and (2) religious groups, which are important organisational nodes for the electorate' (Calfano and Djupe 2009, 329). Durkheim, writing in 1912, notes, the power of religion lies in collective experience and shared belief, not in individual practice (Durkheim and Swain 2012), and this collective power and shared identity is the undercurrent that connects the speaker to the audience when civil religion is invoked from the political podium. But which groups are inherent to the investigation of civil religion and at what point do their divergent individual priorities begin to alienate other groups? The line between alienation of moderate voters and connecting with the electorate using the rhetoric of civil religion is one that is difficult to thread.

McLaughlin and Wise dig further into the element of audience reception in their research, exploring how political party association impacts reaction to religious rhetoric. They find that religious cues that would alienate an unaffiliated voter are

well received by voter of the same party, usually resulting in a positive reception (2014). Focusing on campaign rhetoric is therefore revealing when trying to ascertain who and what power structures and agendas lie beneath religious rhetoric and how party strategies are delivered. Much of the campaign process occurs in separate, partisan spheres in terms of live delivery, but often receives wide national media coverage; only the final 3-4 months of rhetoric are devised to persuade the entire nation. Election primary season is where the test balloons are floated, where the audience can be precisely targeted (because they are often partisan) and these evolving messages, according to McLaughlin and Wise, find an audience that is more receptive to religious rhetoric than a combined target—regardless of which political party is being addressed (2014). The primary and general campaign timeline is also where narratives are developed. Once elected, presidents speak to the country en masse- references become more generalised, media relationships become more interactive (because there are fewer candidates), and rhetoric is more abbreviated and less impactful in terms of a comprehensive message.

The final cluster of scholarship to consider are those whose work engages the speakers included in my project. Noting that most scholarship engaging Obama's speech focused on a single speech, Coe & Reitzes utilised content analysis to conduct a 'broad systemic analysis of Barack Obama's rhetoric' generally (2010, p. 405). Their research clarified topical focus of Obama's speeches overall, noting that contrary to some assumptions, Obama's speeches were quite heavy on policy and thematic appeals and actively downplayed more fractious issues like LGBTQ marriage, which was in active dispute at the time (Coe and Reitzes 2010). Hart and Lind also conducted a wide reaching content analysis of campaign speech, pulling all campaign speech from the 2007-08 campaigns and comparing it to a larger sample of campaign rhetoric spanning 1948-2004 (Hart 2010). Their findings were similar to Coe and Reitzes (2010) in that Obama's rhetoric was more content heavy than his reputation for poetic, lofty rhetoric suggested, and also noted that McCain spoke with more partisan and 'emotional style', an idea I will explore further in Chapter 4 (Hart 2010, p. 355). Lastly, there are two studies which I will mention here but will be more relevant in conjunction with the content of Chapter 4, both of which engage with the concept of the 'prophetic voice'. Frank analyses Obama's speech in Philadelphia entitled 'A More Perfect Union', a speech that is also part of the sample in this project (2009). Healey engages the concept of the prophetic as it relates to both Obama and

Sarah Palin and how they represent their faith. Both works are relevant to the contextual discussion in the 2008 election and are addressed in conjunction with the relevant candidates in Chapter 4.

This particular cluster of scholarship demonstrates the importance of my research and the approach it takes. Each of these studies focus on a worthy aspect of Obama's work but all lack aspects that are engaged here. Coe and Reitzes work does not focus on religious rhetoric and is quite broad in its analysis, in their findings they discuss a need for a more comparative analysis involving Obama's speech in the context of its election cycle(s), as this project does (2010, p. 407). Hart's work does compare Obama and McCain's rhetoric, but again it is a broad intervention, acknowledging its usefulness is limited as a largely descriptive exercise (2010, p. 355). Finally, Frank and Healy's work certainly inform discussion in the data chapters of this project, but only in terms of framing of the language and possible contextual impact (Frank 2009, Healey 2010). Their scope, while useful and interesting, does not reach quite as far as the sample engaged here.

Considering this methodological background, this project has fashioned a path toward a more developed, nuanced understanding of the manifestation of civil religion in campaign speech that incorporates both the close examination of the language offered by content analysis, whilst expanding and deepening the research with utilisation of more qualitative aspects- a progressive lexical analysis, leading into a thorough, multi-level discourse analysis. To do this, I turned to Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) to form a concrete framework and methodology.

3.3 Critical Discourse Analysis

> [If] We may assume that directive speech acts such as commands or orders may be used to enact power, and hence also to exercise and reproduce dominance. [then] Similarly, we may examine the style, rhetoric or meaning of texts for strategies that aim at the concealment of social power relations, for instance by playing down, leaving implicit or understating responsible agency of powerful social actors
>
> (van Dijk 2016, p. 250)

Van Dijk's words refer to the capability of speech to enact power dynamics that impact society, noting that by analysing speech we can understand how and why

those relationships exist, as well as how they are being implemented linguistically. American civil religion is a phenomenon which is inextricably linked to power. Its anchoring events and speakers are Presidents and founders of the United States. Hence when endeavouring to understand the language of such powerful actors, I must utilize an approach which will account for the nuances of language as well as the power dynamics that are being wielded along with the rhetoric. Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) locates all the elements required. In this section I will outline the premises which anchor CDA, engage with scholarship related to its application, and explain key concepts and definitions required to engage with its use in this project.

Machin observes that critical discourse analysis is anchored by a set of three premises. These assumptions establish the values and understandings which justify and establish the rationale for critical discourse analysis (2012). The first premise is that one must accept that 'language is a shaper, legitimizer and maintainer of social codes and practices, ideologies and structures' (Machin 2012). This establishes the significance of language as a tool of influence and legitimacy across all structures of society. To address *how* this communication and influence are achieved, we need to go deeper into linguistics.

Halliday and Webster demonstrate the logistical process that enables the impact of language by establishing that there are multiple meta functions when communication takes place. These functions make up the greater whole that we understand to be linguistic communication. To understand language, we must account for: the perception and intention (the ideational function), combined with the precise positioning of the speaker and audience (the interpersonal function). These are articulated with phonetics and grammar (the textual function) to create communication (Halliday and Webster 2009). It is important to understand how these meta functions operate to begin to unpack the impact, motive and language which are being communicated in any circumstance. To elaborate more precisely:

- *Ideational Function*: refers to the 'meaning potential, encoding our experience' with words and grammatical structure
- *Interpersonal Function*: refers to the positionality of both the speaker and receiver. 'This is the component through which the speaker…express[es] his own attitudes and judgments and [is] seeking to influence the attitudes and behaviours of others' (p. 316).

- *Textual Function*: refers to the tools by which these goals are accomplished, and which add texture and effect to the communication and reception of the previously noted functions, without the textual, the other functions would not actualise.

(Halliday and Webster 2009)

All these factors must be accounted for in understanding language. Engagement based on the textual function alone would leave out fundamental elements of presentation. We cannot understand the transcript of a speech without also understanding who is speaking, what the circumstances are and who the audience might be, these are aspects of interpersonal function. Additionally, we cannot understand based on the objects and actions of a speech without considering their meaning, both literal and inferred—this is the ideational function. All these elements are easily missed in software assisted content analysis.

Finally, as relates to the meaning of words, in the context of the examination of political speech and religious language, there are fewer contexts which impart more significant meaning. Coe and Chenoweth note, 'public expressions of faith from presidents are deeply consequential' (2013, p. 377) and Chapp expresses similar, noting that the power of the presidential pulpit is especially legitimising for civil religion, 'The way in which political elites use religious rhetoric in the public sphere determines the exact role that religion plays in American elections, political culture and the representative dynamics of the country' (Chapp 2013, p. 4). Hence the first premise of CDA, that 'language is a shaper, legitimizer and maintainer of social codes and practices, ideologies and structures' is certainly accurate for the study of civil religion (Machin 2012).

Having established the first premise, we move to the second: that language can be analyzed to draw out underlying ideologies (discourses), which in turn, project values and reproduce those elements in society (Machin and Mayr 2012, Machin 2012). In fact, following van Dijk, critical discourse analysis could be considered a 'socio-political discourse analysis,' he notes, CDA is not beholden to a 'specific discipline, paradigm, school, or discourse theory. It is primarily interested and motivated by pressing social issues, which it hopes to better understand through discourse analysis…this usually means a multidisciplinary approach, in which distinctions between theory, description and application become less relevant.' (van Dijk 2016, p.

349). This openness to factors from multiple disciplines proved necessary to do justice to the volume of contributary factors present when engaging with religious rhetoric in campaign speech in my research. As we will see, examination of word frequency and associated thematic possibilities is not enough to fully develop a discourse analysis in the political realm.

The third essential premise of critical discourse analysis is understanding discourse as 'use of language seen as a form of social practice' (Fairclough 1995, p. 6). van Dijk differentiates political discourse from the general concept of discourse as one connected to political actors, institutions and organisations, engaged in 'political processes and events,' emphasising that context is an essential factor for understanding political discourse (2012, pp. 17-18).

The stakes of language in political discourse are extremely high. As Chapp noted earlier, the way religious rhetoric is used by candidates in campaign contexts shape the relationship between religion and elections (Chapp 2013, p. 4), and I argue, with political discourse at large. As van Dijk observes, 'Power and dominance over groups are measured by their control over (access to) discourse. The crucial implication is not merely that discourse control is a form of social action control, but also and primarily that it implies the conditions of control over the minds of other people, that is, the management of social representations' (2016, p. 257). In the context of campaign speech, presidential candidates are the conduit between that message and the recipient (the public) who may support them.

For practitioners of critical discourse analysis, accounting for the surrounding discourse and the influence wielded by and within it is as important as understanding of the linguistic elements themselves. Hence when determining the most appropriate method for determining the current form of (American) civil religion and the way religious rhetoric is utilised in campaign speech since the 2008 election, this was the best methodology to ensure my research goes beyond the content analysis of others (Coe et al, Chapp 2013, Hickel Jr 2019). Finally, there is a final obligation to implementing critical discourse analysis per Van Dijk: 'Critical discourse analysts (should) take an explicit socio-political stance: they spell out their point of view, perspective, principles and aims, both within their discipline and within society at large' (2016, p. 252). To expand on this and make my own stance clear within the context of CDA ideology: this project aims to secure a snapshot of the current state of

American civil religion in the United States as shown by the use of religious rhetoric, by following the language, considering the contextual positionality and discourses, this project will reveal any underlying discourses of power which impact and shape political discourse.

The final element of critical discourse analysis I would like to discuss clarifies expectations of approach and standardisation. There are many approaches to the process of critical discourse analysis, depending on the variables of individual projects, including the discourse being engaged and the type of content being analysed. But there are essential values and analytical perspectives common to all approaches: (1) there must be close analysis of linguistic factors and (2) there must be engagement with the contextual elements that contribute to the discourse in question, both of which are (3) anchored by the three premises that define CDA as an approach. My thesis seeks to examine the interplay between religious language in these speeches, the context and any emerging elements of power or ideology. I am interested in how this relates to the understandings of Bellah's theory of American civil religion and how these are shaped and supported within the revealed discourse. In turn, a current, relevant version of civil religious discourse should emerge, along with any discourses of power drawn from the language examined.

Having established the tenets of critical discourse analysis, my socio-political stance and the discourses sought in this project, I will now begin to outline my approach.

3.4 Research Design

This section will outline how I constructed my research design, accounting for factors which contributed to the framework of the sample selected for analysis and relevant contextual considerations. Scholar of critical discourse analysis van Dijk recommends beginning with pulling the macrostructures from the selected text(s), to assemble the pieces that will set the parameters of the discourse being studied (2001). Having narrowed the wider context of presidential speech to campaign speech, I focused more precisely on the three most recent (and underexamined) election cycles, 2008, 2012, and 2016 [8].

[8] As of commencement of the project

Speech transcripts were acquired from the American Presidency Project[9], a database created by the University of California, Santa Barbara, which maintains data, transcripts, and other materials from presidential elections from 1960 forward (Peters, 2017). On average, there were 50-100 scripted speeches per candidate, omitting press comments, debates, and other improvisational forums. From these, I selected ten speeches per election cycle, five per presidential 'ticket' per party, totalling thirty speeches for analysis this project. Which speeches were selected (discussed in 3.5) depended on several factors, for which some background is required.

3.4.1 Background relevant to Sample Framework

In the United States, presidential elections are held every four years, with a general (nationwide) election taking place in November of the year prior to the commencement of a new four-year term, beginning the following January. For example, in 2008 the election took place on the 5th of November 2008 with Barack Obama taking the oath of office on the 20th of January 2009, commencing his first four-year term. Presidents are limited to a maximum of two terms. There are two major political parties, the Democratic party, and the Republican party. Whilst third party and independent candidates have run in nearly every election in the past 30 years, none have achieved higher than 5% since independent candidate Ross Perot achieved 19% of the popular vote in 1992 (Eveleigh 2016). In the last half century, politics in the US is a two-party game.

While the elections to choose the President take place just prior to the inauguration, the campaigns for nominations of each political party begin around 18 months prior to the general election with a series of state-by-state party specific elections. The result is that the United States has a uniquely 'sequential election process', where voters participating in later contests not only possess information about the results of earlier elections, but where the order and momentum accrued from such races are quite influential, at times, changing their 'voting intentions in response' to those results (Donovan and Hunsaker 2009, p. 45).

There are fifty states and three territories which have primary elections or caucuses for each party before the general election to choose the president. These primary

[9] https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/

season votes are to narrow the field of candidates per side down to a single nominee to decide who will be that party's candidate for the presidency. Primary elections for Democratic party voters and for Republican party voters can be held on different days in the same state, but you cannot vote for a nominee for both parties, you must vote for your preferred nominee of a single party, only once. How these elections are structured and in what order the states schedule their elections are under the complete control of the individual political parties (locally and at the national level) and the state legislatures. According to Caesar, 'the whole process… is crucially influenced by the timing of the various state contests. States such as Iowa and New Hampshire, which traditionally vote early in the five month period preceding the convention…help to thin the field' (2017, p. 46)

There are several aspects of these earlier state elections which impact how the presidential campaigns are structured. Some important highlights:

1) The order in which these preliminary elections fall in the calendar is significant. Over the years much political wrangling has occurred regarding the timeline of these elections. For our purposes, we need to be aware that:
    - Currently, Iowa is the first state that votes and their caucuses[10] take place on a standalone date. No other elections take place on the same day and no other state can hold their elections first. Iowa caucuses typically occur in January of the election year.
    - New Hampshire is second and they hold primary elections, usually within a week of Iowa, thereby kicking off the election season.
    - Following these two standalone elections of note, the next impactful election date on the calendar is Super Tuesday, in which up to twenty states can have their elections and falls in February of the election year.

[10] Each state chooses the format of their statewide elections for President. Some states hold traditional ballot box elections (choose one candidate to win) called primaries. Primaries are usually divided along political party lines- i.e. For each state there is a Democratic Primary and a Republican primary, usually on the same day (but not always!) Alternatively, some states hold caucuses, which are also divided by party affiliation but instead of a ballot, there is a ranking system and votes are cast by voters gathering with others who wish to vote for the same candidate and a manual head count is done; the candidate's 'caucus' who has the fewest votes are then dismissed to realign with a different candidate. This process continues until one candidate gets a majority. While both processes (and their associated variations) do impact campaign strategy quite a bit, it does not necessarily impact the general message of the campaign so much as technique. Since the speeches selected for this research are exposed to a wide, national audience, the type of election is not impactful.

Super Tuesday garners national attention both because of the quantity of states in play and because the results of so many votes usually eliminate several less viable candidates.

- The next major timeline milestones are the individual party conventions, which are broadcast nationally over a week in July (Republican) and August (Democratic).

2) Owing to the timeline impact (and exclusive media coverage) the earliest two states' election dates give them an outsized impact on election discourse, despite small electoral numbers. Iowa is entitled to just seven and New Hampshire only four electoral votes[11] in the general presidential election. But the candidates concentrate enormous resources, and the media focuses almost entirely on Iowa in the few months leading up to the caucuses. New Hampshire receives all the buzz from the Iowa result and has exclusive coverage for the week between.

3) Finally, there is evidence of the 'primacy affect' influencing the impact of information shared in the election cycle which can accumulate to build momentum through a sequential process such as the US nomination system (Holbrook et al,2001). In work assessing the impact of media influence on voters during the 2008 election, Smith noted that 'public impressions of political candidates often suffer from a primacy bias, in which early information carries greater weight in summative evaluation' (2016, p. 656) Therefore, the image shaped by candidates during the early phase of the nomination process carries additional weight compared to later in the cycle. The same work also noted a marked fatigue that occurs later in the cycle due to repetition of the same content. These factors influenced the selection of speeches, as will be outlined below.

[11] Each state has a set number of electors proportionate to the number of elected federal legislators for each state (corresponding to the number of senators and representatives in Congress), who then vote for the nominee that won their state's election (this is usually the case; though the disputes about the electoral college are best left out of this discussion, for clarity's sake). This makes winning some states far more valuable than others, New York had 31 electoral votes in 2008, whereas Arizona had 10. These figures are adjusted every ten years in accordance with census data. A candidate must accrue at least 270 electoral votes to secure the presidency (270 to Win, 2009).

Therefore, to gain a balanced insight into the rhetorical choices of presidential campaigns for this project, the sample could not just focus on the nominees' speeches after they were formally chosen by their parties. Their personal and party narratives had begun long before that, in the primaries, and so do the speeches selected for this research. I established structured considerations for organising the vast database of speeches into a relevant, coherent, and balanced sample. In the following section I outline those criteria.

3.4.2 Initial Contextualisation and Speech Selection

Criteria 1: Place in the election calendar

First, nearly every candidate's sample contains a speech from Iowa, delivered on date well before the national election, owing to the vast importance of the speech and wide dissemination of the media coverage. The same can be said for party convention speeches (which air live on all four freely available major television networks in the country as well as on cable news networks) and some Super Tuesday speeches, depending on the context of the specific election. So, while a speech's location and date may seem irrelevant or distant on the surface, the impact may be wide reaching.

Criteria 2: Issue specific or titled speeches preferred

Analysis of the sample requires a multi-level approach to both selection and contextualization. To narrow the hundreds of available speeches and public remarks to ten per cycle, additional criteria were established. When researching which speeches to include, one of the first criteria to emerge was the need for content heavy speeches versus a campaign "stump" speech. Stump speeches are repeated from location to location, often multiple times per day and to anywhere from 15-2000 people. As noted previously, there is evidence of diminishing impact as candidate information is repeated and as the election process progresses (Smith 2016, p. 656). The primary purpose of stump speeches is introductory, they are usually light on or without deeper engagement on issues or history. Since the purpose of this research is to reveal the underlying discourse that anchors religious language choices in campaign speech, it was imperative to elevate the speeches that dive deeper into content beyond biographical information, thus speeches other than the stump are preferrable

Criteria 3: Balanced sample based on the Presidential ticket, not merely the Presidential candidate

As the sampling developed, it became apparent that speeches by the presidential candidates themselves were not the only method by which the religiosity and positioning of religious rhetoric is presented to the voters. If the candidate did not present personal religiosity within certain expectations, the campaign slate was 'evened out' by the selection of a more overtly religious[12] vice-presidential nominee to balance the Presidential ticket (Krumel and Enami 2017). If a candidate had a problematic religious association (how it could be problematic will be discussed in individual background per election in later chapters), then the vice-president was often the voice of the presidential ticket's campaign messaging engaging civil religion and religious rhetoric. Thus, even though some candidates for President may not have invoked religious language at the same level as others, which doesn't translate to a lack of civil religious narrative on the presidential campaign ticket; it just comes from a voice that lends more credibility to the delivery.

Considering this, to present a more accurate assessment of how the campaigns' messages intertwined with religious language and civil religion, it became necessary to also include remarks by some vice-president candidates. In the 2008 election, I have included Governor Sarah Palin's acceptance of the vice-president nomination under John McCain and later in the 2016 analysis, I include remarks from Governor Mike Pence, speaking on behalf of their respective tickets. The reason for these additions will be unpacked further in their respective chapters.

3.4.3 Localised Contextualisation

This project is seeking an explanatory critique [13] of the discourse, that is, I am exploring why social realities are as they are, and how they are sustained or changed (Fairclough, 2004). Wodak notes that politicians are "seen both as shapers of specific public opinions and interests and as seismographs, which reflect and react to the atmospheric anticipation of changes in public opinion and to the articulation of changing interests of specific social groups and affected parties' (Reisigl and Wodak

[12] Or mainstream religious affiliation, in the 2012 case of the Romney/Ryan ticket, which will be addressed in that chapter.
[13] Fairclough defines an explanatory critique further, 'in that it does not simply describe existing realities but seeks to explain them, for instance by showing them to be effects of structures or mechanisms or forces.' (Fairclough 2012, p. 9)

2005, p. 32). In other words, context matters. In the case of individual speeches, multiple layers of context must be addressed.

Therefore, for each speech, the following relevant wider discourses were established: Political and media discourses relative to each election, to each party, and each candidate, the US historical political narrative and its relevance, and the understanding of ACR and civil religion in general and in relation to national identity and patriotism.

In addition to the above I also considered the following specific contextual elements:

- Media narratives and dominant issues in public discourse per election cycle: 2008, 2012, 2016.What are the issues that dominate the public zeitgeist and what is the media contributing? What is the role of emerging media channels to the discourse?
- Current context per speech: where does it take place? Who is the audience? When was it and what is the state of the election at that point in time?

Finally, the individual background, expressed and reported personal religiosity, and brief political history for each candidate is constructed, to facilitate analysis of their positionality within the discourse and in relationship to the audience. With these criteria and contextual settings established, the thirty speeches were set, and the project moves forward into individual speech analysis.

3.5 Speech Analysis- Process

Initially, the first approach to textual analysis was to create a coding that resembles Coe and Chenoweth's typology. I created a hierarchal coding system with a series of categorical headings and religious terms which I anticipated would cover the usage of religious language in the thirty speeches pulled, as seen in the following table.

Table 1: NVivo codes

Initial Religious rhetoric codes and themes
(inclusive of modifications of each term)

People/ Figures (Actual or Literary)	Actions	Sacred Norms/ Practices/ objects	Tropes/ Narratives	Descriptors	Group identity	Structures/ Institutions
Creator	belief	Trinity	faith	sacred	Christian	Church
God	deliver	sin	hope	hallowed	Mission	Islam
Allah	save	faith	promise	pure	believers	Civil Religion
Father	pray	heaven	Exodus		sinners	Mosque
Jesus	bless	hell	rebirth		christian	City on a Hill
Moses	worship	bible	apocalypse		congregation	
prophet	sacrifice	verse	sacred		evangelical	
minister		hymn	providence		baptist	
pastor		gospel	resurrection		protestant	
spirit		holy	Babylon		puritan	
rabbi		forgiveness	chosen		pilgrims	
Almighty		unity	cursed			
priest			thwart			
angels						

This list was loaded via NVivo software for analysis of the PDF's downloaded from the American Presidency Project. The graphic below reflects the initial codes. Please note that each term was searched with all forms (-ed, -ly, -er, etc.) and related words. The results were underwhelming. The software pulled some interesting information and did help to move the process along, but it was clear that, as noted previously in this chapter, content analysis of the language alone would not suffice to meet the research questions.

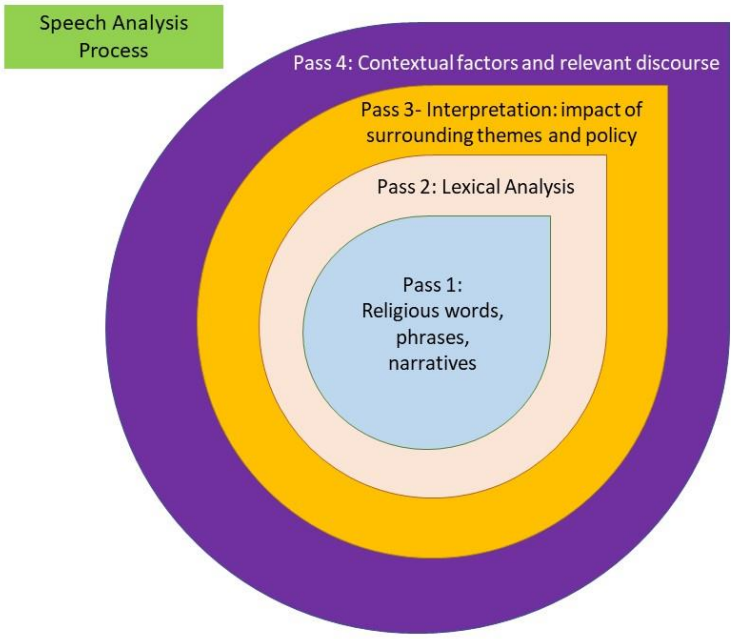
In the first few speeches, there were many aspects of religious rhetoric that were not accounted for in the initial code list and modification of the coding after manually scanning these speeches still revealed unimpressive results compared to viewing the language in full context. The religious language present in the speeches was simply too complex for this method. Moreover, the framing and application of religious language that was present in just the 2008 sample required a much more pliable technique to even locate the language. One would have had to code for the entire vocabulary of the Bible, as Obama utilises entire biblical narratives and stories in his

speeches as well as rhetorical techniques that are visible only in the styling of the sentence structure. The use of biblical narratives and stories were incorporated far more than expected and impacted both on the lexical level and in the overall strategic aim of the entire speech. Additionally, some religious references threaded through entire speeches, bookending a cohesive narrative, and presented a far more comprehensive impression than linguistic analysis of the immediate surrounding context would accurately reflect. Though these vocabulary scans need not be rejected, there was clearly a need for more comprehensive analytical technique than mere content analysis of this kind. On closer inspection of the 2008 speeches, and after failed attempts with NVivo compared to manual scanning of the speeches, I determined that a series of layered passes through the text would be a more useful approach. The next section will outline this process in depth.

3.5.1 Analytical Passes

Pass one begins with the (1) individual religious words or phrases, from those words I expanded outward in phases into (2) the surrounding lexical context and grammatical choices, then further outward to (3) localised themes, policy (within the speech surrounding text), and overall themes for the entire speech, then still further to the (4) context of the event, and the greater discourses. The figure that follows illustrates this approach.

Figure 1: Speech Analysis Process



Pass 1: Content Analysis

The first pass is a scan (via NVivo or manual pass) for religious words, phrases and narratives per the hierarchical coding established for software. This reporting gave me a place to start in terms of trends of usage of obvious religious references as well as the root words or phrases to grow the subsequent analytical passes. Once the trial run with NVivo proved fruitless, speeches from election cycles 2012 and 2016 were done manually.

Pass 2: Lexical analysis

The most complex pass from a linguistics point of view, considers rhetorical devices and grammatical elements. Initially, I parse the local meaning of word choice, paying

close attention to the religious language that I am interested in, and the interrelation of the topics discovered in step one. Does the speaker speak as an individual or as a collective 'us' when using this language? Is it a specific "God" or is a more generalized "creator," and what factors contribute to this choice? Is it affected by the social contexts and discourses impacting the speech? Do these linguistic choices fall in line with the narrative of an American Civil Religion and is it Bellah's version of the narrative or more in line with other scholars such as Wuthnow (1998)? Part of Bellah's initial grounding of his theory was based on political speeches as proof of his narrative continuing over time. Following, van Dijk, approaching the analysis in this way, can reveal (personal and ascribed) ideology, biases/influences, and implicit meanings, particularly the possible 'othering' of the opposition in a speech meant to persuade (2016). This application of CDA is especially useful for revealing underlying narratives such as ACR. This process was done via worksheet per speech (appendix), but for brevity, the elements are listed here in chart form.

Table 2: categories for lexical analysis

Lexical Analysis:				
Verbs	**Nouns**	**Modality**	**Tools of Rhetoric**	**Assessing the Negative Space**
Assertive/Neutral/Passive/Expressive	Personal/Impersonal	Modals	Metaphor	Suppressed/Missing
Nominalisation of actions	Specific/Generic	Hedging	Personification	Assumptions
Transitivity- positionality	Individual/Collective	**Overlexicalisation**	Poetic Devices	
	Pronoun/Noun tools of alignment	Goal of use	Oral Delivery	
	Nominalisation of named subject-			
	Association, Credibility, Legitimacy			
	Authority, Objectification,Anonymity,			
	Aggregate			

Pass 3: Interpretation

Beginning with single words and having examined their grammatical placement and context, I expanded my analysis to include local textual context (the few words around individual words or phrases in question) and continued outward—from phrases to sentences to paragraphs to sections, fleshing out the way the subject is presented. Then examining the form that significant words take, in terms of transitivity, including active vs. passive use of action verbs. Elements like the choice of named subjects or vague nouns and descriptors are key to understanding the overall goal of the referenced terminology as well as what is prioritized (or left out). The choice of pronouns and the positioning of the speaker and the audience within the text is also a significant factor. What policy points are near to and incorporated with religious language? Metaphor is often a deliverer of complex and important topics in political rhetoric and an effective method of conveying concepts that touch on humanity, feelings, and belief— all experiential concepts that are not as easily conveyed by dry textual explanation. This also a common tool for expression of religious teaching and there are several incidents of religious metaphor being utilized to relate secular narratives within these political speeches. All these elements combine to form the discourses that emerge from the text.

Pass 4: Incorporating contextual factors and discourse

Expanding the lens further, the linguistic analysis was related to the specific rhetorical choices to political discourse, context beyond the event itself, and considering positionality factors. Does the reference fall within a specific narrative that ties to an existing policy position of the individual, the party, the nation? Does the reference tie to key elements of civil religion, national identity, or shared belief regarding the positionality of the speaker, the audience, the nation, or all of these? How do the findings relate to the contextual factors of the election at hand? These considerations contributed to the framing of any discourses which emerged from the data.

3.6 Additional factors

In the context of particular election cycles, impactful discourses arise which are relevant to specific political actors. For Obama, there were discourses on his race and religiosity, for Romney, his Mormon faith was a consideration; For Clinton, gender played a significant role in the media discourse and in how she presented herself to the electorate. All of these are addressed in their respective chapters and in the findings chapter of this thesis.

Additionally, once the speeches are assessed individually, they are considered as a bloc per presidential ticket, in conjunction with each other to structure into a discourse on the relevant election cycle (2008, 2012, 2016) and in turn, on the state of religious rhetoric and civil religion in that election cycle. This process repeats for each of the three election cycles included in this project. Engaging these conclusions with relevant discourses and power players in historical progression should result in a new, more refined discourse both per cycle and, cumulatively, for the twelve years/ three cycles under review in this project. In Chapter 7, the entire sample is addressed as a whole and as narrative over a linear timeline. It is this framing which allows for clarity on the development of American civil religion by way of the language of these three elections.

Critical discourse analysis scholar Fairclough notes, "discourse does not simply represent aspects of other moments; it also contributes to their constitution. . . There are two interrelated and inseparable aspects to this analysis then: the crystallization of social processes into texts, and on the other [hand] an analysis of how discourse translates from and into other moments of social practice' (Fairclough, I. 2012). In this project, the research of language does not merely address the use of words in presidential campaign discourse, but I also account for the impact of those words on the manifestation of civil religion in America, the power wielded by such civil religion in terms of influence on the public and the greater political sphere when utilized by speakers with such a significant platform. Critical discourse analysis requires attention to discourses of power in the language, it is these collected perspectives that such discourses to emerge.

3.7 Conclusion

In this chapter I have reviewed the existing discourse as it relates to analysis of religious rhetoric in American political speech, both in conjunction with and adjacent to Bellah's American civil religion. I discussed work which engaged content analysis to better understand this phenomenon, with mixed results, as well as other scholarship which, through mixed methods approaches, obtained informative and useful information on the more subtle ways religious language is used to influence voters using techniques such as coding. I then closed by reviewing existing scholarship that focuses on the rhetoric of candidates in this project. Beyond the literature, I contextualised my own methodological choice, critical discourse analysis, outlining the tenets and principles of the methodology and outlining my own research design based on those principles. Finally, I detailed my processes for speech selection and processing via detailed contextualisation, multi-passes of textual and explanatory analysis and expanding frames of interpretation. In the following three chapters, I will be engaging with the speeches selected for the elections as outlined, beginning with Chapter 4, the 2008 election, to be followed by chapters detailing the research of the 2012 and 2016 elections.

Chapter 4 : The 2008 Election

4.1 Introduction

This chapter examines the 2008 election cycle. We will begin by revisiting the basic premises that underpin Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), to help to anchor which speeches and speakers were selected and why. That section is followed by an overview of unique elements of the voting process and calendar in the United States that potentially impact every national election, but with a focus on the 2008 election cycle and final presidential tickets[14] for each party. I will then provide an overview of the public and media discourses that affect the tone and content of the campaigns. The sampled speeches are then examined by candidate, beginning with Barack Obama, and then moving to John McCain. I will discuss notable lexical observations that the CDA lens reveals, and what ideologies and agendas emerge from that data, framed within the context of the 2008 election, then later with comparable analysis of speeches from the 2012 (Chapter 5) and 2016 (Chapter 6) elections in Chapter 7.

4.2 Methodology

Understanding the personal religiosity of presidential candidates included in this research is a fundamental consideration of the analysis, but with a significant caveat—we are not approaching the candidate's words from the direction of personal convictions of the speaker to the individual personal reception of the audience, but analysing the language itself to see how the linguistic choices and subject matter tie back to the relationship between the religious and the political discourses, enabling American civil religion to thrive. Is personal religiosity of the speaker relevant? Naturally. But it is not the focus of the research, the words are, and those words are more objectively reliable resource than attribution of the personal convictions of presidents, their campaign staff, their speechwriters (most of whom are uncredited),

[14] The 'ticket' is common vernacular for the pair of candidates who run for president and vice-president of the United States as running mates. The vice-presidential nominee is selected the leading presidential candidate and sanctioned by party delegate vote at each party's national convention, though sometimes the choice is announced before the event itself, as the vote is largely a formality. The president and vice-president are then pitched to the voters as a pair and the election vote in November elects them as a set slate. Each party puts forward a ticket in this manner. This being a political calculation instead of a popular vote is largely due to the existence of the electoral college voting system outlined in the 20th Amendment, which puts the decision into official law in a process separate from the general popular vote (USAGov 2021).

and the copious influences that contribute to composition of a speech. The words, once spoken and transcribed, are durable.

The speech transcripts, obtained primarily via The American Presidency Project, are analysed using a structured framework, informed by the premises and techniques of critical discourse analysis (CDA). These premises anchor the theory that underwrites CDA and guide which linguistic and thematic elements are included in the framing of the analysis. Due to this importance, I will briefly revisit them before we apply that analytical framing to the speeches themselves.

The first premise is that language can be analyzed to draw out underlying ideologies (discourses), which in turn, project values and reproduce those elements in society (Machin 2012). Second, that language is a shaper, legitimizer and maintainer of social codes and practices, ideologies, and structures (Halliday and Webster 2009). And the third premise, that we understand that discourses can involve the 'use of language seen as a form of social practice' (Fairclough 1995, p. 6).

In accounting for these premises in critical discourse analysis, discourses are revealed that underwrite power elements and ideologies within the text being examined. This informs our understanding of the way religious elements are presented in the speeches and in turn, helps to build a new understanding of American civil religion.

Beginning with single words, I expand examination of the language of the selected speeches to include local textual context (the few words around individual words or phrases in question) and continued outward—from phrases to sentences to paragraphs to sections, fleshing out the way the subject is presented. I then examined the form that significant words take, in terms of transitivity, including active vs. passive use of action verbs. Elements like the choice of named subjects or vague nouns and descriptors are key to the analysis in terms of grasping the goal of the text as well as what is prioritized. The choice of pronouns and the positioning of the speaker and the audience within the text emerged as significant factor. All these elements combine to form the discourse that emerges from the text.

To frame the language, the following two sections provide context to the 2008 election. Each candidate is introduced with contextual factors and a biographical section which gives relevant information on both their personal religiosity and any stated positions on the role of religion in politics. Following this contextual

grounding, are the lexical findings of all speeches for that candidate. After both speakers have been addressed separately, I will discuss them as a block before moving to the next chapter and election cycle.

4.3 Terminology

Though we spent quite a bit of time discussing methodology in the previous chapter, some elements of critical discourse analysis are best understood in close proximity to the transcripts the analysis is applied to. This is particularly important for linguistic terminology which is used in the analysis of speeches that follow.

Firstly, to elaborate a bit on the relationship between the words and their context, Halliday explains,

> Let us postulate that the relevant features of a situation in which language has some place are the field of social process, the tenor of social relationships and the mode of discourse itself… then by and large, the **field-** the nature of the social activity- determines the ideational meanings; the **tenor**- the social statuses and roles of the participants in the situation- determines the interpersonal meanings; while the **mode**- the part assigned to the linguistic interaction in the total situation- determines the textual meanings.
>
> (Halliday and Webster 2009, 1-2) (emphasis added)

Each of Chapters 5-7 spend quite a bit of time establishing the first element, the field, by outlining contextual factors of the election cycle, the candidate, and the specific speeches before turning to the language choices, which determine how religious elements fit within the tenor and modality of the surrounding language.

The first speech engaged for each candidate is outlined in more detail, to illustrate the approach in application before the entire group of speeches in the sample are engaged more critically in the expanded analysis sections. We will further establish the individual locations and circumstances for subsequent speeches as they are discussed. The tenor and mode are established by more granular analysis of the language by different relevant grammatical elements which follow.

Several key concepts are engaged for each speech. **Modality**, not to be confused with the mode of the previous discussion, is language that expresses the likelihood of

something to occur- for example 'something … will/ could/ is/ has… happened. Cambridge explains modality as 'about a speaker's or a writer's attitude towards the world. A speaker or writer can express certainty, possibility, willingness, obligation, necessity and ability by using modal words and expressions' (2021). Communication of modality expresses the (in our case) the candidate's point of view on the topic at hand. They dare, they pause, they need, they must … whatever action and/or object that follows. Modality can be expressed using many word types and figures of speech.

'**Transitivity** is the set of options whereby the speaker encodes his [sic] experience of the processes of the external world, and of the internal world of his [sic] own consciousness, together with the participants in these processes and their attendant circumstances.' (Halliday 1973, p.134). How a speaker expresses this is through their relationship with objects or subjects when they speak. There are mechanisms which enable transitivity to push in various directions, bringing relationships between the speaker and subject closer or pushing them away. One such mechanism is **nominalisation** which distances an action and places it in the past as an established reality. Per Halliday, nominalisation is a 'world of things rather than one of happening; of product rather than of process; of being rather than becoming' (2009, p. 43) This can be juxtaposed with the use of dynamic language, in which the action is featured. For example, when Barack Obama states 'scripture tells us' he has nominalised the expression of a relationship between scripture and both himself and the audience who is included in his 'us' (Liu 2008a). A more dynamic way of expressing this would be to say 'We believe that…' which is a more intimate and personalised relationship to the message. The choice to express the phrase in this way affects the understanding of transitivity in the messaging implicit in the line.

'**Metaphor** is a poetically or rhetorically ambitious use of words, a *figurative* as opposed to *literal* use' (University 2016). Interpreters of American civil religion rely on examples of religious narrative comingling with the discourse of American political history and patriotism. These examples often take the form of metaphor to deliver complex and important topics in political rhetoric in a more accessible way. It is also an effective method of conveying concepts that touch on common humanity, shared feelings, and belief— all experiential concepts that are not as easily conveyed by dry textual explanation. Machin and Mayr note that metaphor is fundamental to the cognitive process, 'We understand experience the world through a network of

culturally established metaphors' (2012). Finally, metaphor is a prevalent tool for expression of religious teaching and there are several examples of religious metaphor linking the political to religious narratives within these speeches.

Having outlined the key terms, we can move into the specific electoral context of this chapter.

4.4 Speech Selection

As noted in Chapter 3, presidential elections are held every four years, with a general (nationwide) election taking place in November of the year prior to the new four-year term, that begins the following January. For example, in this chapter, the election took place on the 5th of November 2008 with Barack Obama taking the oath of office on the 20th January 2009, but his campaign kickoff event occurred 10 February 2007—nearly two years before he took office (Nagourney and Zeleny 2007).

In addition to timeline and media exposure considerations, when deciding which speeches to include, one of the first criteria to emerge was the need for content heavy speeches versus a campaign 'stump' speech. In the 2008 election cycle, these speeches were usually named, presented to a large live audience as well as received wide national coverage.

The first speech for each candidate, Barack Obama, and John McCain, is presented in greater depth to illustrate the methodology applied to all speeches, followed by synthesized analysis of the remaining speeches, and concluding with what the language reveals about the manifestation of American civil religion in the 2008 election cycle. All the speeches presented here: five titled speeches for Obama, four titled speeches for McCain, one speech delivered by vice-presidential candidate Sarah Palin (more on that below), which met these qualifications.

Why include a vice-presidential speech? As this project has developed, it has become apparent that presidential candidates themselves are not the only speakers on the 'ticket.' Presidential races are packaged as a ticket at the party nominating conventions. From that point forward (approximately 3-4 months) the two personalities on the ticket are branded as a unit and their message balanced as a whole. Therefore, when examining speech presented after that point, both people may contribute to the messaging of the ticket. Considering the strategy behind how

these nominees are paired could form its own research project, but we will narrow our scope to the narratives relevant to civil religion.

If a presidential candidate presents personal religiosity that falls within Christian norms that are traditionally accepted in the United States (with nearly 71% of the country identifying as Protestant or Catholic) then often the presence of religious language and narrative is consistently present for the presidential nominee, as is the case with Barack Obama (Wormald 2015). However, if the candidate did not present personal religiosity within such expectations, the ticket could be 'evened out' by the selection of a mainstream religious vice-presidential nominee to balance the ticket (Wormald 2015). Thus, even though some candidates for president do not invoke religious language to as high a degree, that doesn't translate to a lack of civil religious narrative on the presidential campaign ticket; it just comes from a voice that lends more credibility to the delivery: the vice-presidential nominee.

In this chapter, candidate John McCain required some balancing, which is discussed in his background section, hence we included Governor Sarah Palin's acceptance of the vice-presidential nomination. Later in Chapter 6, I include remarks from Governor Mike Pence vice-presidential nominee under candidate Donald J. Trump.

4.5 Context of the 2008 Presidential Election

4.5.1 Dominant issues in the public discourse

The Economy

The 2008 real estate market crash was in progress and banking collapses were well underway in the run up to the general election. In fact, investment firm Lehman Brothers collapsed six weeks before the general election. The economy was headed into dramatic recession and all candidates were faced with questions on the subject throughout the campaign season. The Inter-university Consortium for Political and Social Research (Prysby and Scavo 2008) notes that while McCain and Obama differed on where to lay blame for the financial crisis, both were primarily focused on establishing their own credibility in handling such events in the future (Prysby and Scavo 2008).

Foreign Policy:

Military action in Iraq and Afghanistan polarised the American electorate. Litmus tests for candidates regarding how they voted on sending troops into conflict were a major part of the election discourse, because Obama opposed the invasion of Iraq and McCain vocally supported it (Prysby and Scavo 2008) and the debunked claims of weapons of mass destruction that justified the war(McCain and Salter 2019). The candidates were largely united in their weariness about nuclear development in Iran.

Health Care:

Both candidates featured diametrically opposed health care policy ideas that were a significant point of dispute during the 2008 campaign. A Kaiser Family Foundation poll conducted in the primary election season cited 'healthcare ranked second among issues voters want policymakers to address — following only the war in Iraq — among Democrats, Republicans and Independents' (NPR 2008).

Technology

Of all the trends impacting the 2008 election, technology was among the most significant. 'Three-quarters (74%) of internet users went online during the 2008 election to take part in or get news and information about the 2008 campaign. This represents 55% of the entire adult population' (Smith 2009). Social media platforms like Facebook and Twitter amplified campaign messaging and media discourse triggering innovative messaging techniques and strategies, though targeting of outreach and advertisements by user groups was still developing as a tool of political discourse and persuasion.

Race

The presence of the first African American candidate for the presidency brought race to the forefront of the discussion. In several instances, Obama addressed formerly taboo topics such as race and racial division and outreach to other marginalised communities. Obama also faced significant racially tinged and religiously xenophobic pushback as an individual candidate, including persistent Islamophobic campaigns focusing on his name, his brief experience being educated in an Indonesian madrasa, and his lineage.

In addition to oppositional narratives attached to Obama's personal biography, his faith and attachment to Trinity United Church of Christ, a prominent Black activist church in Chicago, IL, to which Obama had confessed his faith and to which he attaches his shift from agnosticism to Christianity, was a significant media narrative throughout the election (Obama 2006, Frank 2009). In fact this connection and the coverage of the church's leader Rev. Jeremiah Wright's sermons, led directly to what is considered to be among Obama's most significant campaign speeches, 'A More Perfect Union', which is examined in Section 1.6.3, and focuses on the history of race and faith in the United States.

4.6 Presidential Candidate Barack Obama

4.6.1 Background and personal context

> Scrub language of all religious content and we forfeit the imagery and terminology through which millions of Americans understand both their personal morality and social justice. Imagine Lincoln's Second Inaugural Address without reference to 'the judgments of the Lord,' or King's 'I Have a Dream' speech without reference to 'all of God's children.' Their summoning of a higher truth helped inspire what had seemed impossible to move the nation to embrace a common destiny.
>
> (Obama 2006, p. 214)

In Barack Obama's book, The Audacity of Hope, he dives directly into the conversation we are having here (Obama 2006). How does faith integrate with the political in the United States and with American society, in his view? The answer is complex. He acknowledges that his own faith, while a bit late in coming, is strong and decidedly protestant. He is a member of an active Christian church in Chicago that he joined as a young professional working in the community. In his upbringing, faith and understanding of several of the major organised religions were present, engaged with (he attended both Catholic and Islam focused schools at various points) but not necessarily practiced (Obama 2006). Obama describes his choice to affiliate with a particular organised religious structure as a conscious decision based in large part on the relationship that church had with social change. As an activist and community organiser, this appealed (Obama 2006).

Obama's perception of the relationship of religion to community and political action is relevant to this work. As the opening quotation indicates, Obama clearly recognises the power of religious language in the political context, both in terms of message delivery and activating social change. In his biographical writing as well as some of the speeches sampled here, he acknowledges the value of religious organisations to implement elements of society often presumed to be secular (Obama 2006). Obama anchors his perception of faith in the political sphere with a long lens of constitutional and civic history which prove organised religion to be a powerful and effective tool of activism (2006, pp. 216-217). But he stops short of Bellah's connecting of events like the Puritan colonists and founding document composition to an ongoing narrative of American Civil Religion (1967). Instead Obama emphasises a need for the religious to 'translate their concerns into universal, rather than religion-specific, values (2006, p. 219). Despite this assertion, Obama's speech transcripts reveal quite a skew toward religious rhetoric that is decidedly Judaeo-Christian, as evidenced in the following speeches.

4.6.2 Speech Analysis- One key speech in methodological focus

Photo 1: Barack Obama speaks at Ebenezer Baptist church in Atlanta, Georgia

'The Great Need of the Hour' [15]

Barack Obama

Atlanta, Georgia[16]

(Obama 2008b)

This speech was presented on Martin Luther King Jr. Day at the church where King ministered during his life. The audience included religious and community leaders as well as members of the public. Because it addressed a significant social issue (racism and socio-economic division) and was delivered on a date of significance (Martin Luther King's Birthday, a national holiday), it received wide national media coverage.

Obama opens the speech with the biblical narrative of the felling of the walls at Jericho by the unified voices of the Israelites.[17] He goes on to tie this narrative back to the Civil Rights Movement and King's request for unity in the struggle for civil rights for African Americans. Throughout his speech Obama reinforces the need for unity amongst citizens of all races to overcome systemic racial divisions and create a more just United States of America, empowered by the example of the Israelites in his speech. But while this summary draws out some of the more obvious points in the speech which engage religious language and narrative, there is more detail to be found with the lens of critical discourse analysis.

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[15] Delivered 20 January 2008. Word count: 2610.

[16] Photo credit: https://www.atlantamagazine.com/news-culture-articles/message-hope-ebenezer-baptist-church-marks-mlk-day-powerful-service/

[17] In this biblical narrative, the nomadic Israelite, led by Joshua after having escaped bondage in Egypt, were seeking their promised land of settlement- Israel. They arrive at the city of Jericho, which is surrounded by a seemingly insurmountable wall. On arrival, Joshua is instructed by a messenger of God that the city is theirs, despite its defences. To take possession of the city, God tells Joshua to assemble his military and his priests, carrying the ark of the covenant and blowing trumpets, to march around the circle once per day, blasting the trumpets at the finish, for six days. On the seventh day, the assembled forces march the circle seven times, and on the final trumpet blast, the wall collapse and they take the city (Joshua 6:1-21)

4.6.3 Notable linguistic observations

Pronouns and Perspectives

This speech uses 'we/us' (first person, plural) pronouns throughout the text. Only specific, named individuals (Martin Luther King) or distinct groups abstracted as part of a narrative story (the Israelites, for example) or used as descriptors in concert with other groups (white folks, African Americans), receive pronouns that separate them from the 'we/us' connection between Obama and the audience; but even those identified groups are clearly folded into the 'we/us' Obama is speaking of.

Who are 'we/us'? Obama follows a clear and unbroken thread. 'we/us' begins as the Israelites, then includes African Americans through the Civil War and on to the Civil Rights Movement. 'we/us' then folds in 'White folks', 'North and South', 'Christians and Jews' and finally, 'we/us' are Americans (2008b). At no point is Obama, as speaker, or the audience alienated from this 'we/us' unit. We are Jews/Israelites, we are slaves; we are civil rights activists. We are white, we are African American, we are Christians, and we are Americans. There is no break in the links between these identities.

All of this is assumed, there is no question in the text; the choice of surrounding textual framing leaves no space for ambiguity. He drives the connection home with repetition of the phrase 'we cannot walk alone' (2008b). The link is never broken between Americans and the Israelites or the point of view of the oppressed. His message is unity toward a certain goal as one people—social justice.

Choice of nouns and nominalized actions

Obama's speech utilizes several religiously loaded terms in line with the Jericho narrative that opens it and then anchors the conclusion of it. Some notable choices include 'plight' instead of more neutral terms such as issues or problems; and using 'sacrifice' and 'forgive(ness)' when discussing policy like education and criminal justice. His final call to action toward the end of the speech is also decidedly non-secular, [the] 'Scripture tells us we are judged not just by word but by deed' (Obama 2008b).

Agenda/Ideology revealed through repeated terminology

It is clear from the second paragraph that the overarching theme of this speech is unity, encouraging Americans to work together for a more just existence for all. The repeated use of the word unity carries this agenda through the text. It is supported by further use of biblical references and Christianity associated terms and concepts, particularly the obligation that 'we' be our 'Brother's keeper,'[18] compelling the audience to utilize compassion, honour, moral obligation, and empathy.

Obama contrasts his ideal of unity with the lack of it, framed situationally with metaphor and religiously tinged terminology. For example, he refers to 'corridors of shame' to describe racially and economically disparate schools, and then turns that shame onto parties complicit in racial division: 'The believer condemns the non-believer as immoral and the non-believer chides the believer as intolerant' (Obama 2008b). He is engaging with a narrative of civil rights using religious terminology, linking the two ideas together from an ethical standpoint.

At the end of his speech, Obama circles back to the Jericho narrative, reinforcing unity and the concept of brothers and sisters' obligation to care for one another. Noting that, 'we have [metaphorical] walls—barriers to justice and equality- that must come down. To do this, we know that unity is the great need of the hour' (Obama 2008b). Finishing in a distinctly ministerial style, Obama incorporates the refrain from King's 'I Have a Dream' speech, 'We cannot walk alone' to drive home the unity concept that he is compelling 'we' Americans aspire to. After all, he has drawn a parallel between Americans acting in unity with the Israelites at Jericho, empowered to take down the divisive walls of racism. This speech is emblematic of Obama's overt use of religious language and style in his campaign. Whilst the context of this speech (delivered at Martin Luther King Jr's own church on the holiday commemorating his life) is a valid justification for such delivery, the language, and stylistic choices he makes here also recur in other contexts.

[18] Obama makes several references to the idea of being our 'brother's keeper' in his speeches. This refers to the story of Cain and Abel. In the text God asks Cain about his brother's welfare after Cain has murdered him. Cain questions, 'Am I my brother's keeper?' to which God reprimands and punishes Cain for neglecting his responsibility to care for his brother as he would himself (Genesis 4:9-14). In Obama's context, familial ties are not required for such treatment, harkening back to the so-called golden rule, 'do unto others as you would have done unto you' (Luke 6:31) which Obama openly asserts as one of his core values ((Obama 2006)

4.6.4 Expanded analysis

This section will reflect the analysis of the additional Obama speeches from the 2008 campaign. The first speech was delivered during the primary season to Democratic party voters in Iowa[19], and received significant media exposure (Obama 2007). Another selected speech, delivered at the National Constitution Center in Philadelphia[20] is entitled 'A More Perfect Union,' and became widely known as his 'speech on race', as it followed a persistent controversy regarding the pastor of his personal church, Reverend Jeremiah Wright (Obama 2008a). The third speech, delivered in Ohio[21] in July of 2008, links concepts of civic responsibility, religious faith, and institutions in remarks about the relationship between faith-based organisations and the American government. The final included speech is entitled 'The America We Love'[22] and was delivered in Independence, Missouri shortly before Independence Day 2008.

Contextual issues of selected speeches

Before diving into the linguistic aspects of Obama's selected speeches, some contextual factors should be considered. Firstly, it is important to note that while we are not examining the speech of George W. Bush, as the president completing his second term in 2008, his shadow loomed large over the 2007/08 campaigns, both in terms of contextual issues discussed previously (4.5.1), and by providing contrast to Obama's version of American civil religion.

Second, a bit more background into the controversy surrounding Obama's pastor, Rev. Jeremiah Wright[23], should be considered as framing for his speech on race. Wright's inflammatory remarks, anchored in Black liberation theology and rhetoric,

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[19] Delivered at the Jefferson-Jackson Dinner, Des Moines, IA, 10 November 2007. Word count: 1800. Iowa conducts the first state-wide election in the country and sets the trend for other states. The J-J Dinner is a marquee event of the primary election calendar as all candidates at this early stage of the race speak, it is held shortly before the caucuses and draws an enormous crowd. The event receives significant media coverage. In the case of Obama, this speech is widely seen as the tipping point that pushed his position ahead of Hillary Clinton in the Iowa race.
[20] Delivered 18 March 2008. Word count: 4868.
[21] Delivered 1 July 2008. Word count: 2610.
[22] Delivered 30 June 2008. Word count 3410.
[23] Five days previous, ABC News broadcast excerpts from Rev. Wright showing him at the pulpit cursing America and using other inflammatory language regarding racial oppression of black people by and in the United States, including references attributing the 9/11 attacks as justice for American involvement with Israel. The original article can be found here: https://abcnews.go.com/Blotter/DemocraticDebate/story?id=4443788&page=1 (Ross 2008).

ignited a conversation about racial divisions in the United States. Most dominant in the media narrative was this excerpt from a recorded sermon, originally delivered in 2003:

> Not 'God Bless America', God Damn America! That's in the Bible, for killing innocent people. God Damn America for treating her citizens as less than human. God Damn America as long as she keeps trying to act like she is God and she is supreme!
>
> (Wright 2003)

As the media coverage of the Wright story continued, it became increasingly clear that Obama would need to address the topic, and he chose to do so by clarifying his own perspective on faith and what it meant to be a citizen of the same country that enslaved one's ancestors. Scholars like Frank note a connection between Obama and the prophetic voice of King and others who engaged faith to battle for civil rights, to which Wright also owes a significant homage, particularly in this address (2009). He writes of this particular speech: 'at the core of the speech is the prophetic tradition, with its fundamental assumptions that all human beings are made in the image of God, that the traces of God are found in the face of the other, and that humans have an obligation to recognize and care for their brothers and sisters' (Frank 2009, p. 190). But this speech speaks to more than the civil rights issue due to Obama's repeated calls for unity in several directions, all under the umbrella of common American goodness. Nevertheless, this contextual framing helps us analyse Obama's words more clearly. With these factors in mind, we move to the language.

Linguistic analysis

Both when his audience is primarily of his own political party and later when his audience widened to the entire nation, Obama makes rhetorical choices that link religion and civil responsibility and patriotism. In Iowa, Obama is more subtle in his insertion of religiously tinged language. He speaks of the flawed 'mission' of 'compassionate conservativism'[24] and his own desire for the nation to 'believe again' in their government. He emphasises the nation's potential by citing other influential

[24] Per Kuypers, et al, 'Compassionate conservatism redefines the Welfare State in new terms as well; instead of railing against government, compassionate conservatives "promote active benevolence in all sectors of civil society and to institute results-driven competition within social welfare bureaucracies, federal, state, and local" (Dorrien 2003).

Americans who feature in the American civil religion narrative, including Kennedy, who he notes acted on 'conviction', and 'summoned the entire nation to a common purpose-a higher purpose,' inspiring 'an America that believes again' (Obama 2007). Obama returns to this idea in his Missouri speech, when focusing on what patriotism means (2008c). In doing so he invokes the founders of the nation and the text of the Declaration of Independence, 'We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal. That they are endowed by their creator with certain unalienable rights…' and presidents such as Washington and Lincoln, noting that the 'willingness to sacrifice' on behalf of America's ideals is a component of patriotism. According to Obama in this speech, part of being a patriot is 'the belief that [America] can be made better. . . that our revolution was waged for the sake of that belief' (Jefferson 1776, Obama 2008c). The combination of these references link quite closely to Bellah's theory of civil religion, and is one of the more clear allusions to his aspirational mandate that the nation has an obligation to live up to its exceptional blessings (1967).

In the Iowa speech (2007a), Obama does not reference specific biblical narratives or God, as he did in the first speech we examined. Instead, it is primarily in his word choice that Obama injects religious undertone- speaking of 'mission' and contrasting his perspective on being our 'brother's keeper' with 'compassionate conservatism' both of which attach religious agenda to civic responsibility. Obama's mission here is one of internal striving as a nation, living up to the ideals it was founded upon, framed in juxtaposition to the more outward facing compassionate conservatism of the Bush presidencies.

When Obama returned to the national audience in March and July of 2008, religious references become overt. As noted Obama begins and ends his speech in Atlanta with an overt reference to the Israelites and felling of the walls of Jericho (Obama 2008b). In his speech on race in Philadelphia, Obama he begins with the preamble to the constitution, 'We the people, in order to form a more perfect union…' (Rosen and Rubenstein 2021) then follows with the ambitions of the founding fathers and writers of the document; an achievement he that is marred by America's 'original sin[25] of

[25] The concept of 'original sin' refers to the first sin committed before God, which was the fall of Adam and Eve. Previously nameless and without shame, they are coerced to eat the fruit of the forbidden tree against God's express instructions. Their punishment for the sin is to be cast from paradise. The concept of shame is also introduced to the narrative by their recognition of their nakedness, subsequent clothing to cover and punishment upon discovery of their actions by God. (Genesis 3)

slavery' (Obama 2008a). As discussed in Chapter 2, Bellah also designates slavery and the American Civil War as the pivotal point in the American civil religion narrative, tying it to Lincoln's leadership as a Jesus-like figure. For Bellah the abolishment of the sin of slavery was the anchoring event of the United States striving toward its potential, with its abolition, the nation emerged unified—reborn (1967, 47-48). Obama's speech follows this line of thought, but with a different biblical reference. He speaks of African American slaves' delivery from 'bondage,' a reference to Moses' deliverance of the Hebrew slaves from Egyptian captivity[26] (Exodus 1-13), to a unified freedom embodied by full citizenship of the United States for all Americans; a country Obama describes as worthy of such faith. 'This belief comes from my unyielding faith in the decency and generosity of the American People' a decency not achieved until after resolution of that original sin of slavery (Obama 2008a).

Obama follows this by emphasising unity, a value also highlighted in Bellah's conception of the reborn United States. He cites both the unification of races and the unification of multiple religious faiths under the umbrella of forming that 'more perfect union.'

He speaks to his own personal religious journey, but then returns to the comingling of civic responsibility, the ideals of American citizenship and the need for unification in combatting racial divisions and inequality:

> In the end, then, what is called for is nothing more, and nothing less, than what all the world's great religions demand, that we do unto others as we would have them do unto us. Let us be our brother's keeper, scripture tells us, let us be our sister's keeper. Let us find that common stake we all have in one another and let our politics reflect that spirit as well.
>
> (Obama 2008a)

[26] The narrative of Moses as told in the book of Exodus is prominent in discussion of Civil Religion and will appear throughout the project. A brief overview of the story as written in the text begins with the description of the suffering Hebrew people enslaved in Egypt. Moses, their eventual deliverer, was promised, raised in anonymity, and then was revealed as their reluctant but divinely mandated representative of God's will. The chapter continues with the confrontation with the Egyptian Pharaoh who refuses to release them and is punished with a series of plagues until he relents. The book progresses beyond this to the journeys of the Jews and the revelation of God's word to Moses and their disgrace before God. However most American Civil Religion engagement with the chapter stops after the slaves leave Egypt (Exodus 1-10).

In selecting this language, Obama links the notions of faith in God, faith in the American People, and faith in the nation together as intrinsic and irrefutable.

In his speech about faith-based organisations, Obama speaks of his personal religiosity from the outset, then quickly links 'God's will' to the 'Lord's work' and 'community service' as the anchor of his own faith, and that of millions of Americans (2008d). In his previous speeches, the concept of being our 'brother/sister's keeper' was tied to idealized American citizenship in line with the founding documents of the nation (2008a, 2008b). In this speech, Obama returns to the concept to further integrate the faith-based and civic discourses, while carefully distinguishing between the sharing of tasks and values and infringing upon other faiths. Noting the misuse of public office to promote specific faith groups over another, he clearly advocates for all faiths to be unified toward common civic responsibilities without such elevation. Interestingly, Obama uses very precise and neutral language to outline the specific policies and rules that surround such cooperation. However, when discussing the underlying values that support such unified cooperation, the separation is less clear. In supporting the idea of interfaith cooperation and interaction between faith-based organisations and government bodies, he anchors it in shared faith and values that Americans share in both realms, 'We know that faith and values can be a source of strength in our own lives. . . But it can [also] be something more. It can be the foundation of a new project of American renewal' (Obama 2008d).

Yet in describing struggles of faith-based organisations to acquire government funding for community works, a sticky church v. state issue, Obama discusses 'how to navigate a government website', 'getting technical assistance' and 'lack of knowledge about how the system works' as opposed to churches 'providing' a service, 'working with' government actors and agencies- language choices which speak to active cooperative engagement (2008d). This is a distinct structural difference to the way he discusses the beliefs that inspire such work, for example: 'What I'm saying is that we all have to work together- Christian and Jew, Hindu and Muslim, believer and non-believer alike to meet the challenges of the 21st century' (Obama 2008d). When he is discussing government procedural interaction with faith, the language is quite formal. When discussing belief and common American values, quite personal.

When discussing the controversial points in Wright's remarks and his personal interaction with his church and upbringing, Obama takes it only on himself and the

other named party: Rev. Wright. The speech audience of fellow Americans who endeavor to form that 'more perfect union' are separate from both men in those passages (2008a). However, when he returns to his refrain for unity, he also returns to the 'we.' Obama does not separate himself from his fellow Americans except when discussing difficult topics and his personal religious history.

A final factor that must be considered is structural composition of the speeches themselves. It is not uncommon for speeches to begin and end with the same theme. But in the case of Obama, the beginning and ending refrain are often intrinsically linked to a narrative that is strongly reminiscent of the one Bellah paints in his original essay. From beginning with Jericho when discussing civil rights whilst invoking Martin Luther King Jr., to transitioning from the Constitution and founding fathers directly into the notion of original sin as it relates to slavery and the potential rebirth of the nation, Obama's speeches normalize the link between religious narratives and terminology and the ideals of American citizenship. The decision to feature these links at the start and finish of his speeches offers elevated attention to this connection.

4.6.5 Conclusions—Obama 2008 presidential campaign

In most of his remarks, Barack Obama speaks as one with his audience, allowing him to embody a unified message. There is very little 'I' in an Obama speech, nearly always, it is 'WE': we are believers, we are citizens, we are Americans; we share values, we depend on one another. With few, quite specific exceptions, there is little disconnect between the point of view of the audience and the speaker. When he does choose to speak from a first person, singular perspective, there is a reason. In the speeches sampled here, when Obama separates himself from the audience it was, 1) when discussing his personal religious journey and history regarding his controversial pastor, Jeremiah Wright, and 2) when he outlined the separate paths necessary to protect religious freedom procedurally when funding government programs and faith-based organisations (2008a, 2008d). In the latter, he was an 'I' when discussing implementation and procedures, but a 'we' when discussing the shared faith and values that supported the promotion of faith-based community work (2008d). In these more challenging moments, he also chooses more clinical language, and many of the verbs are nominalized, which inserts a linguistic distance—and removes the element of responsibility for the act itself. Instead, it is about the result.

Concepts that feature strongly in religious teachings also consistently appear in Barack Obama's remarks. Prioritisation of these connections is supported by the deliberate use of certain words that evoke religious connotation. The choice to use words like 'plight', 'sacrifice', 'forgive' and phrases like 'corridors of shame' and 'good works'; or 'conviction' and 'higher purpose' (Obama 2007) continue the religious tone that is initiated when a speech begins with the story of Jericho (2008b) or the iconic beginnings of the forming documents of the United States (2008a). In several speeches, Obama links good citizenship and the idea of being an American ideal with the concept of being one's 'brother/sister's keeper', reinforcing the idea that only by incorporating this biblical concept of community, will the United States reach full potential promised in the founding documents (2008d, 2008b, 2008c). When discussing slavery and the struggles of African Americans both pre-Civil War and throughout the civil rights movement, Obama uses obviously compatible references from Exodus such as 'deliverance from bondage'; but his choice to designate slavery as America's 'original sin' is one of the clearest connections he makes to the narrative Bellah follows in his theory of American civil religion (Bellah 1967) (Obama 2008a). Terms such as 'mission,' 'faith,' the will of God as morally correct and above all, unity: unity of faiths, unity of race, unity of access to resources and the resulting reduction of inequality are key to Obama's concept of the American Dream.

These are framed as aspirational in his speeches, as he is often in search of a 'more perfect union,' but the insinuation throughout is that it is the destiny of the country to personify this embodiment of citizenship. The alignment of Obama and Bellah's aspirational views of American civil religion is not surprising to see. Bellah endorsed Obama's presidency in a 2008 editorial, noting that his values seemed to offer hope for American civil religion's promise, tempered with a bit of skepticism (Bellah 2008b).

4.7 Presidential Candidate John McCain

4.7.1 Background and personal context

Senator John McCain's political identity was associated with two dominant narratives, that of being a self-declared 'maverick,' a subversive rule-breaker in nearly all his endeavours; and his military service—McCain is the most well-known prisoner of war in US military history, having been held captive and tortured in a Vietnamese prison for more than five years (McFadden 2018). On his return from Vietnam, McCain, who was of a multigenerational high ranking military family, his experience in captivity was widely covered in the media and he was honoured by multiple presidents prior to beginning his congressional career in 1982 (McFadden 2018).

Much of McCain's public religiosity was intertwined with his military experience. He often related stories of a guard who was merciful and expressed that he was Christian. McCain and his fellow captives were moved by the guard's actions,

> I will never forget the fact that no matter where you are, no matter how difficult things are, there's always going to be someone of your faith and your belief and your devotion to your fellow man who will pick you up and help you out and bring you through.
>
> (Liu 2008b)

And yet, despite public declarations of his faith as a central tenet of his survival of captivity, by the time he ran for president, first in 2000 and then in the 2008 election, his credibility with some elements of the Republican party was questioned. The reasons cited for this scepticism include his divorce from his first wife, who was a media presence during his captivity and return, and remarriage in 1982 to his second wife Cindy (Serrano and Vartabedian 2008). Their relationship was widely understood to have begun while he was still with his first wife. He also switched denominations, having been raised and married as Episcopalian and then remarried and continued in an evangelical Baptist church in Arizona, where he relocated after his return from Vietnam. These changes coincided with his entry into politics and, for some, contributed to a perception that his faith may be performative (Liu 2008b).

Being contrasted with an overtly religious president like George W. Bush these elements became even more glaring. McCain's first campaign in 2000 was directly against Bush, it was a campaign that McCain that shaped his image-craft in 2008.

McCain was burned from the right by Bush' superior credibility with conservative evangelicals despite having built a lead in the polls with a reform agenda and candid and frequent access to McCain by the media. His campaign messaging in 2008 was much more carefully focused (Brownstein 2018).

These factors may have contributed to his choice of a vice-presidential running mate who was known for being both explicitly evangelical and conservative, and relatable 'average 'hockey mom,'' Alaska Governor Sarah Palin (Palin 2008a). Palin provided a counterbalance to McCain's low religious credibility with the evangelical right. She is unequivocally pro-life when McCain had voted to allow exceptions to abortion bans. She had used her first veto as governor to block legislation adding to gay rights in Alaska, and she was a married mother of five with a military son. She too had a history of switching churches and denominations, but it didn't seem to matter much. When asked what her religion was, 'Palin responded, 'Christian.' When asked if she was any particular type of Christian, she answered, 'No. Bible-believing Christian', when in actuality she was associated with the Pentecostal Assemblies of God, an answer that may have drawn more scrutiny from evangelicals (Liu 2008a, Healey 2010).

This choice to shore up McCain's conservative credibility with Palin means that proper understanding of the discourse of the presidential campaign ticket should include at least something from Palin. Her perspective is included by way of her acceptance speech at the Republican National Convention, which was nationally televised. In the next chapter we will see another Republican ticket that had this sort of balancing of religious credibility with Romney and Ryan. There is a bit more post-mortem research as to why and whether this type of offset matching is effective in the context of that election. Hence, we will dig a bit deeper into that decision in Chapter 5.

To begin the analysis of the McCain presidential campaign rhetoric, we will go in depth with one speech, followed by a more integrated analysis of additional McCain speeches and one Palin speech.

4.7.2 Speech Analysis – One key speech in methodological focus

Photo 2: McCain Announces Palin as running mate in Ohio

'Vision for Defending the Freedom and Dignity of the World's Vulnerable'[27]

John McCain

Rochester, Michigan[28]

(McCain 2008d)

John McCain delivered this speech at Oakland University in Rochester, Michigan to clarify his position on America's role in human rights issues domestically and internationally. He begins with reference to Abraham Lincoln and the Civil War, presenting Lincoln as the optimal example of an American leader facing human rights atrocities. He continues with the adoption of William Wilberforce (interestingly, since he was British), as another exemplary abolitionist. The choice of Wilberforce is significant. He was a devout and notoriously vocal evangelical Christian whose political decisions were openly motivated by his faith. McCain welcomes Wilberforce's message not only because of his repute as an abolitionist in England but also because he was, like Lincoln and the abstract exemplary American, a 'humble Christian' man (McCain 2008d).

4.7.3 Notable linguistic observations

Pronouns and Perspectives

In sharp contrast to Obama's speech, which used 'we/us' almost exclusively, in this speech, McCain uses 'I,' juxtaposed with an abstraction of a collective United States of America as an individual entity capable of action. The resulting impression is a speaker (McCain) positioned as leading the collective United States as shepherd of

[27] Delivered 7 May 2008. Word count: 2262.

[28] https://www.mercurynews.com/2008/08/29/mccain-picks-alaska-gov-sarah-palin-for-vp/

the righteous movement against injustice. While the audience of this speech is clearly American, they aren't necessarily included in the collective USA McCain describes, *unless* they fall within the righteous parameters described in the speech. McCain presents an aspirational concept of the United States citizenry, separate from the audience or those being led—i.e., 'You too can be a leader if you are righteous' as opposed to the idea that 'we are all in this together' in Obama's speech. McCain does use 'we' occasionally, but in an aspirational sense: 'we are/should be' doing this or behaving in this way and 'they' (the other/the 'evil'/the oppressor) are lesser than 'we.'

All individuals referred to in the speech are named. However, victims of oppression are not specified in the same way but are more generalized abstractions participating in the situational narrative: there are atrocities that exist, there are victims and (non-USA) oppressors, and the collective USA (and its leaders) have a responsibility to rescue/reform these situations. This consistent othering elevates the collective America as the exemplary, righteous nation, possessing the right and obligation to be the moral ideal and disciplinarian of those straying from the ideal (globally, not just domestically).

Choice of nouns & nominalised actions:

McCain utilizes terms that continue the religious connotation begun in the opening paragraph. McCain uses terms like 'blessings', 'virtue', 'conscience' and 'crusade' when referring to the privileges of the United States and their role as an advocate for vulnerable people in a variety of contexts, including human trafficking and modern slavery (McCain 2008d).

Agenda/Ideology revealed through repeated terminology

The type of modality (4.3) in this speech is particularly powerful. More than a repeated enunciated message (unity), the framing of the speaker (a 'humble, Christian man'), the audience (aspiring), the collective USA (righteous and responsible for maintaining that righteousness) with the subjugated, problematic situations. McCain addresses creates a distinct power dynamic. The reinforcement of this relationship with clear individual 'I' pronouns creates an unmistakably authoritative tone. There is no ambiguity as to whether the idealized America he describes and acts on behalf of as speaker is legitimate or questionable- it is assumed

and obvious. There is tremendous power in presenting the message with this implied authority, the only perception left open to the audience is that it must be correct.

As McCain concludes,

> Ours is a nation with a conscience and thank God we are. As William Wilberforce said so many years ago, 'When we think of eternity, and of the future consequences of all human conduct, what is there in this life that should make any man contradict the dictates of his conscience, the principles of justice, the laws of religion, and of God?
>
> (McCain 2008d)

4.7.4 Expanded analysis

This section will reflect the analysis of three additional McCain speeches from the 2008 campaign as well as one speech from running mate Sarah Palin. The analysis will synthesise content from McCain's remarks in Atlanta, Georgia[29] where he addresses the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (2008b). Second, his remarks claiming the Republican presidential nomination by delegate count in March 2008 (2008c), and finally his speech accepting the official nomination at the Republican National Convention (McCain 2008a)[30]. Palin's speech is also from that event, her acceptance of the vice-presidential nomination(Palin 2008b).

Further engagement with McCain's remarks indicates his affinity to bring faith into his rhetoric around two primary narratives: mission and the correlation between good citizens and good Christians. In his speech in Atlanta, Georgia on the anniversary of Martin Luther King Jr.'s assassination, he connects King's achievements in the Civil Rights Movement and as a Christian man, to those of the founding fathers and to the mission of the United States in the world. He does so literally, noting that King's 'arguments were unanswerable and they were familiar, the case always resting on the writings of the founders, the teachings of the prophets, and the Word of the Lord' (McCain 2008b). And he does so with vocabulary choices, when referring to racially motivated violence and the fight for human rights as 'Struggle. . .rewarded in God's own time' and as 'evil', 'moral badness' and 'the enemy' to be overcome (McCain 2008b). Like his reference to Wilberforce in the previous

[29] Delivered 4 April 2008. Word count: 1558.
[30] Delivered 1 September 2008. Word count: 8399.

speech (2008d), McCain correlates King's Christian goodness with his identity as an American, 'the story of the man we honor today. . . is the story of our country' (2008b). Though he engages with the 'we/our' in this speech more often than in others, most of the time there is a distance between his 'I' and the audience or subjects he is engaging. In the case of this speech, it is particularly notable how consistently McCain distances actions related to racism and oppression. These are almost exclusively phrased as nominalized realities: 'the scorn of the world,' 'petty cruelties', 'moral badness', and 'moral blindness'(2008a). This is a choice, to inject this distance, yet include the vivid word choice harkening to the moral standard King embodied. But it does not engage with who or how these cruelties were executed, nor of the repercussions. McCain doesn't get too close to sin in the way he directly engages Christian ideals King embodied.

McCain's tendency to stick with the 'I/you' dynamic continues through his speeches. He very rarely engages the 'we/our' except in cases where he speaks of the idealised American self. For example, in a speech delivered on the night he secured the Republican nomination[31], he noted 'I do believe we are born with responsibilities to the country that has protected our God-given rights and the opportunities they afford us. . .part of a kinship of ideals that have always represented the last, best hope of mankind' (McCain 2008c). This tendency to position himself as the leader of the flock is in line with Wuthnow's concept of Civil Religion in the Priestly/Prophetic turn (1988, 1988b, 2011). His assertion was that the conservative thread of civil religion perpetuated the narrative of an elevated America serving as shepherd for global righteousness fits with the separation that the McCain ticket inserts into their rhetoric. McCain sticks with the first person, but also takes it further in some speeches, referring to Obama merely as 'my opponent' and the rare 'we' he includes is exclusive to those who adhere to the standards of the elect American citizenry (McCain 2008b).

McCain's convention acceptance speech is quite issue heavy and therefore a bit lighter on religious references, however he does invoke his personal history as a prisoner of war to bring in a concept that his running mate, Sarah Palin will also utilize, the idea of 'servant leadership' (McCain 2008a). The notion of a 'servant's heart' or 'servant leadership' ties to Jesus' example as a leader with humility and

[31] Delivered 4 March 2008. Word count: 1324.

grace, for whom no task or petitioner is beneath his best work. It is emphasised in the gospels of the New Testament, particularly John 13 , and while not clearly a coded reference in the vein of Mclaughlin and Wise's work, it would most certainly be recognizable terminology for evangelicals in the Republican base (Maxwell 2019, Anonymous 1998, McLaughlin and Wise 2014). In this speech, McCain frames himself as an 'imperfect servant of my country for many years. But I've been her servant first, last, and always. And I've never lived a day. . .that I didn't thank God for the privilege' (2008a). He goes on to frame his misfortunes, including his capture during the Vietnam War, as blessings; but with a caveat: 'I'm not running for president because I think I'm blessed with such personal greatness that history has anointed me to save our country in its hour of need,' distancing himself a bit from the Christ metaphor (2008a).

To bring in further context, it is interesting to examine how vice-presidential nominee Sarah Palin presents the ticket's position to this narrative. It is, useful to note that vice-presidential candidates are often the aggressors in a campaign, taking on the opponent very directly and harshly. Governor Palin was no different in this regard. As noted in the background section, part of the motivation for her selection was to reinforce the family values and evangelical support where McCain had demonstrated weakness against George W. Bush in 2000. Therefore, it is unsurprising that in her formal nomination acceptance speech[32] Palin speaks a lot about family and the length of her marriage and fidelity, about her large family, and that her tone and vocabulary is much more overtly religious. Her speech is almost call and response in style. She speaks of her 'servant's heart' and that being 'spirit' which will carry her in her duties as vice-president (Palin 2008b). When she discusses John McCain, she leans strongly into the mission narrative, and McCain's unbroken 'faith' with his personal and military missions and the troops.

Interestingly, she does keep with the 'I/you' dynamic of McCain's speeches, there are almost no collective references. She diverges from McCain's distanced style is in engaging antagonistically with Obama's religiously tinged narrative of America. She mockingly compares Obama to Moses, 'What does he actually seek to accomplish after he's done turning back the waters and healing the planet?'(Palin 2008b). In this remark she correlates his climate policy with one of the more unrealistic events in the

[32] Delivered 3 September 2008. Word count: 2994.

Bible. She returns to this tone of pushback later, characterizing his ministerial style of speech as 'the idealism of high-flown speech-making, in which crowds are stirringly summoned to support great things,' in contrast to McCain's hands on mission related works. Her engagement with religious terminology and narratives are usually serving to either reinforce the Christian credibility of the ticket with her own example, or mockingly to undermine assertions on the democratic side. She drops in some supportive references to McCain's mission and priestly narrative of America's sacred purpose, but his speeches carry the weight of that message. She is a bolster to that structure.

4.7.5 Conclusions—McCain/Palin 2008 presidential campaign

John McCain, and Palin by proxy, primarily engage with religious terms in a way which ties quite closely to interpretations of civil religion from the conservative, priestly point of view, positioning the US the exceptional example with responsibility to shepherd others onto the righteous path (Monnet 2012) (Wuthnow, 2011, 1988, 1988a). By nature of his personal profile and military history, McCain does not follow the personal faith narrative that Bush did before him, but ties notions of faith to both what it is to be a good American and a good soldier. The morality of the nation is the morality of a Christian God per his remarks and that endows the country with certain privileges and responsibilities. Palin reinforces his credibility with her more overt delivery of the most conservative policy positions: pro-life, family values, pro-military, and by taking the digs at Obama's positioning of himself as a good Christian that McCain could not take himself, due to his own flaws.

4.8 Notable Observations- 2008 Election Cycle

If, as Gorski (2017) notes, there is a canon and pantheon of figures that are essential to American civil religion, they would be the historic events I described earlier: the founding of the nation and founding documents, the US Civil War, the Civil Rights Movement and assassinations of the 1960s; and the leaders would have to include Washington, Lincoln, Martin Luther King Jr; all were alluded to or name-checked here. McCain's speeches reveal much of the priestly element of American civil religion described by Wuthnow (1988, 2011), but he also includes a social justice element that is inconsistent with the conservative element. Obama is also remarkably close to the Bellah's existing line in this speech, outlining a unitarian viewpoint with social justice at the fore. Both speakers allude to the American Civil War as a seminal event in the evolution of the character of the country, in line with American civil religion; Obama by referring to 'north and south' a phrase that is deliberately tied to that notion of separation and rebirth into a unified form, and McCain by referring to Lincoln and the abolition of slavery outright. McCain also refers to the American revolution in his clearest link to the American civil religion narrative, referring to 'the sense of virtue that made our revolution a moral as well as political crusade' (McCain 2008d).

4.9 Conclusion

Having established the seeds of civil religious narratives, some overt and some subtle, from the 2008 election by examining Obama and McCain's speeches, Chapter 5 will move on to the 2012 election. It is a cycle in which Obama moves from a relatively unknown, new candidate to incumbent president, which comes with a slate of privileges and messaging advantages, as well as the baggage of three years running the country. His opponent is former contender from the 2008 Republican primary options, Willard 'Mitt' Romney, whose personal religiosity affects his candidacy greatly.

Chapter 5 : The 2012 Election

5.1 Introduction

Chapter 4 focused on the 2008 cycle, an open election in that it had no incumbent candidate because President G.W. Bush had served the maximum two terms. Of those candidates, Barack Obama had a very short history in national politics and thus his position on issues, including perspectives on religion in political and civic discourse, was a relatively blank slate. This was a stark contrast with his primary Democratic competition, Hilary Clinton, who had an extensive history in public life. John McCain had a much longer history of in the US Senate and public figure. But McCain was a candidate who branded himself a 'maverick'; he bucked trends, followed no one, and disagreed with many. As such, his narrative of civil religion was deliberately independent from his Republican predecessor. The 2012 election cycle, addressed in this chapter, requires understanding not only the words used in the 2012 campaign, but the connections between these and other speeches delivered over time and in some cases, delivered overseas, despite being part of the presidential campaign

Candidate Obama is now incumbent President Obama, which brings with it advantages (name recognition, significant free media exposure), the precedent of his 2008 campaign, his messaging as President, and a policy track record that has brought him far greater exposure than his two years in the US Senate had done by 2008. In examining his speeches, I account for the influence of incumbency and presidential messaging when evaluating his choice of words in the 2012 campaign.

The second candidate in the 2012 presidential race is Willard 'Mitt' Romney, a former governor of Massachusetts and one of the most prominent Mormons in the country. In addition to his personal and political history he was also a leading presidential candidate in 2008, eventually losing the nomination to McCain after leading the race for months. Thus, his messaging regarding religion and civic responsibility began prior to the 2012 election cycle, when he ran for President in 2007. To ensure that I give a complete view of Romney's presentation of civil religion, we must start there, for his speech on faith in 2007 set the tone for his messaging in the 2012 cycle.

This chapter will follow the format of Chapter 4, beginning with the speech selection process, then offering discursive context of the 2012 election, followed by Obama in

focus, then Romney, and concluding with notable observations that tie the findings of each to narratives of American Civil religion.

5.2 Speech Selection

As in the 2008 election, the speeches selected from 2012 candidates focus on remarks with significant content that goes beyond the biographical or stump speech. They are often titled and carry an issue focus. President Barack Obama, as he did much of the introductory heavy lifting in 2008, 2012 speeches are in a different place on the narrative timeline of his political life. After nearly two years of campaigning in 2007-08, and three years as President, he is known to the electorate. Obama also does not need to persuade his party's primary voters- he runs unopposed, rather his goal with Democrats is to ensure their enthusiastic support so they turn out to the polls. He also an incumbent candidate, so the issues that he addresses are often based on his policy successes and failures during his first term as President. The impact of incumbency and a term as President has on campaign approach and language will be explored in its own section (5.4.1). That said, there is a continuation of the relationship between faith and political discourse remains in his speeches, though delivered more subtly.

For Romney as well, but for different reasons, his candidacy must be framed retrospectively to contextualise his perspectives in the 2012 cycle. Although he does not win the nomination until 2012, he was one of the top two candidates in the 2008 campaign. Much of his biography and personal religiosity (especially relevant in his case, he is a prominent leader in the Reformed Latter-Day Saints Church) was established for the American public in the first 9 months of the 2007/08 campaign cycle. We explore his history in section 5.5.1 of this chapter, and in the context of that analysis, we begin his speech analysis by focusing on one delivered during the 2007/08 campaign, followed by an exploration of several speeches in 2012. The purpose of singling out Romney's 2007/08 speech in focus was 1) to demonstrate the depth of methodological application to each candidate is consistent (speeches were presented in focus for each candidate), and 2) to establish his perspective on religion and government. This speech was in response to push back from rivals about his faith and objectivity, and his media exposure as the Republican frontrunner at the time meant it was widely disseminated. Thus, its inclusion is necessary to understand his 2012 presentation of religion and civic responsibility.

Finally, some speeches included in this election cycle were not delivered in the United States and we acknowledge others which where the line between President and Candidate is difficult to parse. Presidential candidates frequently include a foreign policy tour as part of their campaigns, and they receive similar coverage and media exposure (sometimes more so) to domestically delivered remarks. But such speeches are often fairly generic and stick to policy and precedence established by the incumbent President, making them less relevant for this research. However, in the case of the speeches included here, the transcripts illustrate key elements of how the way Romney presents the relationship of religion, religious narratives and the political responsibilities of individual citizens and the nation, in relation to the countries (Poland and Israel) being addressed. For Obama, his role as President is unavoidable and I was careful to avoid incorporating presidential speeches into the sample, acknowledgment of the continuity of some narratives through his presidency is necessary to properly contextualise his 2012 campaign speech.

5.3 Context of the 2012 Presidential Election

5.3.1 Dominant issues in public discourse

The Economy

As noted in the previous chapter, the economic collapse of 2008 was just beginning at the point of the election in November 2008, thus economic recovery was a significant issue of the first term of Obama's presidency and the cost of initiatives to stimulate economic growth created a spin-off issue—concern about a budget deficit; though there is about a 20 point differential between democratic party voters (lower concern) and Republican voters on this issue (Pew 2012a).

Health Care

As President, Barack Obama focused much of his first term on the passage of the Affordable Care Act and Reconciliation Act (commonly known as the ACA or Obamacare), which was signed into law in March of 2010 (Services 2021). While nearly two years had passed by the time the campaigns got off the ground, the issue was still paramount in public discourse, with 74% of registered voters indicating it was 'very important' to their vote—second only to fiscal concerns (economy/jobs) (Pew 2012a). The Affordable Care Act enacted a federal mandate; however, the full

implementation of the act was dependent on state level cooperation and political division on the act continued to be contentious. Additionally, public opinion was tepid and sceptical, with favourability of the ACA hovering around 44% (45% opposed) around the time of the 2012 campaign season (Blendon et al. 2012).

Complicating this issue was candidate Mitt Romney's personal background as Governor of Massachusetts. During his term, Massachusetts had been the first to implement a centralised health care system at the state level and many had cited Romney's example as a positive precedent when lobbying for the ACA (Summers 2011). This created a problematic conflict for Romney as the Republican presidential candidate as one who had policy commonalities with the Democrats.

Terrorism

The topic of terrorism is interesting in the context of 2012 not because it was a growing concern, but because it diminished significantly since the 2008 campaign, with registered voters designating the issue as 'very important' dropping from 68% in 2008, 71% in 2010, to 59% in 2012 (Pew 2012a). Some attributed this drop to the killing of Osama bin Laden in May 2011 (Administration 2021) and a subsequent bump in Obama's foreign policy credibility with the public (Zengerle 2011). This is of interest to this project because, as was demonstrated in McCain's speeches in Chapter 4, religious rhetoric and American civil religion are often positioned within the context of America's role in foreign policy, especially by Republican speakers.

The role of social media

Beginning with the 2008 election, the role of social media outlets like Facebook and Twitter as a mechanism for political discourse increased rapidly. In 2008, this development was primarily a tool for pushing campaign messaging out to targeted voter groups as well as small donation fundraising directly from candidate campaigns and political parties, led primarily by the Obama campaign and the Democratic National Committee. In 2012, social media began generating a more complex discourse between the input of individuals, multi-level partisan campaigns, Political Action Committees (PACs), and media stories pushed out individual platforms. It also became apparent that much of the narrative on social media platforms skewed very negatively compared to other coverage, especially on Twitter. The Pew institute noted this shift, 'Twitter and Facebook, users were consistently more negative than

positive about both candidates—although Romney fared somewhat worse (Pew 2012a). The increasing power of social media corresponded with a diminishing return for more traditional media outlets like television, and consequently was a narrative unto itself.

Obama's underperformance

As will be discussed in more depth in the following section, the presentation of an incumbent candidate can be quite different to that of an emerging, new candidate. Throughout the 2012 election cycle, there was a persistent narrative that President Obama was underperforming compared to past incumbent presidential candidates. This reached a peak after the first televised debate, for which Obama was widely panned (Pew 2012a).

5.4 Presidential Candidate Barack Obama

5.4.1 Personal context: Obama as incumbent candidate

As we engaged with President Obama's background and personal religiosity and its role in his 2008 campaign in Chapter 4, in this introduction we will focus on how he repackaged himself as an incumbent candidate in the 2012 campaign, so that we may reflect on the impact such a shift has on how he uses religious rhetoric in his 2012 campaign speech. Incumbency affects the strategic construction of a campaign in a variety of ways, but to keep this discussion within the scope of my research I will focus on two specific aspects of incumbency that could influence the topic we are addressing: the use of religious language and rhetoric in campaign speech and the discourses which underwrite those linguistic choices, particularly American civil religion.

The first and most obvious way that being an incumbent President impacts a re-election candidacy involves the candidate himself- aspects of familiarity, media exposure and confidence. Non-incumbent candidates for office are establishing a something of a new brand as a presidential candidate, while factoring in any elements of their previous public life that may already be part of the national political conversation. An incumbent candidate is presenting their candidacy with a far more immediately retrospective lens. With a first term in office and their previous successful campaign, the candidate has established their experience and with that comes greater confidence. As Leuprecht and Skillcorn note in their examination of the relationship between the first and second campaigns of successful incumbent presidential candidates, there is a 'change in self-perception by the candidate and the campaign. . .a sense of being above the fray, and a qualitatively different kind of contender from the opponent' (2016, p.99).

The incumbent candidate also has nearly a full term of a globally documented track record as President, as well as 2-3 years of media discourse in which they are the central figure representing US government action—for better and for worse. As such, as Holbrook notes, incumbent candidates such as President Obama are 'held accountable for prevailing national conditions' (2012, p.642). This lens leads to accountability on the campaign trail and a more retrospective lens in terms of campaign messaging rather than establishing their hope for the future.

The other incumbency factor to consider is what Campbell calls the 'Rose Garden Strategy[33]', a privilege the incumbent President can activate, wherein the incumbent candidate gains ground by his very presence in the physical context of *being* President (2008, p.120). Political scientists have noted the legitimacy that this imagery can have on the optics of an incumbent campaigns for the Presidency (Leuprecht and Skillicorn 2016, Campbell 2003, Weisberg 2002). Also inherent to this effect are events the President does not plan but attends, which are widely covered by the press and allow for expression of issues and narratives which may assist and shape the campaign.

One such event relevant to this study is the National Prayer Breakfast at which President Obama, like five decades of Presidents before him, delivers an annual speech which comingles the sacred, moral, and civic responsibilities of the officials in attendance. This event is covered nationally by the media and includes a Unitarian Christian blessing of government functions; and comments in that context are certainly a continuation of a commingling of religious belief, civic duty, and government operations.

In the 2012 Prayer Breakfast speech, President Obama champions White House faith-based initiatives, and the work of Christian groups in secular society, sanctions politicos and jurists alike for 'living out your faith in service to others and notes:

> The bible teaches to 'be doers of the word and not merely hearers.' We're required to have a living breathing faith in our own lives. And each of us is called on to give something of ourselves for the betterment of others and to live the truth of our faith not just with words, but with deeds.
>
> (Obama, 2012f)

[33] The 'Rose Garden Strategy' was initially invoked to describe President Lyndon B. Johnson's use of the White House Rose Garden in the early days of his campaign. Having moved into the presidency after the assassination of President Kennedy, he did not enjoy the same incumbency assumptions of an elected President. By positioning himself in the White House context for nationally visible events, his image **as** President was reinforced (Campbell 2008, p.120). Strictly speaking, political campaigning and official duties of the Presidency are constitutionally required to be separate and cannot take place on federal government property, but as noted above, the President is the person as well as the office and media discourse and public perception doesn't necessarily differentiate (U.S. 2022).

Obama immediately transitions from this passage into a discussion of creating jobs, the role of government and climate change before closing with a confession of his personal faith:

> I have fallen on my knees with great regularity. . .asking for guidance not just in my personal life and my Christian walk, but in the life of this Nation and in the values that hold us together and keep us strong. I know that He will guide us. He always has, and He always will.
>
> (Obama 2012f)

This rhetoric is clearly relevant to a discussion of civil religion and this particular event often comes up in scholarship on the subject (Wuthnow 1988a, Wilson 1982, Weiss 2016, Roof 2009, Hammond et al. 1994, Gorski 2017), however the scope of this thesis contains specific framing: campaign speech. Therefore remarks from the National Prayer Breakfast are included here for contextual framing, illustrating the type of speech that Obama was able to give as President and how that may contrast or influence the presentation of religious language in his campaign. Such context helps develop the impact of incumbency on President Obama as a candidate for re-election.

5.4.2 Speech selection

Similar to the 2008 election cycle the speeches that were chosen for 2012 were selected due to their audience exposure and the fact that they contain substantive content beyond the repeated biographical stump speech. I looked at one of Obama's 2008 speeches in depth in Chapter 4 to demonstrate detailed application of the method in his campaign. In this chapter, analysis of Obama's 2012 speeches will be combined as it was for the remaining four speeches in 2008.

Five speeches will be addressed in this section spanning the breadth of the 2012 election cycle. The first pair of speeches are remarks from a campaign rally delivered ten days before the election in Hilliard, OH, a swing state pivotal to the election result, and Obama's victory celebration speech, delivered on election night 2012 in Chicago Illinois (Obama 2012c, Obama 2012d). These will be discussed together due to their similar linguistic choices.

Following that, we move to remarks delivered at the University of North Carolina Chapel Hill, a speech focusing on education but with additional more general issues related to the campaign (Obama 2012a). The fourth speech was given to the National

Urban League conference in New Orleans, Louisiana, and contains the most overtly religious content of the selected speeches from Obama's 2012 campaign (Obama 2012b). The final speech is a commencement address delivered to the United States Air Force Academy Colorado Springs, Colorado and provides an interesting juxtaposition to a speech Romney delivered in similar context (Obama 2012).

As previously noted, in this election Obama is the incumbent candidate, so selecting speeches for this analysis also required filtering out official presidential remarks in addition to campaign events and remarks. Though official presidential remarks may impact campaign rhetoric, such remarks are beyond the scope of this project's focus, except for possible influence may have on religious references in the campaign.

5.4.3 Linguistic analysis

In terms of pronoun choice and framing Obama continues his use first person address, using primarily 'I/we' or 'I/we' and 'you'. He does occasionally refer to 'they' when speaking about issues with negative impact on Americans or when engaging opposition decisions by Republicans or candidate Romney. But generally, Obama keeps his discourse positive and does not often engage his opponent directly.

There is a noticeable lack of prominent biblical narratives in 2012 compared to 2008 and he does not spend as much time linking to historical turning points or the founders of the nation. It is difficult to ascertain from his 2012 speeches whether the lack of specific biblical narratives he seemed to favour in 2008 is a stylistic choice, but in the context of research on the messaging shifts that often occur in incumbent campaigns, it is possible this is less a shift away from those implements and more a shift toward the more established strategy for success in second campaigns. Leuprecht notes that 'Obama's language remains approximately the same for his first campaign and government [as President], but it changes rapidly…within the space of fa few months in late 2011 and early 2012' toward what he calls the 'language of influence' (2016, p.99) . That language is one that is overwhelmingly positive in terms of word choice, with less focus on opponents, regardless of topic (Leuprecht 2016, p. 102). And as anticipated by Campbell's work, there is an inevitable focus on the dominant issues of his Presidency, in this case the economy, including issues like student loan burdens and the housing crisis, healthcare and foreign policy (Campbell 2008, p.120-1). But that shift to focus on positive takes on the issues does not mean

religious rhetoric and implication are not present, merely in a different form than 2008.

Obama continues to use specific vocabulary that ties back to those more religiously tinged framing of elements of civic duty, speaking frequently of the 'spirit of America' and the mutual responsibility of being 'family,' returning to the narrative of our 'brother's keeper' in his remarks in Ohio[34] (Obama 2012c) and his victory speech, delivered on election night in Chicago[35] (Obama, 2012d). Obama elevates that spirit as 'what makes the United States of America the greatest nation on Earth' as well as our 'saving grace' (2012c). Later in his victory speech, he describes that spirit as having 'lifted the country from the depths of despair to the great heights of hope' and whilst he does not call his vision of hope synonymous to faith, when he elaborates near the end of his remarks, it is certainly implied:

> I have always believed that hope is that stubborn thing inside us that insists, despite all the evidence to the contrary, that something better awaits us, so long as we have the courage to keep reaching, to keep working, to keep fighting,
>
> (Obama 2012d)

After that build up, it's hard not to infer that the next step is salvation, considering the language choice and his ministerial speaking style. That said, Obama's election night speech was probably the most neutral of those we review here. Less subtle is the speech delivered in North Carolina

Obama's speech at the University of North Carolina[36] was delivered to an audience of students and guests hence the topic was the economy but focused on student loans. It doesn't seem like there is much space for religion within such a topic and based on the language, there's not much. What is interesting about this speech is how it was delivered. Obama weaves a 'call and response' stylisation through the speech, a deliberate choice which harkens to the Black church and a tool frequently utilised by his former preacher, Jeremiah Wright (Clardy 2011). Clardy likens the 'call and response method of Black preaching' as linked to a 'theology of defiance', originally with the slave in defiance of the oppressive master. As time passes, that relationship 'speaks to the hearts of Black parishioners by offering cooperative words of

[34] Word count: 3598.
[35] Word count: 2161.
[36] Word count: 4579.

encouragement that reaffirmed their Christian identity and instilled a sense of pride and dignity' (2011, p. 207).

Obama's use of the technique, while he does literally call for an 'amen' repeatedly in the speech, is delivered in a decidedly secular University setting. But the geographical location is in the Southern United States and the University has a diverse composition, making the tone and exchange of call and response readily recognisable (Obama 2012a). The position of the faithful responders in this scenario is of citizens doing their best to grasp the American ideal noted previously as the purpose of the 'American Spirit' (Obama 2012d) but struggling under the yoke of student debt (Obama 2012a). The statements of the burden (and the prompt for the 'Amen!') were various descriptions of debt, the suffering to be assuaged by his outlined plan for relief in the second half of the speech (Obama 2012d).

In remarks delivered to the National Urban League in New Orleans[37], Obama spends much of the speech discussion the idea of mission, that of the nation, of the citizenry and of faith-based organisations which facilitate that mission in communities. That mission 'transcends politics' and focuses on safety and opportunity for young people and in resolving deprivation and violence in those communities, noting 'we pray for those who succumb to the less-publicized acts of violence that plague our communities' (Obama, 2012b). Noting the shared, 'mission', 'mourning' and 'faith', he asks the audience to step into their civic duty, 'it is time for believers, it is a time for folks who have faith in the future.'

This concept of mission is also present in the final speech we will examine in the 2012 cycle, delivered to an audience of soldiers and veterans at the Air Force Academy in Colorado[38]. Here Obama comes as close to the early Bellah conception of civil religion, and consequently to Wuthnow's conception of the conservative arm of his version of it, by invoking the United States mission in the world. However, this is not a mission steeped in oppositional stance against an enemy as Romney outlines in a later speech. Obama's mission entails 'leading on behalf of human dignity and on behalf of freedom' showing compassion in crisis in Haiti (2012). He notes, 'There are many sources of American power: diplomatic, economic, and the power of our ideals', he spends most of his speech focusing on the latter, and how they inform the nation's

[37] Word count: 4530.
[38] Word count: 3323.

(and the military members individual) mission (Obama 2012). Obama's mission as both candidate and Commander-in-chief of his audience is based on 'that fundamental faith, that American optimism, which says no challenge is too great, no mission is too hard. It's the spirit that guides your class [sic]' (2012). Notably, there is no named enemy in Obama's generalised mission. While he describes specific deployments and incidents (al Qaeda, Vietnam War), there is no invocation of countries or groups in a defensive position (Obama 2012). In the following section examining Romney's remarks, he too invokes the responsibility of American mission, but with very different framing.

5.4.4 Conclusions—Obama 2012 presidential campaign

In describing hope as an act of faith, belief and shared destiny as Americans, Obama frames Americans as a collective of believers who work together toward a collective mission. His use of call and response in North Carolina is reminiscent of his ministerial delivery in Atlanta in 2008. He keeps the thread of shared perspective with his audience throughout his speeches except when invoking subjects or incidents that he may wish to distance himself from—using nominalisation of verbs when discussing challenges the country has faced during his term and in the rare incidents, he invokes the actions of his opponent. Obama's presentation of religious elements in his campaign speech is markedly more subtle in 2012 than in 2008, though some threads remain. However as noted that is partially down to the impact of incumbency on his messaging overall. As our brief engagement with his rhetoric at the 2012 National Prayer Breakfast shows, his position has certainly not moved away from an overt commingling of civic and sacred duty, but perhaps the need to present it so overtly on the campaign trail has diminished.

5.5 Presidential Candidate Mitt Romney

5.5.1 Background and personal context

Willard 'Mitt' Romney is the son of a political and religious dynasty. Originally from Michigan, his father George Romney was the state's governor for six years before joining the cabinet of President Richard Nixon. Mitt Romney, following his father's ambitions, was governor of Massachusetts before he took to the national political stage (Staff 2021).

Both Romneys were active members in the Latter-Day Saints Church. Mitt Romney was not merely a leader in the LDS Church in Massachusetts, but was the 'stake president', comparable to a regional diocese in Catholicism; a 'Mormon lay leader, offering pastoral guidance on all manner of human affairs from marriage to divorce, abortion, adoption, addiction, unemployment and even business disputes' (Stolberg 2011).

Religiosity in political discourse

Like John McCain, Mitt Romney ran for the Republican presidential nomination in the previous election cycle. Romney initially presented his Mormon faith to the voting public during the 2007-08 primary cycle, where he was the leading candidate for several months. He engaged his personal beliefs and their potential impact on policy directly, in a speech entitled 'Faith in America' (Romney 2007). Because of the relevance of this speech on his impression of the electorate understanding of Romney's point of view in 2012, we include it in our analysis of his perspective as a candidate and will begin with it as the speech of focus.

However, despite this direct approach Romney was eventually defeated in 2008. His approach in 2012 markedly avoided direct engagement with his Mormon beliefs. Possible statistical justification for this could be Evangelical perceptions of Mormonism, of which 39% have an unfavourable opinion (Pew 2007). Additionally, while two-thirds of mainline protestants consider Mormonism to be 'Christian', only one-third of Evangelicals feel the same. This is despite the fact that 97% of Mormons view their religion as Christian (Goodstein 2012). This disparity risked putting Romney in a precarious 'outsider' position with much of the Republican voting base.

After the 2008 defeat, the writing was on the wall and Romney developed a tendency not to explain or justify his personal beliefs, but to talk around it. Stolberg notes that in the face of criticism of Mormonism as a 'cult', Romney did not defend it, but called for civility (2011, p.1). For Powell, Romney's avoidance of his own religion seemed more of a pivot to other election issues such as jobs, resulting in almost complete avoidance of the topic. This malleability contributed to his reputation as a candidate that would package himself as the audience wished him to be, a tendency that gave him the nickname the 'etch-a-sketch' candidate even within his own campaign, for being 'utterly devoid of any ideological convictions' (Powell 2012). This led to a credibility problem when juxtaposed to established Evangelical candidates in Republican presidential primaries such as Mike Huckabee in 2008 and Rick Santorum in 2012 when the contrast was drawn into sharp relief.

Romney's reaction to this contrast in 2012 was most frequently to pivot to other topics, or to take cover in a more protestant Christian conception of American citizenship as the faithful servant, which will be seen in the speeches I analyse here. The idea of Romney using a more mainstream Christianity as cover for his more outlying personal faith would seem to be a challenge to reconcile with Evangelical leadership who might legitimise his candidacy; and indeed he did struggle in the 2008 primary race to bring those voices to his defence. In the end, that division helped contribute to McCain taking the nomination.

Interestingly, by the 2012 election season, the power dynamic had shifted. McCain had lost and Evangelical leaders eventually endorsed Romney's candidacy, though not by directly legitimising his personal religion, but by objectifying his faith into a more universal version palatable to the Evangelical base. Salek notes that leading figures such as Franklin Graham used several tools to sanction Romney's position as the candidate whilst not necessarily endorsing his 'stigmatised' Mormon faith, noting that Graham 'instead of placing support behind Romney, the Mormon candidate, [he] argued that a vote for the Republican nominee [Romney] is more aligned with Evangelicals' views and America's foundational principles than a vote for Obama' (Salek 2014). It is here that we begin to see a turn by Romney and supporters toward a more sectarian version of civil religion rather than his own personal religious convictions.

Impact of Background on Romney's Candidacy

Romney dealt with the stigma of his personal religious background in the 2012 presidential election in two ways: by pivoting away from his personal beliefs and engaging with a narrative of civil religion wherein the ideal American citizen could only be person of faith, and by selecting a counterweight vice presidential running mate, Paul Ryan.

If Romney was considered moderate to the point of being referred to as a blank slate, as well as standing on wobbly ground from a perceived normative Christian point of view, it is difficult to imagine a more stable choice of running mate with the Republican establishment than Paul Ryan. Ryan was, at the time, a leader in the House of Representatives with a national reputation and position (he would later become Speaker of the House until his retirement in 2019), was a lifelong Catholic with consistently conservative positions on issues both financial and social and, like Romney, was an established family man (Gigot 2012). It has long been established that running mates are a political decision but, like McCain before him, Romney's choice was particularly partisan at a point in the campaign when many candidates turn toward persuading more moderate general election voters (Krumel and Enami 2017, 500). But Romney had an enthusiasm deficit with Evangelical voters who form the base of the Republican party, which jeopardised turnout of the party faithful in the general election. The voice of an extreme right Republican like Ryan would not necessarily persuade an undecided voter but could push those reluctant Republicans who may stay home rather than vote for a Mormon candidate, to muster enough enthusiasm for Ryan to show up at the polls. This is the gamble taken by the Romney ticket and why we account for Ryan's public voice in this project (Court and Lynch 2015).

5.5.2 Speech Analysis — One key speech in methodological focus

Photo 3: Republican presidential candidate Mitt Romney speaks at a campaign rally.

'Faith in America,' Address at the George Bush Presidential Library [39]

Mitt Romney

College Station, Texas.

(Romney 2007)

The first speech we will examine was actually delivered the first time Romney was a presidential frontrunner, in 2007, when he competed against eventual nominee John McCain for the 2008 Republican presidential ticket. Having received considerable pushback from rival candidates for the Republican nomination, Romney delivered a speech specifically addressing his outlook on his own faith and the role of religion in political discourse and policy making. The speech was widely covered and analysed, and its sentiments carried forward into his 2012 campaign. Since we are examining how he presented religious language and themes in his candidacy, this precedent setting speech from the 2008 election cycle warrants focused consideration. Presidential Candidate Mitt Romney's image and messaging on civil religion began here.

5.5.3 Notable linguistic observations

Pronouns and perspectives

In this speech, Romney sticks with the 'I' pronoun, in keeping with a speech meant to clarify his position on his own faith and political service. His subject shifts between distancing himself from the audience with 'you' and 'Americans' as named subjects, and careful use of 'we' to refer to himself and those he describes as 'Americans.' How this shift in perspective is handled is of interest because the 'we' is often placed in opposition to another group. At various points in the speech he places 'we' vs.

[39] Delivered 6 December 2007. Word count: 2547.

'secularist extremism' when discussing the separation of church and state, vs. European countries with established state religions and their 'empty cathedrals;' then most frequently, 'we' are placed in opposition to religious extremists who prioritise 'violent jihad,' 'martyrdom,' and 'theocratic tyranny' (Romney 2007).

This positioning provides an alternative space for Romney to reside apart from his personal faith journey. The speech is, after all, intended to clarify his faith in the context of political action. Romney begins the speech by placing 'we' who are connected by the idea that is 'fundamental to America's greatness: our religious liberty,' in a defensive position against these 'threats,' then he transitions into his own faith.

He engages with his own religious narrative with deliberate distancing; he rejects the idea of a religious litmus test for political candidates, but follows the declaration with a clear disclaimer,

> Let me assure you that no authorities of my church or of any other church for that matter, will ever exert influence on presidential decisions. Their authority is theirs, within the province of church affairs, and it ends where the affairs of the nation begin.
>
> (Romney 2007)

Instead of clarifying the tenets of his faith, Romney focuses on the need for religious pluralism and tolerance, tying the concept to the diversity of belief in the original American colonies and the founders of the nation, a link which is congruous with Bellah's theory of Civil Religion.

Choice of nouns & nominalised actions

Romney's speech invokes several terms associated with faith, including straightforward use of 'believers,' 'prayer,' and 'heaven.' But he also brings more alliterative language, when discussing the way 'freedom opens the windows of the soul so that man can discover his most profound beliefs and commune with God' (Romney 2007). Continuing, 'freedom and religion endure together or perish alone.' Even if God had not been named specifically the choice to pair terms like 'profound' with 'belief' or 'commune' instead of meeting would bring the tone of faith into what could, had more neutral language been selected, be a discussion of individual freedoms *including* freedom of religion. Instead, he has commingled the basic tenet

of the founding documents with rhetoric of the sacred. He does not discuss liberty independently, but pairs it with religious tolerance.

Conversely when engaging with entities in opposition to his framing of faith and America, actions are nominalised and thus distanced from the 'we' of his speech. When engaging with secularism, he notes those who 'seek to remove from the public domain any acknowledgement of God,' that 'they are intent on establishing a new religion in America' the religion of secularism' (Romney 2007). This perspective is juxtaposed with 'We are a nation 'under God' and in God, we do indeed trust'[40] and an emphasis on the founders use of the 'Creator' when declaring independence (Romney 2007).

Agenda/Ideology revealed through repeated terminology

Finally, Romney presents a particular version of the United States hinging on his concept of America's 'greatness,' a mantra he returns to six times in the speech. Greatness in this narrative includes specific traits. He notes 'America [is] in the forefront of 'civilized nations, even as others regard religious freedom as something to be destroyed' (Romney 2007). Americans 'do not respect believers of convenience' and respect the 'great moral inheritance we hold in common.' While noting that all humans are 'children of God,' there is a caveat that Americans are responsible 'to our fellow Americans foremost.' As will be noted in a later section, Romney anchors these assertions as foundational to the nation's existence, engaging several influential actors during the revolutionary period as well as Presidents such as Adams, Lincoln, and Kennedy.

In this and other speeches, Romney's version of religion in the United States rests far from his personal religiosity and much nearer to Bellah's conceptualization of a unified, non-denominational (but distinctly Judeo-Christian) civil religion tied to historical milestones in the nation's history. The political directions in which Romney pushes these ideas can be seen with a wider lens.

[40] It is interesting to note here that this line is presented in context as if it were linked to the founders and founding documents of the United States c. 1776 and 1787. In fact, the phrase 'under God' was added to the US Pledge of Allegiance, and the phrase 'In God We Trust' inscribed on US currency in legislation signed by President Eisenhower in 1955.

5.5.4 Expanded analysis

In this section we will examine four speeches from Romney's campaign to expand understanding of his presentation of religion in campaign discourse. Beginning with his acceptance of the Republican nomination in August 2012, as well as his comments on a foreign policy tour during July of 2012, and closing with his remarks nearer the election, in October of 2012. Moving forward from the speech of focus (Romney 2007), where Romney outlines in very specific terms, the commingling of the founding of 'America's Greatness' and its religious and moral obligations, in the subsequent speeches we will see those concepts and narratives manifest in his presentation of foreign policy approach and relationships both at home and abroad.

In his speech accepting the Republican nomination,[41] Romney continues to present the United States and its values in an oppositional stance. After brief introductory remarks about his new vice-presidential running mate, Romney begins to discuss freedom, with freedom of religion named first, and juxtaposes an image of a kneeling Statue of Liberty escaping Castro's tyranny, referencing those escaping communist Cuba hoping that 'in America, their children would be more blessed than they' (Romney 2012a).

Romney describes features of his personal history, though he is careful to downplay his Mormon faith, noting that 'We were Mormons and growing up in Michigan. . .My friends cared more about what sports teams we followed than what church we went to,' an interesting turn of phrase for a candidate struggling with conservative religious support. But he leans further into the faith narrative once not discussing his own personal history, elaborating on the dream he originally noted in the context of Cuban immigrants, 'If every child could drift to sleep feeling wrapped in the love of their family—and God's love – this world would be a far more gentle and better place' (Romney 2012a). Later in the speech he expands this dream of individual citizens to the national identity,

> And that's how it is in America. We look to our communities, our faiths, our families for our joy, our support, in good times and bad. It is both how we live our lives and why we live our lives. The strength and power and goodness of

[41] Delivered 30 August 2012. Word count: 4100.

> America has always been based on the strength and power and goodness of our communities, our families, and our faiths.
>
> (Romney 2012a)

In this speech Romney positions himself together with the audience, keeping his point of view to 'I/you' and 'we' exclusively. He also revisits some choices from the first speech we examined. He returns to referencing God in the more neutral language of the founding documents: 'the creator' and repeatedly refers to religion as the first among the freedoms that anchor the nation. For the first time in our analysis, however, he brings in the narrative of being our brothers/sisters' keeper in the context of supporting faithful communities both within his faith practice, community work and as a good American.

Next, we will examine two speeches on foreign policy which Romney delivered in Jerusalem, Israel[42] and Warsaw, Poland in late July 2012[43]. It is not unusual for a presumptive candidate to do an international tour introducing themselves to potential allies and to present their point of view on foreign policy in such contexts. What is interesting about Romney's tour and why we examine these speeches together, is how his choice of rhetoric and venue corresponds with other speeches in which he places the United States (and its allies, in these cases) in a position of defence against those who Romney cites as enemies of what he designates as the most important of freedoms, freedom of religion.

In his remarks to the Jerusalem Foundation, Romney positions himself as one with the nation of the United States and speaks on behalf of the entity. After a deferential opening, he unifies Israel and the United States in terms of perspective and literal pronouns. Whilst in speeches delivered in the geographical USA, he frequently uses 'we' to refer to the national identity, it is primarily with a perspective of the idealised American life, the goals of faithful citizens and the aspirations of those escaping oppressive environments. In this speech the 'we' not only includes Americans and Israelis as one people, but the aspirational aspect is not present. Instead, he moves into a narrative of common mission, noting that the US and Israel are 'part of the great fellowship of democracies. . . we serve the same cause and provoke the same hatreds in the same enemies of civilization,' a less than subtle nod to Iran and other

[42] Delivered 29 July 2012.Word count: 2177
[43] Delivered 27 July 2012. Word count: 1894

Islamic nations (Romney 2012b). Large sections of the speech engage with Jewish tradition and ceremony such as Tisha B'Av[44], and though there may be implied deference and connection to Jewish faith in their engagement, these mentions are not directly linked to civil obligation or political discourse, the way other references are.

What is significant and directly linked is the positioning of Islam in opposition to Israel and the United States. Romney cites the murder of athletes at the 1972 Munich Olympics, denial of the holocaust, and murders of students at universities in Israel, tying these events to Iran, Syria, Afghanistan, Lebanon, Egypt, and Iraq, and framing the 'enemies of civilization' he mentioned earlier: 'radical theocracy.' This placement of Islamic nations in the position of 'other' cements the position of united, sacred goodness inherent in Romney's depiction of United States and Israel. He states it outright: 'We both believe that our rights are universal, granted not by government but by our Creator' and later in his conclusion, 'The enduring alliance between the State of Israel and the United States of America is more than a strategic alliance: it is a force for good in the world' (Romney 2012b).

All this is not to say that his position is surprising in terms of the politics, indeed the relationship between the United States and Israel has been widely known to be close for decades. What is interesting is that as we delve further into Romney's speeches, his presentation of the mission of the United States (and of Israel) is much more closely aligned with the sort of civil religious narrative of the 1980's Presidents Reagan and Bush, than it is to McCain's more subtle positioning. This resemblance crystalises further in his speech delivered on the same trip, in Poland, where he engages with another Reagan era narrative, positioning the Christian American moral imperative against communism and the fascist aggression of the Nazis.

Romney opens his speech in Warsaw, Poland entitled 'Freedom and Friendship' with mention of the Iron Curtain, as coined by Churchill as England had been the first stop on this tour of the three countries. He ties the three countries: England, Israel and Poland together with the United States as that 'great fellowship of democracies' (Romney 2012c). In this context, his link to common faith comes via the Catholicism that is prevalent in Poland, and its native son Pope, John Paul II. His language

[44] Tisha B'Av, falls on the 9th day of the month of Av (August 6-7, 2022) and is a day of fasting and prayer. It is the culmination of the Three Weeks, which commemorate destruction of the Holy Temple in Jerusalem (Chabad.org 2022).

choices are equally as directly tied to religion as in his speech in Jerusalem: 'In some desperate hours of the last century, your people were witnesses to hope, led onward by strength of heart and faith in God. . .in villages and parishes across this land you shamed the oppressor and gave light to the darkness'; he pairs this narrative with the declaration of the prize for such struggles, 'history has recorded the ascent of liberty, propelled by souls that yearn for freedom and justice' (Romney 2012c).

In this speech we also see Romney invoke the Exodus narrative of freedom from bondage, albeit circuitously by quoting John Paul II (Romney 2012c). Like his speech in Israel, he uses an I/you/we dynamic with the audience, with the only distancing occurring with the nominalisation of 'our enemies': 'violent radical jihadism' but in Poland he adds Hugo Chavez in Latin America and Russia.

The final speech we will examine for Romney was delivered late in the election cycle and is entitled, 'The Mantle of Leadership' (Romney 2012d). In this speech his presentation of religious responsibility as mission for the nation continues. Though widely covered by the media, the audience he is addressing is at the Virginia Military Institute. In this speech he continues a theme we have noted throughout, which is the depiction of our 'enemies' as 'dark', and those who he has linked in fellowship of values, as the 'light' in a 'struggle between liberty and tyranny, justice, and oppression, hope and despair' (Romney 2012c). Those who 'impose their dark ideology continue to be forces based in the Middle East and identified with Islamic extremism. Though it should be noted that in this speech, he does specifically note that those 'who have had enough of the darkness' include Muslims and nonbelievers, who had previously not been a focus of his narrative.

Romney remains committed to his positioning of America as exceptional and with a mandate to push out the darkness, and he continues to do so with loaded terminology, including the necessity of not having 'false pride' and emphasising that faith in 'America as the best hope of humankind, is akin to 'having faith in America. . . and faith in ourselves'.

5.5.5 Conclusions—Romney 2012 presidential campaign

The picture painted by Romney's speeches is one that is fairly consistent across his speeches. After an early bit of wobbling in engaging his own faith, he consistently speaks to a more universalised, civil religion narrative that connects to the electorate more cleanly than his Mormon faith could. Invoking the familiar tropes of Exodus and being our Brother's Keeper that we first saw in Obama's 2008 rhetoric, Romney frames these stories with a more backward facing lens. Noting the transgressions that occurred in the past which may continue to threaten the future and positioning the United States as the sacrosanct leader of the movement to dispel this darkness, as is its sacred mandate.

5.6 Notable Observations- 2012 Election Cycle

The 2012 election cycle gave this project its first ongoing candidate narratives. For Obama, the continuation of a successful campaign in 2008, through 3 years of the Presidency, and then into the 2012 campaign. For Romney, the establishment of his vision of a Christian American mission beginning with his candidacy in 2007 and continued through his rhetoric in 2012, in speeches both domestic and abroad. Development of these continuing narratives are possible because of the nuances one sees when examining speeches using Critical Discourse Analysis over more quantitative driven content analytical approaches to civil religion in speech. The threads that weave through both of these candidate narratives would not be apparent had they been isolated into samples based on their separate cycles, nor if they were analysed for the presence or absence of coded language alone. The discourses of an election (each cycle and the process itself) and Obama and Romney's evolution as candidates allows for a more accurate understanding of how they were presenting their visions of the issues and of the role of religion and civil responsibility.

In Obama's case, it is apparent that his perception as established in the 2008 campaign, that the American dream and spirit, based on common belief and that shared ideals and will to 'be our brother's keeper' are still present, if more subtly delivered now that he is the incumbent President (Obama 2012b). It was interesting to note that he used the idea of mission a bit more strongly in the foreign policy sense, though not in the adversarial framing used by his opponent, but more in a caretaker sense resembling Wuthnow's presentation of the liberal vein of American civil religion, which is not misaligned with Bellah's essential assertion that ACR is aspirational for the nation, not only a set of sacred beliefs intertwined with historical events, documents and rituals that are uniquely American, but also that those links contribute to an understanding of the United States as an ideal (Wuthnow 1988, Bellah 2008, Bellah 1967).

Romney is an intriguing case, both in terms of how he handled his personal religious beliefs in relation to his candidacy and messaging, and in terms the pivot he makes after his 2007 speech. From that point forward he primarily engages a unitarian, Judaeo-Christian doctrine of morality intertwined with the same figures (Founding Fathers and former presidents) and documents supporting a mission of the United States as the ambassador of these values to the world. This aligns with Wuthnow's

suggestion that the conservative path of American civil religion follows a 'Priestly' narrative, where the nation has a moral obligation to convert and spread their understanding of a nation blessed by God across the world as an example to the flock (Wuthnow 1988, p.247). Romney positions this mission in advocacy of and in opposition to familiar parties: Israel, the Pope and Catholicism (via Poland), and facing down both the spectre of the Iron Curtain and the Muslim world. Romney repeatedly references Islam with a negative or adversarial to the American mission. Whereas when Obama engages with very similar subjects and audiences and Islam is literally never mentioned at all; groups that may ascribe to the Muslim faith and also be enemies of the United States are always specifically named, and a faith connotation is never mentioned.

Examination of speeches from the 2012 election cycle began to reveal ongoing discourses which simmer beneath the religious rhetoric, including further development of the direction of civil religion. It's no surprise that Obama's path remains the same: Unitarian, caretaking in focus, and tied to the events, documents and shared values cited by Bellah, though as a President running to keep his office, there is a bit of the mission rhetoric seeping into his speech. A tact that had so far been a Republican approach. Romney takes his civil religion rhetoric to a far more overt place than McCain, who was on less stable footing engaging in the religious conversation in his campaign. Where either of these tracks lead in 2016 is in for a shakeup, as we have two new candidates in Hilary Clinton and Donald J. Trump.

5.7 Conclusion

In the 2008 election cycle, John McCain struggled to meet the high bar of religiosity and associated Christian value narratives which accommodate the republican base. He attempted to remedy that with a counterbalancing vice-president in Sarah Palin. In the 2012 election, Romney faced similar challenges, but not because his values as a conservative were questioned, but his Mormonism placed him outside expectations of the evangelical base. He too was supported by a more textbook conservative vice-president with Paul Ryan. Neither candidate was successful in overcoming Barack Obama. Despite some challenges during the campaign, he won a second term and his narrative of a community oriented, unitarian American Dream where we were 'our brother's keeper' continued for four more years. In the chapter that follows, we will engage with the final election of this project, the 2016 campaign between Hillary Clinton and Donald J. Trump, where everything changes dramatically—rhetorically and literally.

Chapter 6 : The 2016 Election

6.1 Introduction

2016 brought a clean slate of candidates to the election process. President Barack Obama had completed a second term and therefore was not eligible to run for the presidency, which meant that there was no incumbent candidate for the nomination by either party. But that is not to say that there were not recurring issues and candidates with significant political history in this cycle.

Former First Lady to President Bill Clinton, former U.S Senator from the state of New York and Secretary of State under President Obama, Hillary Clinton secured the Democratic nomination for president after a challenging primary competition against Vermont senator Bernie Sanders. On the Republican ticket, after a heavily disputed primary season, the nomination and the presidency went to property developer and television personality Donald J. Trump.

First, the chapter will address which speeches were chosen, dominant issues in the public discourse, and media narratives of the 2016 election. Then each candidate's history in political and public life and expressions of personal religiosity are discussed in their background and personal context sections, followed by analysis of their speeches. Eventual winner, Donald J. Trump is analysed first, followed by Hillary Clinton.

The contextual sections include narratives Trump began to engage during Obama's presidency which helped place him on the national stage prior to his run. In Hillary Clinton's introductory section, there is inevitable discussion of her long history in public life, including the impact of gender and misogyny and their influence on messaging in the campaigns. One difference from the analysis of previous chapters is that owing to the unique rhetoric of the 2016 election, the expanded analysis sections will incorporate an additional analysis point which arises from the apocalyptic presentation that dominates the Trump candidacy: worldview and the future. Engaging directly with this aspect of speech is relevant for understanding the nature of civil religion and the discourses emerging from the language.

6.2 Speech Selection

Following the selection standards for previous election cycles, the speeches analysed here are those with significant content beyond the biographical. Consideration is also given to speeches that both candidates give to similar venues or audiences, for example both candidates' nomination acceptance speeches are included.

Additionally, there were other, atypical issues which required consideration. In announcing his candidacy, which is one of the speeches included in the analysis, Donald Trump took a divisive and assertive stance on issues of immigration and terrorism which continued throughout his candidacy. Hence when speeches were delivered by both candidates to the same audience, touching on these issues, it seemed prudent to include them since they are relevant to understanding the discourse being developed by Trump's rhetoric. Therefore, each candidate's speech to AIPAC, the American Israel Public Affairs Committee are included.

In terms of the overall religiosity of the Presidential ticket, like McCain and Romney, to secure the evangelical vote, Trump required a devout vice-president to balance the ticket. Hence Mike Pence's nomination acceptance speech is included. This balance will be explored in the Trump context section.

6.3 Context of the 2016 Presidential Election

6.3.1 Dominant issues and media narratives in the 2016 election

Photo 4: Slate of candidates for the Republican debate in 2015

A contentious primary election cycle

The lack of an incumbent President in the 2016 election led to an 'open field' of candidates for both parties.[45] On the Republican side, things were a bit chaotic. At its peak, there were seventeen presidential candidates competing for the Republican nomination. The early field was so crowded that to make a televised debate feasible, minimum threshold criteria were introduced, which required contenders to have established 2.5% of the vote in the six dominant national polls in the month prior to the staging of the debate (Murray 2015). This resulted in 10/17 candidates taking the stage (above). The other debates set similar (though not identical) requirements in order to make an organised debate format operational.

As one can imagine, this made for a contentious early primary season amongst Republican candidates vying for a larger piece of a very divided pie. Candidates who remained viable for much of the primary season included those who were directly associated with or were leaders of faith groups (Senator Ted Cruz, Former Governor

[45] Photo Credit: https://www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2015/10/do-you-have-any-right-to-watch-the-presidential-debates/625997/

Mike Huckabee, Former Senator Rick Santorum), established national politicos (Senator Marco Rubio, Senator Lindsay Graham, and seven former state governors), and what some considered outsider/agitator candidates who were relatively new on the national Republican scene: Carly Fiorina (former CEO of Hewlett Packard), Republican leaning Libertarian Senator Rand Paul, whose father ran for President twice and is associated with founding the Tea Party, and finally, the eventual winner: Donald J. Trump.

Such a large field led to a long and conflict filled primary election season, leaving Senator Cruz and Trump as the last two candidates standing (270toWin.com 2016). While this project focuses exclusively on the final Republican Presidential ticket of Trump and Former Indiana Governor Mike Pence, the context of the primary competition contributes to both the tone of the messaging in the general election as well as in the choice of Pence as Vice President.

For the Democrats, there were originally six candidates, though most dropped from contention fairly quickly, leaving Secretary Hillary Clinton and Senator Bernie Sanders as the two frontrunners prior to the Democratic Convention (Staff 2016). Sanders and Clinton remained neck and neck in competition for electoral delegates (Those who vote for the eventual party nominee) through the Democratic National Convention in July 2016. Sanders' populist influence impacted Clinton's candidacy as well as eventual nominee Trump's messaging. Both Sanders and Trump utilised messaging that was perceived to be both populist and 'revolutionary' (Gaudiano 2022) (Staufer 2021). Compared to Clinton, an establishment candidate who emerged as potential First Lady to her husband, President Bill Clinton, in 1992, the contrast was stark, and the attacks were pointed. Both Sanders and Trump were agitating, outsider candidates aiming to disrupt the establishment. It's hard to imagine a more establishment candidate than Hillary Clinton, who had been involved in political discourse for twenty-five years.

Shifting strategies in media coverage

Since the 1980s, media coverage of many aspects of society has moved toward a binary format. In the case of political coverage this leans toward what is referred to as 'the horse race—who is winning and who is losing and why' (Patterson 2016). This approach inherently contains at least half negative perspective, someone has to be losing the race. Negative coverage is media attention about topics that are not positive for the candidate, such that scandal, poor performance or personal attacks by an opponent. But in the 2016 election things moved significantly toward the negative beyond this dynamic. According to a study conducted analysing the media coverage in the 2016 election, the media perspectives were overwhelmingly negative, particularly toward Senator Clinton, whose coverage over the course of the entire election cycle, primaries and general election periods, never reached a positive balance and usually skewed negative by a significant gap; averaging 62% negative media coverage over the year (Patterson 2016). During the general election, when it was just Trump v. Clinton, the nominees' coverage never was never majority positive. In fact while, 'it peaked at 81 percent negative in mid-October, but there was not a single week where it dropped below 64 percent negative' during the entire election cycle (Patterson 2016).

Indeed, this negative slant in coverage focuses on more than competitive political races. Immigration and Muslim issues are particularly affected, 'the ratio of negative stories to positive ones has been 5-to-1. In that same period, news reports featuring Muslims have been 6-to-1 negative' (Patterson 2016).

While this additional negativity might seem tangential to the religiously tinged political discourse this project is engaging, the negative media slant amplifies the themes and patterns located in this project, particularly those in speeches of Donald Trump, which lean heavily into apocalyptic narratives and demonisation of immigrants and Muslims.

The role of social media

As discussed in previous chapters, social media platforms such as Facebook and Twitter are on a trajectory of increasing influence in political speech and branding. In the 2016 cycle, Sanders and Trump integrated these platforms in innovative ways, utilising lesser-known methodologies to target voters with precise messaging—

sometimes under their campaign umbrellas and sometimes via other groups, a topic explored in more depth in a moment.

For the first time in this research, Twitter records became a factor of political speech. Indeed there are daily archives of Trump's tweets that far outnumber speech transcripts (Trump 2016a). However, given the established range of the research and methods being utilised here, this aspect of Trump's messaging was deemed beyond the scope of the project, but certainly an opportunity for further work.

The emergence of fake news and reported interference in the 2016 election

As noted in the previous section, social media was a pervasive and effective tool of influence in the 2016 election cycle, influence we now know to have been nefarious. Though unknown in 2016, it was later documented by an independent investigation that 'Between January 2015 and August 2017, Facebook linked 80,000 publications to the Russian company Internet Research Agency through more than 470 different accounts. At the same time, a total of 50,258 Twitter accounts were linked to Russian bots – fake accounts programmed to share false information – during the 2016 election period' (Marineau 2020).

Per the report of Special Counsel Robert Mueller III, the Russian interference was intended to favour one candidate, Trump, and work against the other, Clinton, on behalf of persons associated with Russian President Vladimir Putin and with the goal of 'using social media accounts and interest groups to sow discord in the U.S. political system through what it termed "information warfare' (Mueller 2019).

The influence of social media and public outreach to stir discord in the election cycle is a significant factor to consider when reflecting on the messaging choices of both candidates and when considering the underlying discourse that may exist beneath invocations of religious themes and language, hence its notation here.

A divided and hostile electorate

In light of the grim picture painted above, it is not surprising that research shows the U.S. electorate has become divided and pessimistic in recent years. According to a Pew study of voters conducted two weeks prior to the election, voters lacked enthusiasm and were disappointed with progress made on their respective issues of focus. Additionally, the electorate expressed conviction that *their* issues were the

most looming compared to those of the opposite party, and that the need was 'very serious', adding to discontent. For example:

> Fully 79% of Trump voters said illegal immigration was a "very big" problem in the country today, while just two-in-ten Clinton voters (20%) said the same. Nearly three-quarters of Trump supporters (74%) saw terrorism as a very big problem, compared with 42% of Clinton supporters.
>
> (Pew 2016)

This division and pessimism are reflected in the content and style of the speeches that we analyse below.

6.4 Presidential Candidate Donald J. Trump

6.4.1 Background and personal context

Prior to his candidacy in the 2016 Presidential election, Donald J. Trump was primarily known to the public as a real estate mogul, New York City social fixture and celebrity, making cameos in films like Home Alone 2. And although he has written several best-selling books focusing on his business prowess, widely publicised bankruptcies and business closures led to speculation that the opportunity to host the television series *The Apprentice* rescued his balance sheet (Keefe 2018). Regardless of the legitimacy of his business acumen, his name recognition was undeniable and post-*Apprentice*, he was known for having power in the business world and for his series of attractive (ex)wives. Trump first considered running for president in 2000, briefly declaring candidacy with the Reform party, but dropping out early on (Staff 2022). Between 2000 and 2012 he vacillated between parties, but he established his place in Republican party politics after the election of President Barack Obama.

Throughout the Obama campaign and presidency, a racially tinged and debunked conspiracy theory disputing Obama's birth certificate had persisted in some channels of media discourse, particularly on Fox News (Serwer 2020). It was known as the Birther Movement. In March of 2011, Trump appeared on Fox in advocacy of this theory, amplifying it and becoming its standard bearer for years to come (Serwer 2020). Trump's insistence that Obama provide his 'long form' birth certificate added nuance to the theory and uniqueness to his discussion of what may have been a fading conspiracy, ensuring Trump's continued relevance in the discourse. When the White House produced the document, Trump framed it as evidence of his influence (Serwer, 2020).

It is impossible to separate Trump's ties to the Birther controversy from his insider/outsider rhetoric in the speech analysis to follow. The roots of the Birther conspiracy are linked with decades of racial discrimination against people of minority groups who are deemed illegitimate by the dominant race's national identity. Examples of this include partial citizenship of slaves to growing nationalist movements in Western Europe.

This is a phenomenon called 'exclusionary patriotism' (Devos and Ma 2013, Devos and Banaji 2005). In research specific to perceptions of Obama, Devos and Ma found that,

> The relative difficulty people had seeing Obama as an American was a function of the extent to which he was construed as a Black person. Indeed, Obama was implicitly viewed as less American than McCain, Clinton or even Blair when race was stressed [in the study].
>
> (Devos and Ma 2013)

In analysing Trump's speech, there are repeated tendencies to cast non-white citizens as not-American, directly and by constructing an abstraction of what/who is American, with conspicuous absent groups. This is a practice that began with his engagement with the Birther narrative.

Trump's candidacy began with his campaign announcement from his office building, Trump Tower (2015), and gathered tremendous momentum, spurred by his unorthodox style and presentation as a populist outsider. He was, however, a peculiar choice for the conservative Republican party whose base of evangelical and fiscal conservatives could find many elements of concern in Trump's many controversies. How did the conservative base reconcile countless mistresses, sexual harassment, and unethical business practices?[46]

Martin attributes this unlikely evangelical acquiescence to a phenomenon called 'active-passivism,' noting that,

> Evangelical voters could, according to the logic of active-passivism, overlook Trump's campaign language against refugees, immigrants, people with disabilities, people of color and more, because God was on the throne. If Trump were to win the presidency—as he did—true Christians could trust that God had seen what was happening and still allowed for the result.
>
> (Martin 2020, p. 319)

In other words, believers could exempt themselves, and Trump, for any misgivings or mistakes because their faith requires unfailing belief in God's wisdom, so they can

[46] A semi-complete laundry list can be found here: (Graham 2017) https://www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2017/01/donald-trump-scandals/474726/

'substitute theological trust in place of democratic responsibility' (Martin, 2020, p. 318).

Additionally, Trump's opponent was a woman who many evangelicals firmly disliked—Hillary Clinton. Trump's 'hegemonic masculinity,' contrasted with her candidacy in a way that appealed to evangelical conservatives and may very well have impacted the way Clinton presented her own message (Monk-Turner 2020). Martin notes this hyper-masculinity meshes with evangelical women's role as 'hearers of the gospel,' in that they could teach each other and the children but never men, as their role in the faith (and in public life) is subservient to the man's (Martin 2020). Trump's actions may be inappropriate, but it was not nearly so offensive as Clinton's overstepping of evangelical gender norms.

What this meant for Trump was that his bombastic misogyny and blatant discrimination are given a pass, so long as he is affiliated with the core priorities of the conservative right: being pro-life, committing to pro-life judges, and defending a Christian faith which is perceived as being persecuted. But Trump was not particularly religious, he had been twice divorced, had public affairs, and only recently switched to being pro-life. So how did he shore up this balance? With Mike Pence.

Governor Mike Pence is everything Trump is not. He is an established conservative who has not only established his fidelity as a family man, he publicly speaks to his belief in the 'Modesty Manifesto,' an oath originated by Billy Graham which forbids a married man from sharing any private space or being alone with a woman who is not his wife (Monk-Turner 2020). Pence's history in the party as a representative in the U.S. House and a completed term as governor ingratiated him to reluctant party establishment, and his impeccably rehearsed presentation as a candidate stood in stark contrast to his freewheeling future boss. He was a perfect match.

Having established the context for the Trump/Pence presidential ticket, we begin with analysing one of Trump's speeches in detail, to demonstrate how the method applies to his particular speaking style. Analysis of four other speeches from the ticket will follow.

6.4.2 Speech Analysis—One key speech in methodological focus

Address Accepting the Presidential Nomination at the Republican National Convention [47]

Cleveland, Ohio[48]

(Trump 2016a)

Photo 5: Donald J. Trump leading a campaign rally**.**

Donald J. Trump delivered his acceptance speech at the 2016 Republican convention after months of painting a grim picture of the current state of the nation, a hopeless future only he could deliver the audience from. That tone continues in this speech, delivered to the Republican nominating convention, the day after his running mate, Governor Mike Pence delivered his own acceptance. We will discuss Pence's speech from the same stage in the expanded analysis section, as it provides a balancing contrast to Trump's presentation here, in terms of tone and in the centring of despair. Both Trump and Pence utilise religious language, though with very different framing.

6.4.3 Notable linguistic observations

Pronouns and perspectives

'I am your voice!' (Trump 2016)

Donald Trump uses the first-person perspective, like most other candidates. However, who his 'I/we' encompasses is a slightly different. Much of the time, including the majority of this speech, 'we' equates to Trump and/or his organisation and campaign, and not to himself plus the audience. Not that he does not engage the audience directly, but it is usually separately from himself, as in 'you need this' so 'I'

[47] Delivered 21 July 2016. Word count: 5096.
[48] Photo credit: https://www.scmp.com/news/world/united-states-canada/article/3015109/donald-trump-promises-wild-rally-he-launches-2020

will do that,' as opposed to what 'we must do.' Trump often refers to the audience as 'America,' though that is not a term that is inclusive of all citizens, as he clearly presents an insider/outsider dynamic throughout. Outside are 'illegal immigrants with criminal records…roaming free to threaten peaceful citizens,' as well as anyone 'from any nation that has been compromised by terrorism…We don't want them in our country' (Trump 2016a).

Trump juxtaposes this position with advocacy for those who do belong, noting that we need to 'liberate our citizens from the crime and terrorism and lawlessness that threatens their communities' (2016). Who Trump infers is committing this 'lawlessness' is not overtly stated, but it is telling that his next paragraph is about protecting the police in particular states. Specifically, these are states which happened to have recently hosted protests against police violence against African Americans. Trump's community of citizens excludes those who would participate in such events. Such language is an example of 'racist dog whistles,' coded language which seems on the surface to be benign and free of connotations of racism, but contains deeper meaning that would be understood to reinforce white supremacy to the intended listener (Shapiro 2020). From the reading of this initial speech, it seems possible that the 'America' Trump addresses excludes those who were participating in protests against police violence, which eventually became the Black Lives Matter movement, and immigrants from pre-dominantly Muslim countries. As we unpack more of his speeches, we will find that 'America' is also an abstraction of a narrative that he engages as a rhetorical device; an America that is on the precipice of violent and permanent destruction.

Trump does engage with his opposition, including Senator Clinton, President Obama and his administration, government in general, and other designated enemies. These are usually named specifically and are often engaged with a confrontational tone.

Choice of nouns & nominalised actions

In analysing previous candidate's speeches, this section usually shows intentional distance from some issues or actions; sometimes associated with the opponent party/individual, or decisions or events which the candidate wishes to distance themselves from. For candidate Trump, the results are markedly different.

Trump's language choices are notable because of their vivid negativity and implication of immediate harm and/or impending catastrophe. Trump's 'America' is facing: 'lawlessness', 'violence', 'hatred', 'destruction', 'oppression', 'deterioration', 'threats', 'murder', 'killing', 'barbarians', 'families ripped apart', 'lives ruined', 'crying mothers', 'crisis', and 'roads and bridges [that] are falling apart, our airports are in Third World condition' (Trump 2016).

Trump places blame for these conditions, interestingly, at the '**altar** of open borders' and those who use the '**pulpit** of the presidency to divide us by race and colour, [and have] made America a more dangerous environment for everyone than frankly, I have ever seen and anybody in this room has ever watched or seen' (emphasis added, 2016). These two examples are the only explicitly religious words Trump uses in the body of this speech. However, their juxtaposition to all this catastrophic imagery harkens to the apocalyptic.

In his closing, Trump does make a direct appeal to the 'Evangelical and religious community' noting the injustice in their inability to engage politically, as prohibited by law[49] (Trump, 2016). From this point forward he strikes a different tone, by using repeated language.

Agenda/ideology revealed through repeated terminology

At the point in the speech when Trump engages evangelicals, he begins a refrain, 'start believing' (2016). He asks religious communities to believe they have the power to 'speak your minds from your own pulpits' and transitions from that specific policy change to 'believing in ourselves and in our country again.' It is only here that he brings his family and personal connections into the speech, framing his 'sole and exclusive mission to go to work for our country.' He declares 'America is a nation of believers, dreamers, and strivers that is being led by a group of censors, critics, and cynics' (Trump, 2016). Trump returns to his declaration of 'I am your voice' before engaging in his most famous refrain, 'We will make America strong/proud/safe/great again.'

[49] The Johnson Amendment is part of the US tax code which decrees those religious organisations and charities who are considered tax exempt may not position themselves politically nor contribute in-kind or monetarily toward any political endeavour. Violation of the Johnson Amendment can result in the loss of tax exempt status for the organisation (Service (2022)

6.4.4 Expanded analysis

In this section we will examine four additional speeches from the Trump/Pence campaign, beginning with Mike Pence' acceptance speech from the nominating convention, which presents an interesting counter to Trump's dark presentation of the world. Pence is an established activist of the evangelical right and former governor of Indiana. His vice-presidential acceptance speech[50] emphasises his piety, as well as his commitment to family and conservative issues such as abortion (Pence 2016). Three additional speeches by Trump are also included here: his remarks announcing his candidacy for president from Trump Tower in New York City[51] (Trump 2015); his Remarks at the AIPAC Conference in Washington DC[52] (Trump 2016b), for which there is a corresponding speech by Hillary Clinton in the next section; and finally, Trump's speech outlining his plan for the first 100 days in office, delivered in Gettysburg, Pennsylvania[53] (Trump 2016d).

Perspectives and lexical observations

As noted in Trump's acceptance speech in focus, he tends to use first person singular 'I' and a specific first-person plural which usually encompasses not the entire audience, but specific groups, sometimes his campaign or staff, sometimes he and his supporters, and very occasionally himself and the Republican Party. The others he engages are named and adversarial. Pence also uses first person I/we, but his 'we' is more generalised. Pence's speaking style is much more inclusive and genial. He uses frequent contractions and casual phrasing, such as when he notes, 'so I guess he was just looking for looking for some balance on the ticket' and as he frequently points out when speaking in public, 'the introduction I prefer is just a little bit shorter: I'm a Christian, a conservative and a Republican, in that order' (Pence 2016).

Pence's 'we' includes everyone connected with his past history, as the early part of the speech focuses on his background. He identifies John F. Kennedy and Martin Luther King Jr as his youthful heroes and notes they were 'raised to believe in hard work, in faith and family' in Indiana, a 'state that works because conservative principles work every time you put them into practice' (Pence, 2016). He speaks of his wife and their

[50] Delivered 20 July 2016. Word count: 3081.
[51] Delivered 16 June 2015. Word count: 6544.
[52] Delivered 21 March 2016. Word count: 2341.
[53] Delivered 22 October 2016. Word count: 4524.

'blessings' then moves to his widest 'we,' the 'American people' who 'are as we have always been, one nation under God, indivisible, with liberty and justice for all' [54] (Pence 2016).

Like Trump, Pence engages with terrorism and immigration, but with a bit of a softer touch. He refers to 'radical Islamic terrorism' once, but otherwise discusses terrorism without the religious label. Pence discusses 'grim and heart-breaking scenes' and 'safety' (Pence, 2016), by contrast Trump promises 'radical Islamic terror is right around the corner…we can't allow that to happen, we have enough problems' when discussing refugees from Syria, a 'terror-prone region' (Trump 2016d). This framing of immigrants and Islam is pervasive in his speeches (Trump 2015, Trump 2016b, Trump 2016a, Trump 2016d, Trump 2016c). His language in his speech to AIPAC takes this rhetoric a step further, incorporating the same graphic violent language choices he uses to describe the impending catastrophe he forecasts for the United States, one of murder, killing, violence and hopelessness, for which his intervention is the only solution. (Trump 2016b).

Pence is much closer to Bellah's civil religion than Trump, dropping in most historical figures and events that Bellah ties to the narrative of ACR, including Lincoln, Kennedy, King, and Reagan (Pence 2016, Bellah 1967). He also ascribes to the 'blessed nation' narrative of Reagan, noting that issues such as the 'sanctity of life' and the second amendment[55] as 'our God-given liberties.' Pence promises to 'keep faith with that conviction, to pray daily for a wise and discerning heart, for who is able to govern this great people of yours without it…I have faith, faith in the boundless capacity of the American people and faith that God can still heal our land' (Pence 2016). This last phrasing is interesting because the use of the word 'still' implies we are running out of time, it is nearly too late. This idea of impending doom for which we must act now to save ourselves is the linchpin in how Trump frames his own narrative of the America. A nation on the precipice of annihilation without his intervention.

[54] The 'one nation under God, indivisible, with liberty and justice for all' is quoted from the US Pledge of Allegiance revision from 1954 (Crawford, 2015).
[55] The Second Amendment includes the right to bear arms and form militias and is a major issue of contentious engagement for conservative voters, protection of which is supported by powerful lobbying organisations ((Anonymous 1788)

Trump's candidacy announcement speech sets the precedent for this view of an America on the edge of apocalypse. He begins the speech noting 'our country is in serious trouble. We do not have victories anymore' (Trump, 2015). He elaborates, Japan, China and Mexico are 'killing us economically.' Mexico is 'sending people that have lots of problems and they're bringing those problems with us. They're bringing drugs. They're bringing crime. They're rapists. And some, I assume, are good people' (Trump, 2015). He goes on, 'Israel maybe won't exist very long,' 'We're dying. We're dying. We need money.' 'We have losers…We have people that are morally corrupt. We have people that are selling this country down the drain.' 'According to economists…we're very close—that's the point of no return…We will be there soon…That's when we become a country that's unsalvageable. And we're going to be there very soon' (Trump, 2015).

He presents himself in a prophetic position, after establishing the impending doom that only he sees, he presents himself as the one who is able to subvert it. In this speech that framing is quite literal, an audience member shouts, 'We need Trump now!' Trump replies, 'You're right,' the audience repeats the mantra, we need Trump now!' (Trump, 2015). At the end of this speech, Trump makes it clear:

> Sadly, the American dream is dead. But if I get elected president, I will bring it back bigger and better and stronger than ever before, and we will make America great again.
>
> (Trump, 2015)

Worldview and the future

To illustrate the worldview Trump is rendering, we turn to the final speech examined here, which continues these patterns, with some notable additional elements. In his speech at Gettysburg, he invokes Abraham Lincoln (as one is wont to do at the location of Lincoln's most famous speech), but not only out of respect for the location. Trump places himself in a similar position to Lincoln was during the US Civil War,

> President Lincoln served at a time of division like we've never seen before. It is my hope we can look at his example to heal the divisions we are living through right now. We are a very divided nation.

> I am not a politician and have never wanted to be a politician, believe me. But when I saw the trouble, our country was in I knew I couldn't stand by and watch any longer…I love our country and I felt I had to act.
>
> (Trump 2016d)

Lincoln's narrative as deliverer of the nation from is an established element of American civil religion, and this is one of the few times Trump engages directly with the ACR narrative. The vast majority of his words are spent painting the apocalyptic alternative to his path. From this same speech,

> Here is why this is relevant to you. If they can fight somebody like me who has unlimited resources to fight back just look at what they can do to you. Your jobs. Your security. Your education. Your healthcare. Your violation of religious liberty. The theft of your second amendment. The loss of your factories, your homes, and much more.
>
> (Trump 2016d)

Trump notes he has deliberately chosen Gettysburg to present his solution to prevent this catastrophe and 'heal the nation,'

> That is why I have chosen Gettysburg to unveil this contract. I'm asking the American people to rise above the noise and the clutter of our broken politics and to embrace that great faith and optimism that has always been the central ingredient in the American character.
>
> (Trump 2016d)

Hence Trump's forecast for the future is one of total destruction and destitution unless America is delivered from this fate by his election. This future is not only America's, but is also that of Israel, our 'cultural brother' (Trump 2016b). Those outside this circle of like minds, including those in the United States who fall outside his parameters of 'Americans' are locked in opposition with his worldview.

6.4.5 Conclusions—Trump/Pence 2016 presidential campaign

While Trump's perspective on the path of the country, who is contributing to the impending demise of the country and what he will do to save it are certainly the dominant narrative of the Trump/Pence ticket, one must take Pence's position on the ticket into account as well. The pair of them present two seemingly divergent

channels of Christianity's relationship with civic duty, patched together to ensure enough Republicans turn out to vote. Pence presents a more established narrative, in line with candidates like G.W. Bush and Romney, of a country predicated on religious freedom and with a mandate to rule and make decisions with that history in mind.

Trump, on the other hand, barely engages with civil religious themes at all, but that does not mean he does not invest in the Christian history of the United States. In fact, the commingling of Christian eschatology with his political perspective assumes an even deeper engagement with elements of American history that Bellah and others engage with in establishing civil religious narratives. The apocalyptic nature of his rhetoric and presentation of himself as deliverer from catastrophe is a marker of narratives of civil religion, just not Bellah's. Instead it teeters into the conservative path of Wuthnow's civil religion in terms of the divide between a more leading role for the nation as global priest and the more liberal prophetic turn (1988a, 1988b). Wuthnow's conservative civil religion endorses a sacredly sanctioned capitalist economic point of view, something Trump's economic stances are aligned with, but Trump's rhetoric is forecasting and his solution deeply isolationist. Other nations may come in line with his vision, but he is not leading them. Pence may be, but he is not the top of the ticket.

Indeed, Trump seems most aligned with Gorski's disruption of civil religious traits which divert into Christian Nationalism (Wuthnow 1988a, Gorski 2018, Gorski 2017). Gorski notes an important distinction that is not articulated literally in Trump's speeches but is certainly implied:

> The white evangelicals who voted for Trump in the primaries did not vote as whites or as evangelicals, but rather as **white evangelicals**. More specifically, they voted as white Christian nationalists who believe the United States was founded by (white) Christians and that (white) Christians are in danger of becoming a persecuted (national) minority.
>
> (Gorski 2018, p. 361)

Based on the rhetoric in the speeches reviewed here, this is not an unlikely conclusion. In his previous work Gorski notes the relationship between apocalyptic rhetoric and nationalistic fervour, 'it gives us the sense that we understand what is 'really' going on, that the moral of the story is in black and white and that we are the lead actors in the final showdown between good and evil' (Gorski 2017, p, 23).

Apocalyptic language is seductive in its cold fearsomeness, there is little doubt whether the scenario depicted is terrible and should be stopped. The critical query of whether that scenario is accurate comes later…or not at all. The evangelical audience is well versed in the scenarios of Daniel and Revelation, they do not need it to be linked to biblical verse. The link to their core values via someone like Pence, who so embodies textbook evangelical conservatism, juxtaposed with vivid and repeated catastrophic imagery and rhetoric of the destruction of all they hold dear is allusion enough.

6.5 Presidential Candidate Hillary Clinton

6.5.1 Background and personal context

> 'If the wife comes through as being too strong and too intelligent, it makes the husband look like a wimp.' [President Richard Nixon] then went on to note that voters tended to agree with Cardinal de Richelieu's assessment: 'Intellect in a woman is unbecoming.'
>
> (Clinton 2004)

These words seem antiquated in a thesis composed in 2022. And yet President Nixon's remarks, shared in an interview where he was asked about the presidential campaign of 1991, address his perception of the political impact of Hillary and Bill Clinton's marital dynamics. They were also an early harbinger of a sentiment that would follow Hillary Clinton throughout her political life.

Hillary Rodham Clinton first came to national attention beginning in late 1991 as the potential First Lady to her Presidential candidate husband, William J. (Bill) Clinton. Fairly early in her husband's campaign, Clinton acknowledges her iconoclastic perspective, noting that she immediately hired a campaign staff, rather than the usual practice of letting her husband's handlers manage her role (Clinton, 2004, p. 103). As media and political discourse soon followed her lead, developing an irrevocable narrative of an assertive woman married to a candidate for the nation's most powerful political office. The framing of the discussion was not always respectful, as Nixon's opening comments indicate.

The traditional role of First Lady, in addition to being explicitly gendered, comes with norms more aligned with the Christian right than a Democratic candidate, despite the role being filled by women from various political parties over centuries. Such expectations include, 'wife and mother, public figure and celebrity, nation's social hostess, symbol of the American woman, social advocate…and presidential partner' (Jones 2016a, p. 629). This expectation falls in line with the understandings of womanhood, political activism, and civic responsibility espoused by evangelicals, in which a woman's dominion is primarily focused on the home, and their duty to be 'socially engaged and have faith inform their public life' (Monk-Turner 2020, p. 31). That faith is anchored in an understanding of a submissive relationship of the woman to the man in marriage, even (especially) in a public context. In two terms as First

Lady, Hillary Clinton subverted these expectations, impacting the way she is perceived in faith contexts and communities even after her formal position changed to ones with less gendered expectations.

On leaving the White House after two presidential terms, Clinton moved into a political life independent of her husband's shadow, running for the senate seat in New York. This is notable both because it marked her movement away from a more gendered political role as First Lady, into one that is overwhelmingly filled by men, and also because of the timing and location of the senate seat—both factors impacted the way she presents her messaging and persona.

Senator Hillary Clinton took office in 2000 and as the junior Senator of New York, took on a significant national security interest after the attacks on September 11 2001, serving on the Armed Services Committee (Office 2022). Later in 2009, she was nominated as U.S. Secretary of State by President Obama, serving as the country's chief diplomat until 2013. How does this impact her political speech in 2016? In the 234-year history of the United States Senate, there have been only fifty-eight women senators elected. Clinton's placement on the Armed Services committee was the first for a New York Senator ever. Her nomination as Secretary of State made Clinton the second ever woman in the role, managing the male dominated world of foreign policy. As Jones notes, 'Women's minority status in decision-making bodies often results in their conformity to a normative masculine style of communication, one that restricts the full expression of their ideas' (2016a, 626).

Having been a prominent public figure for 30+ years, Clinton has delivered countless public remarks and interviews and authored several books. In much of her writing, she has consistently asserted a lifelong personal faith and history with the Methodist church, noting particular adherence to Wesley's teachings to 'Do all the good you can, by all the means you can, in all the ways you can…' and applying that principle as a mandate to live a life of service (Clinton 2004, 22). This outlook framed her whole career trajectory. She has spent her entire professional life in public service. In terms of her views on the relationship between civic responsibility and faith, in a forum focused on faith during the 2008 Presidential primary campaign, she framed the nation this way.

> We have taken the gifts that God gave us and we have created this democracy where we choose our leaders and…therefore, when I say politics is not a game, it

> is really coming from deep within me because I know that we have the opportunity to really give other people a chance to live up to their own God-given potential. And that to me is the kind of grace note that makes politics worthwhile.
>
> (Clinton 2008)

Later in the same event she invokes Lincoln, a benchmark figure in American Civil Religion compared to Christ's narrative of having sacrificed himself for the sins of the nation. Clinton emphasises Lincoln's admonishment of sin and role in putting the nation on the path to fulfil 'our mission on God's side' (Clinton 2008, np).

Yet perception of Clinton indicates a scepticism about her faith, with media and voters expressing surprise at her religious knowledge and convictions when they emerge, and some implying duplicity in her discussion of biblical themes and narratives (Chozick 2016). A Pew Research study on the religion and the 2016 election showed that 43% of Americans surveyed considered Clinton 'not too' or 'not at all' religious (Mitchell 2016).

Some attribute the gap between her expressed religiosity to her keeping her day to day faith practices relatively private (Dias 2014), but others attribute it to the inherent distrust of her motives that has been a part of her public reception since she first took a policy driven role as First Lady. The decision to engage proactively in policy change, for some, was action in 'violation of her femininity and 'appropriate role' as first lady' (Jones 2016a, 629) which undermined her authenticity and adherence to gender norms in the eyes of many evangelicals, hence her credibility as a Christian is disputed. Issues surrounding her marriage and President Clinton's infidelity also complicated gendered perceptions of Mrs. Clinton with voters, evangelical and not.

Judith Butler established gender as performative and responsive to the social norms and expectations of particular narratives, environments and other factors (Butler 2006). As a pioneer of sorts, Clinton, like others before her, adapted her presentation and style, including her way of speaking to the circumstances in which she was presenting- male dominated areas of political life. In the analysis of her 2016 campaign speech that follows, there is evidence that 'Clinton, more often than not…focused on demonstrating her policy expertise and toughness' (Jones 2016a).

Clinton Campaign Communications director Jennifer Palmieri noted this was deliberate strategy in the 2016 campaign, and in hindsight, a regrettable one:

> I didn't appreciate at the beginning of the campaign how important models are for the person running, and the public, right? So the fact that we had never seen a woman do this before, I really think that was a much bigger hindrance than I thought, and what I realize we had done to her is we had made her a female facsimile of the qualities we look for in a male president because there was no other way for us to think about the president. And I think that's why people thought she was inauthentic.
>
> (Palmieri 2018)

In the speeches analysed here, this approach appears to have extracted the inspirational aspects of political speech—language that expresses the ethical and moral purpose of policies and actions is conspicuously missing. In stark contrast to Obama, Clinton's presentation of similar ideological perspectives lacks the hope and aspirational aspects of civil religion that underwrite that civic duty, replacing them with process and policy-oriented language, case studies and clinical description which injects distance between Clinton and the American electorate.

6.5.2 Speech Analysis—One key speech in methodological focus

Address Accepting the Presidential Nomination at the Democratic National Convention [56]

Hillary Clinton

Philadelphia, PA [57]

(Clinton 2016)

Photo 6: Hillary Clinton speaks at campaign rally.

After a contentious primary season between Senator Hillary Clinton and Senator Bernie Sanders, Clinton accepted the Democratic party nomination with a conciliatory tone intending to bring fractured party delegates together in a common purpose to defeat Donald Trump. The location of the event, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, is steeped in U.S. History, as the original capitol of the colonies and location of the writing of both the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution. Thus, mention of these events and the Revolutionary War are inevitable; and though intrinsic to the developmental timeline of American Civil Religion, such references do not create a link to Bellah's work without contextual elements of faith and belief to underwrite the events. Such elements are absent from Clinton's speech. But there are elements of faith and religious narratives present, primarily in response to narratives put forward by her opponent, Donald Trump.

6.5.3 Notable linguistic observations

Pronouns and perspectives

Clinton's delivery in this speech is quite conversational, almost folksy, which is a departure from other speeches we will look at in the next section. She speaks from the 'I/we/you' point of view for most of the speech, often using informal contractions ('I've/I'm/you've') in her address before she begins to engage her opponent. She

[56] Delivered 28 July 2016. Word count: 5389.
[57] Photo credit: https://www.teenvogue.com/story/hillary-clinton-teen-body-image-question-donald-trump

spends a sizeable portion of this speech discussing family connections and history and speaking as a 'we' with them as well as with her audience. She notes they are like 'most American families are. They used whatever tools they had, whatever God gave them and whatever life in America provided and built better lives and better futures for their kids' (2016). Clinton also notes her Methodist background in this section, and like Obama before her, takes the lesson of community from the text and applies it to citizenship, 'We have to look out for each other and lift each other up…I learned the words from our Methodist faith: Do all the good you can for all the people you can, in all the ways you can as long as ever you can' (2016).

When she makes her turn toward engaging Trump and Republican narratives, she shifts from 'we/you' to 'America', including herself and the audience in that grouping (Clinton 2016). After noting the courage of the founders of the nation, she cautions 'Now America is once again at a moment of reckoning. Powerful forces are threatening to pull us apart. Bonds of trust and respect are fraying. And just as with our Founders, there are no guarantees. It truly is up to us. We have to decide whether we will all work together so we can rise together'(Clinton 2016).

Choice of nouns & nominalised actions

The majority of Clinton's subject nouns are direct, though when engaging with Republican or Trump's policy perspectives she injects some distance and adds nuance by nominalising actions, such as 'I refuse to believe we can't find common ground' vs. 'I disagree,' and when engaging Trump's tweets, 'A man you can bait with a tweet is not a man we can trust with nuclear weapons!' instead of calling him untrustworthy.

Agenda/ideology revealed through repeated terminology

When she begins to address policy points, she chooses the word believe as a repeated refrain, possibly to contrast with Trump's negative presentation of issues as things that need protecting from rather than to be positively addressed. After professing belief in ten issues from a fair minimum wage to trade deals, she contrasts what she believes with Trump's grim depiction of the future. Clinton frames this as a fight throughout the speech, a fight between the voters (including herself) and Trump's version of future; a fight endorsed by the Founders. It is a battle between good and 'midnight in America' (Clinton, 2016).

6.5.4 Expanded analysis

This section contains analysis from four additional speeches delivered by Hillary Clinton in her 2016 campaign, focusing on the significant lexical and thematic elements. These speeches were delivered at campaign events in Minneapolis, Minnesota (Clinton 2015) [58], at the American Israel Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC) candidate event (Clinton 2016a) [59], in Marshalltown, Iowa just before the Iowa Democratic Caucuses (Clinton 2016b) [60], and remarks delivered at Temple University (Clinton 2016c) [61] in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania; the same location as the speech in focus in the previous section, which was delivered in July for the Democratic National Convention (Clinton 2016). Each of these speeches offers insight into Clinton's perspectives on religious themes and their interplay with the political.

Perspectives and lexical observations

In all four of these speeches, Clinton maintains the participant position that places her in the same perspective as the audience, primarily using first person pronouns to link their perspectives. The exception to this remains when she engages opposition perspectives, which she refers to as 'them' or names the specific person (Trump) or group (Republicans) as applicable. As noted in the speech in focus, there are times when she frames this binary in quite a confrontational manner, rather than focusing on establishing a conciliatory or unifying dynamic with the immediate audience. However, in specific situations where the audience is specialised, she is more nuanced in her perspectives.

Minneapolis, Minnesota has a significant Muslim population, as it has a large Somali diaspora population (Almond 2022). Clinton does not note this directly, but she spends much of the speech engaging in discussion of issues related to immigration, islamophobia whilst maintaining the 'we' perspective in her delivery (Clinton 2015). She maintains a similar perspective in her speech to AIPAC, though it is a bit more of a complex narrative to maintain as it is an American Jewish political group which advocates on behalf of Israel, so there are 'we' and there is Israel and 'the Jewish

[58] Delivered 15 December 2015. Word count: 4730.
[59] Delivered 21 March 2016. Word count: 3290.
[60] Delivered 26 January 2016. Word count 4890. The Iowa caucuses are the first state election of the nominating season.
[61] Delivered 19 September 2016. Word count: 3814.

State' within the context of the speech (Clinton 2016a). Clinton's perspective never creates an adversarial or binary relationship with either group

Like Obama before her, Clinton does not discuss terrorism in the same breath as the Muslim Faith, which is unsurprising given that Clinton would have followed the same policy while Obama's Secretary of State. Clinton discusses 'jihadi'(-sts/ -is) many times in the Minneapolis speech, as well as specific organisations such as ISIS and Hamas, as well as conflicts in Iran and Syria (2015), and does the same in the AIPAC speech as well as bringing in Hezbollah (2016a), but they are severed from the faithful entirely. There is one mention of Sunni Arabs, but the framing is in opposition to specific terrorist groups (Clinton, 2015). Even when discussing Ayatollah Ali Khamenei of Iran when speaking to AIPAC, she refers to him as the 'supreme leader' rather than the title that carries Islamic connotation (Clinton 2016a).

The only exception to this separation is when alluding to preventative work in Muslim-American communities against radicalization, even those references are quite subtle. The outlook presented here is of a unified, faithful America,

> America is strongest when all our people believe they have a stake in our country and our future, no matter where they're from, what they look like, how they worship or who they love. Our country was founded by people fleeing religious persecution. As George Washington put it, the United States gives 'to bigotry no sanction, to persecution no assistance.' So to all our Muslim-American brothers and sisters, this is your country too and I am proud to be your fellow American.
>
> (Clinton 2015)

This is as close to a narrative of American Civil Religion as one sees in Clinton's rhetoric. She ties faith, and not a Christian one, to the founders, founding principles and American identity. It is a stark contrast to how she engages with the rhetoric of her opponent, 'we must all stand up against the offensive, inflammatory, hateful, anti-Muslim rhetoric. You know not only do these comments cut against everything we stand for as Americans, they are also dangerous' (Clinton 2015).

She takes a similar tone in the AIPAC speech,

> Will we as Americans and as Israelis stay true to the shared democratic values that have always been at the heart of our relationship? We are both nations built by immigrants and exiles seeking to live and worship in freedom, national built on principles of equality, tolerance, and pluralism. At our best, both Israel and America are seen as a light unto the nations because of those values.
>
> (Clinton 2016a)

The final notable element of these two speeches is the only direct reference Clinton makes to a biblical narrative or person. In her closing at AIPAC, Clinton compares her own life and moral obligation to service with the choices of Esther[62], who 'refused to stay silent in the face of evil…by speaking out she risked everything, but as Mordecai reminded her, we all have an obligation to do our part when danger gathers' (Clinton 2016a). This is the first time Clinton makes such a specific reference to the bible in her 2016 speeches, but it is not the first time she invokes Esther. She related the story as inspirational in the 2008 primary election cycle, in a faith focused forum (Clinton 2008).

The other two speeches stand in stark contrast compared to these. When speaking to audiences in Iowa (2016b) and in Pennsylvania (2016c), Clinton's speeches are almost clinical in their language. While the first-person perspective remains, there is a remarkable lack of engagement with values or convictions of any kind. Almost all the actions are distanced and assigned to processes, case studies/names, groups, or entities. Even the most personal of examples in the Iowa speech, a visit to a children's hospital and talking with parents, is framed as a discussion pre-existing conditions and insurance denials with no mention of hope or despair, moral imperatives, or the

[62] In the Old Testament of the Bible, Esther is a beautiful Jewish orphan, who lives with her Uncle (or cousin, depending on interpretation) Mordecai, who was chosen as queen to the King after he deposes his first queen, Vashti. Esther keeps her Jewish identity secret from the King. The King's court is by all accounts, full of debauchery and idolatry, so the scenario is not one of moral superiority. When a decree is issued to kill all the Jews after Mordecai offends a jealous Haman, an influential advisor to the King, Esther risks her own life to speak to the King without invitation (a disrespect of protocol punishable by death) in hopes of saving her people. She is not only welcomed by the King, but in entertaining him with banquets gains his favour to the degree she is comfortable confessing her Judaism to him. The King is also reminded of Mordecai's goodness. The story is seen less as a moral instruction, but more as a demonstration that even in the most hopeless and seemingly unholy of environments and times, common and flawed people can rise to great impact if they choose the right path (Esther 1:10, NIV).
Interestingly, Esther is sometimes used in contrast to the Book of Daniel, which depicts apocalyptic narratives through visions of Babylon (Hale (2022) Given Trump's apocalyptic leaning narrative, Clinton's choice of heroine is an alternative choice when facing a similarly doomed fate.

lack of. Instead, a solution is proposed, followed by four paragraphs of procedure. No expression of empathy or sympathy, and the actions proposed are technical and distanced, 'I want to propose' this change, 'Here is what I want to do…', 'I started to work with…' (Clinton 2016b). This language could arguably be emblematic of what Jones calls the 'masculine voice,' which includes 'statistics, emphasising one's own accomplishments and referencing expert authorities,' This is in contrast to the 'feminine style,' which contains more identifying with experiences of others (2016, p. 631).

In the final speech, there is less of this phenomenon. Though the speech is still full of case studies to engage with actions, Clinton connects herself to the narrative, noting 'I am inspired by…' many of the examples she brings into discussion of resilience, noting 'that's the spirit that makes this country great' (Clinton 2016c). In this speech she speaks of her faith again, invoking the spirit of being our brother's keeper and 'lifting each other up' that featured in other speeches, referring to that code as her 'mission' (2016c). She also mentions values and relates personal experiences to anchor the assertion that 'We can build a future where all our children have the opportunity to live up to their God-given potential, no matter who they are…That's the America we believe in' and closing by framing that as the value worth fighting for (Clinton, 2016c).

Worldview and the future

In all five of Clinton's speeches, she presents policy points for pressing issues for individual Americans. She does this by establishing the problems (healthcare needs, educational access, etc), the impacted parties (average Americans), then discussing solutions and the parties who hinder progress (companies, Republicans, etc). Most of these scenarios are framed as solvable and without hyperbole. Where more dramatic language comes into the discourse is when discussing Trump as an alternative to Clinton's proposed path. In several speeches the stakes are framed as extremely serious, though it is usually tied to specific affronts to specific people. She warns against the dangers of xenophobia, racism, and discrimination she gleans from Trump's campaign rhetoric. Those he targets (Muslims, Immigrants, Minority groups, Women, the Disabled), she is careful to name and to protect in her own rhetorical approach.

There is hope for the future in Clinton's view of the world, if quite a bit of work to be done. We are not facing down catastrophe unless we give power over to Trump.

6.5.5 Conclusions—Clinton 2016 presidential campaign

Hillary Clinton's speech engages frequently with religions, but less so with religious themes and the historical benchmarks of ACR. In fact, in terms of religious terminology, she utilises terms like belief(-ve), spirit, God-given, faith, and sacrifice frequently. It is not that she does not discuss the founding of the nation, the American Revolution or, civil rights—she does, but rarely in conjunction with what it means to be an American and a person of faith. The only exception to this is her continued reference to a concept of communal responsibility as a citizen and human that the attributes at different times to Wesley, her Methodist mother and church culture, and Biblical examples like Esther (Clinton 2004, Clinton 2008, Clinton 2016c, Clinton 2016a, Clinton 2016, Jones 2016a, Chozick 2016).

6.6 Notable Observations—2016 Election Cycle

The 2016 election cycle brought a divergent and ominous offshoot of civil religious rhetoric in the form of Christian Nationalism manifest in Donald Trump's speeches. While his language alone would not have necessarily linked to civil religious narratives we have engaged in previous cycles, the more standard presentation of his running mate, Mike Pence, established a legitimacy with the Republican Party base (evangelical and not) that allowed Trump's white nationalist rhetoric to ride the coattails of existing expectations of Republican discourse. What this shift means for the current state and future of civil religion will be explored in the next chapter.

Clinton presented a bit of a counter narrative to Trump, but direct engagement with religious discourse was fairly minimal. Clinton's counter nationalistic language and discourse respecting religious entities ostracised by Trump often lies in the negative space between her words—what is NOT there, such as references to Islamic faith in conjunction with terrorism or terrorist organisations. Because her speaking style is very formal and often lacking feeling and emotion words such as hope, values, and other phrasing which might express the meaning and motivation behind policy actions, there is extraordinarily little to engage as far as her perception of American citizenship and sacred values or history. Clinton is, perhaps, the most wholly secularist of the candidates we have examined. She certainly does not reject faith as a

value tied to political acts, but her faith is largely a private matter, and where she does express it as motivating certain values, she carefully keeps that influence on her own decision making, rarely tying it to the citizenship of the whole.

6.7 Conclusion

This concludes the exploratory research chapters of the project. In Chapter 7, I will discuss the findings of these three election cycles separately and as an interwoven narrative as political parties and as candidates vying for the same role. Additionally, I will discuss the discourses emerging from the data hewn from these speeches and the future of American Civil Religion.

Chapter 7 : Findings

7.1 Introduction

Having analysed speeches across three election cycles from 2008-2016, incorporating remarks from five presidential candidates (one twice) and two vice presidents who make up the presidential ticket for each party, Democrat and Republican, we now turn to analysis of the data hewn from this work. In the sections that follow, I will address multiple aspects of the research questions central to the project:

- Given the intertwining of faith and patriotism in the United States, does the use of religious language in recent campaign speech reflect or support the continued existence of a civil religion; and if so, does this reflect Bellah's theory of American civil religion as envisioned in his 1967 essay or has a new, different interpretation of civil religion developed in the United States?
- What can analysing religious language in campaign speech tell us about the discourses and agendas that the language supports and legitimises? Are those underlying discourses reflective of the power structures which support their candidacy such as political parties?

This chapter will begin by returning to the candidates themselves, discussing findings on the role of religiosity in relation to the religious speech each ticket delivered, noting the more remarkable linguistic findings of particular speakers. Interestingly, the synthesis of the data lends itself to discussing the candidates in the frame of the ticket and as individuals regardless of party affiliation, as there are commonalities to be addressed among each.

Beyond the candidates, we will discuss the development of the both the manifestation of American civil religion across these three elections as well as how this new analysis fits into the wider conversation about Bellah's theory of civil religion and scholarship regarding it, with attention to modifications to the theory from other scholars which shaped understanding of Bellah's theory prior to this study.

As required of the methodology of the project, critical discourse analysis, I will then note the discourses of power which emerge from the work. These developing discussions are important avenues for future study and for framing our understanding of the language at hand.

Finally, the chapter will conclude by discussing how these discourses fit within the inquiry of the role of religious rhetoric in politics more generally in the future, whether in the vein of civil religion or not, revisiting the scholarship and critique of Chapter 2, the emerging significance of nationalism in this discourse as revealed in this research, and the impact that could result from that trajectory.

7.2 Candidate Engagement with Religion

7.2.1 Role of religiosity

Though I argue in Chapter 2 that personal religiosity and religious sect help anchor and form the delivery of rhetoric associated with American civil religion, it was unclear how religiosity might shape that messaging in the context of individual speakers. Now the data has been gathered, the influence has shown to be much more deflective in nature rather than legitimising.

Each candidate, with the exception of Donald J. Trump had some pre-existing declaration of their faith that preceded their run for office. For some, it came in the form of published biographies that were sourced by media coverage (Obama 2006, Clinton 2004), and for others in media coverage of their public roles in society: McCain, as a prisoner of the Vietnam War, his faith was well documented in the press; and similarly Mitt Romney, as the most famous Mormon politician in the country and former chair of the Salt Lake City Olympic committee (Powell 2012, Liu 2008b). These established faith positions were the sort of expected biographical elements of candidates one would expect. However, in the case of Obama, McCain, and Romney, arguably the most overtly faithful of all the candidates, this established religious profile proved something to overcome and clarify. Those with the least outwardly religious profiles, Clinton, and Trump, never addressed the issue directly.

In his 2008 campaign, Barack Obama wore his religiosity outwardly, it permeated his rhetoric as well as his speaking style. But it was the emerging controversy regarding the pastor of his church in Chicago, Rev. Jeremiah Wright of United Church of Christ, which forced more direct engagement of the role of faith and civic duty, for Obama personally as well as articulating his view of the interplay of the two elements more generally (Ross 2008). Despite his high degree of public religiosity, there was also a persistent questioning of the legitimacy of his faith. I will explore potential causes of

this questioning in section 7.4.1, which focuses on discourses of power revealed in this project, specifically issues of race, gender, and the outsider narrative.

For Romney, personal faith could hardly be more established. Unfortunately, in the eyes of many, it was not the right faith (Krumel and Enami 2017, Goodstein 2012). In response Romney delivered a speech clarifying his position on matters of faith and its role in governing and civil responsibility (Romney 2007). This speech not only informed his position in his 2007-8 failed presidential run, but when he sought the republican nomination again in 2012 (successfully) he took that position and shaped it into an approach that runs quite faithfully along Wuthnow's 'priestly' approach to Bellah's theory of civil religion, in which the nation embodies an approach to governing rooted in Christian values which stands as a beacon to the rest of the world (Wuthnow 1988a, Wuthnow 1988b). This perspective was not incongruous with his personal faith as a Mormon, because it was a broader, more universalist (Christian) framing of a faithful approach to civic responsibility. In the end, Romney received additional bolstering in evangelical voters' eyes with the choice of Paul Ryan as his running mate (Krumel and Enami 2017, Gigot 2012).

Like Romney, McCain needed to buttress his ticket with further evangelical support in the form of an overtly Christian vice-presidential candidate. While McCain professes his faith quite openly in his early public life (Serrano and Vartabedian 2008, McFadden 2018), other events in his personal life undermined his legitimacy as the 'good Christian man' he depicts when describing aspirational Americans (McCain 2008b). Hence the comprehensive perspective on his religious credentials needed strengthening, especially after losing the nomination to evangelical firebrand, George W. Bush in earlier campaigns. Hence the choice of his running mate, Sarah Palin, an expressive, devout Christian woman with a large family and a folksy rapport, brought in lend faith and authenticity to the ticket (Court and Lynch 2015).

In the 2016 election cycle, both candidates Clinton and Trump, conveyed low levels of personal religiosity in terms of faith and civic tasks. That is not to say they did not engage with the topic at all, but the references they do make are deliberate, context specific and largely removed from their personal belief systems. Clinton does express strong personal faith a few times, referencing personal connection with the narrative of Esther in the Old Testament. However, she rarely invokes personal belief or Christian values in conjunction with policy or civic perspectives. Trump engages with

religion and the religious, to be certain, but not from a perspective of his own personal religious beliefs. In this framing, Clinton and Trump appear to be the most secular candidates examined in this project.

All this to note that religiosity was a factor of interest, but not determinative of how religious rhetoric was presented by the candidates, with the exception of Mitt Romney and Barack Obama. And in the case of both candidates, their personal religiosity and history of faithful practices did not shape their messaging but trigger a shift away from their personal perspective toward a clearer more unitarian presentation of civil religion.

7.2.2 Discussion: linguistic choices

I would like to return for a moment to some important terms from Chapter 4 (4.3) with regard to how language is framed. The first is *modality*, which refers to the likelihood that something will occur; whether a speaker or writer chooses to say *might* vs. *will* vs. *could* (Halliday 1973). These choices offer an opportunity to establish the sense of urgency, of need, of hope. A second concept worth revisiting is *transitivity* which refers to the relationship of a speaker to the audience, an action, or an object. These two elements of speech proved of significant importance in understanding the messages conveyed in the political speeches examined in this project. They are also usually expressed by seemingly benign words, illustrating the need for the type of analysis which this project undertakes. Had this this research used content analysis in the vein of Coe, et al., this element would likely have been overlooked, as their coding focused almost exclusively on straightforwardly religions terms, and specifically Judaeo-Christian terms (Coe and Reitzes 2010, Coe and Domke 2006, Coe and Chenoweth 2013, Coe and Chapp 2017, Chapp and Coe 2019).

As I will discuss in more detail in sections that follow, the narratives and discourses present in the speeches are often articulated through the metaphorical distance and urgency that frame civil religious rhetoric. In fact the injection of distance between parties in the speech contributes to a seismic shift in conservative presentation of religious perspectives on civic duty such that it diverges completely from existing civil religious theory. In using CDA, this analysis includes aspects of modality and transitivity as well as language related to any religion, which proved to be key to understanding the shift in the conservative narrative from priestly civil religion

toward a form of Christian nationalism framed in direct opposition to Islam and other forces deemed outside the abstraction of 'American'-ness.

It seemed clear in the 2008 election cycle that candidate Obama was committed to communicating with little or no distance between himself, the audience at hand, anyone who might see the speech in the United states, and within the parties spoken of in his remarks. In isolation, such a tendency may seem a stylistic choice. A personal decision down to personality of the particular candidate. And in his case, it was, because his approach to rhetoric which falls under the umbrella of civil religion is unique to these three cycles, even his party mate, Hillary Clinton takes a completely different approach.

What proved more consequential was not closeness in terms of transitivity between the candidate speaking and the audience or subject, but when there was notable distance between them. This distance, evident in the analysis of remarks by McCain, Romney, Clinton, and Trump, revealed not only significant deviation from civil religion as understood in current scholarship, but the development of this distance, the increasing of Distance between America and other groups, between America and outsiders, and eventually between Americans, illustrated and entirely new trajectory for the nation.

In the sections that follow I will explore the notable findings hewn from linguistic analysis of these candidates.

Transitivity and Modality

In terms of transitivity Barack Obama nearly always use the first-person plural 'we' when speaking, and as Obama's framing of religious language and relationship to civic responsibility seems to focus on the values of justice and community, this link is unsurprising. Obama and the audience are one people working toward a goal of common justice. His frequent invocation of the concept of being one's 'brother's keeper' aligns with this (Obama 2008a, Obama 2008b).

Hillary Clinton, who ran on the democratic ticket after Obama exceeded eligibility, was also a member of Obama's cabinet. Her rhetorical style was markedly different though she and Obama shared some similarities. As explored in Chapter 6, Clinton's speaking style was sometimes conversational to the point of folksy, she also maintained an almost regimented distance from feeling words and concepts. Thus,

much of the necessary components to construct an aspirational image of the nation are absent from her speech. She does speak of America's mission, which is not surprising given she was Secretary of State under Obama, such rhetoric is more common parlance when discussing foreign policy. However, one aspect she shares with Obama is a meticulous separation between terms like terrorism and violence and elements of Islam. This distance follows Obama's deliberate initiative to disassociate Islamic faith from connotations of terrorism that had become pervasive since 9/11. This intentional distance between terms is a striking contrast to some rhetoric on the other tickets.

All three republican candidates use first person 'I' most of the time. Both McCain and Romney, tend to deliver their remarks; with their 'I' juxtaposed with a you and refer to Americans as a construct. For McCain to be a worthy American it's referred to as 'righteousness' and more overtly, a ' a humble Christian man' (2008d). This is not to say, that the American citizens in the audience of his speeches do not meet this standard, but that he is establishing a benchmark to which Americans aspire. This aligns well with Wuthnow's description of the 'priestly' path for the nation, in which this exceptional country is meant to be an example to others globally, with an incumbent responsibility to live up to that standard (1988).

For Romney, the positioning of the 'I' and 'you/America' is similarly partitioned and aspirational. However, there is one key difference in the way McCain and Romney frame their, and the nation's, positionality—for Romney there is often an adversary opposite them; and primarily that adversary is associated with Islam.

As noted in the previous section, transitivity is often about metaphorical distance between parties. When an action or even is placed further away from the speaker or the audience, rhetorically, the less relatable that action, event, or object becomes. In analysing the sampled speeches, this distance tends to be reserved for opponents of the speaker, controversial policies and as alluded to above, potential enemies. This distance is also a key element to understanding the differences between Obama's perspective on civil religion and that of the republican candidates (Clinton engages little with civil religion, more on that in a moment). For Obama, faith motivated and influenced elements of citizenship and civic responsibility are elements for 'we' Americans to aspire to fulfil, this is in line with the 'prophetic' path per Wuthnow and aligns well with Bellah's original theory. Conversely, the republican candidates take

these same understandings of religion informing the founding events of the country, understanding it as an example of exceptional blessings from God and the taking that mantle and facing it outward—toward a world in need of a model- the 'priestly' path, as far as it is followed. Thus, there is an expectation of different perspective and framing of distance when the mission is posed outwardly, instead of the prophetic path which is collective. However, the language examined in this research revealed a further push away from merely embodying that standard to others. Beginning with Romney there is a pushing away of those deemed outside of the standard of the mission. Romney juxtaposes a 'Christian America' with 'secular extremists' (Europe), and 'violent jihad', 'martyrdom' and 'theocratic tyranny' (Islam) (Romney 2007). This positioning is accompanied by an imperative to preserve 'America's Greatness,' a refrain we would become quite familiar with by 2016 (Romney 2007, 2012d). This language foreshadows Trump's linguistic framing, and arguably could be seen as laying the groundwork for more populist rhetoric, a topic which will be explored in the next section.

I have established that both McCain and Romney allude to a mission that the United States embodies by its mere existence. One interesting development from this research is that while this is usually an aspect of the conservative path, once Obama is elected president, he too engages in mission rhetoric. This is understandable given his position as leader of the country as opposed to an individual candidate. Though it is notable that most of the time, when he engages with mission in this capacity, Obama frames the individual mission as well as the national mission. In his remarks to the Air Force Academy he references the American mission in context of humanitarian work in Haiti, 'leading on behalf of human dignity' (2012). This is a different type of mission than that which Romney is framing in opposition to those which are fundamentally different and attacking American ideals. To return to the idea of distance, even when framing civil religious elements as an outward facing mission, Obama's rhetoric is inclusive, whereas Romney's framing of that same mission injects distance between 'us' and the subjects of that mission. When Trump takes the handoff for the 2016 election, this binary develops further, in very troubling directions.

7.2.3 Candidate Trump Changes the Narrative

In his campaign rhetoric, Trump does not engage in talk of mission. He does not really even mention God or belief that much. What he does talk about is the malignment of the faithful, and frame who is responsible for that fate. He also discusses inevitable death of the nation. He does all of this from a rhetorical distance, as an observer of what will happen next- a kind of prophet with unparalleled sight, forecasting the apocalyptic future that awaits those who do not act now to stop it.

This is a fundamental shift away from the exemplary nation, blessed by God to show the world how to perform; replaced instead by a fragile nation on the precipice of losing it all. Trump's view turns inward, the jeopardy is coming from all sides. The position of the faithful in his scenario is decidedly defensive, not shining a light for others. America's greatness is already gone from this view but could be retrieved from the jaws of defeat with the right vote. Who is responsible for this catastrophe? To see it, we return to the rhetoric of Romney and the development of one who is the most distant: the outsider.

As noted in Chapter 5, Romney takes the priestly Christian nation on the global stage, which other republican candidates like McCain constructed before him, and places it in opposition to those who he perceives would push back against Christianity- secularists and those in the Islamic world. But it is notable that his discussion of this dynamic is fairly staid—the danger is not imminent. While the specificity of this narrative is important to note in fleshing out the republican narrative over these three cycles, while the mission is facing outside concerns it remains within our understanding of civil religion. However, once Trump picks up the narrative and applies a different modality to his language, the crisis becomes urgent and the stakes rise. Whitehead, et al note that 'Islamophobia clearly had a strong empirical association with Trump voting. Americans who believe Middle East refugees are terror threats, that Muslims hold inferior values…or endanger Americans' physical safety,' these were the audience that Romney primed with his rhetoric and who Trump activates with his increased expression of urgency (Whitehead 2018, p. 166). The result is a shift away from our understanding of civil religion stemming from Bellah's definition, which not only associates a unitarian faith understanding with historical events and figures, but also attaches a narrative that part of this sacred connection is a kind of imperative to live up to it (1967, Bellah 2007a, Bellah [1978]

1998, Bellah 1976b, Bellah 2008b). When Wuthnow adapted the theory to account for the division of partisan ideologies, the moral imperative split into a 'prophetic' and a 'priestly path' for which the left and right leaning agendas push the theory of civil religion in a channel that either embodies the community aspects of religion (Prophetic/Left), or the mission to shine the light on others as an example (Priestly/Right) (Wuthnow 2011a, 1988a, 1988b).

However, with the introduction of Trump's apocalyptic rhetoric, to the connection to existing civil religion on the right is severed. His engagement of religious language steers toward a more populist, sometimes nationalist rhetoric where the sacred connections associated with the nation are no longer aspirational or a light to shine onto others. Instead, the narrative depicts a constructed American value system that is on the precipice of destruction and only immediate aggressive action to defend it against outside invaders can save it. In light of this shift, and of the research questions guiding this project, in the next section I will discuss the unfolding of the branch of religious nationalism apparent in Trump's rhetoric.

7.2.4 The Emergence of Christian Nationalism

Whitehead and Perry (2018) define Christian nationalism as a cultural framework—a collection of myths, traditions, symbols, narratives, and value systems—that idealizes and advocates a fusion of Christianity with American civic life' which sounds quite similar to Bellah's definition of civil religion (2018, p. 10, Bellah 1967). They also establish Christian nationalism as an aspirational ideology, but not a consensus historic perception of the nation. From Whitehead and Perry's research:

> Christian nationalists view God's expectations of America as akin to his commands to Old Testament Israel. Like Israel, then, America should fear God's wrath for unfaithfulness while assuming God's blessing—or even mandate—for subduing the continent by force, if necessary, viewed their mission through the lens of apocalyptic Christianity. A number of influential advocates of Christian nationalism could be characterized as "postmillennial," meaning that they believe that Christ's kingdom is already established on earth, and thus his followers should bring every aspect of American civic life under his reign.
>
> (2018, p. 10)

This is a worldview that approaches the extreme, thus they outline a spectrum of engagement with Christian nationalism that defies any rigid binary of support for or opposition against the idea. They propose 'four main orientations toward Christian nationalism in the United States: Americans are either Rejecters, Resisters, Accommodators, or Ambassadors [of Christian nationalism]' (2018, p.13). These four perspectives express the complexity of Americans' engagement more fully with issues and positions which intersect with the political and religious and thus help to shape understanding of Christian nationalism in the United States. Whitehead and Perry also note the blurring of boundaries between Christian and American identities in this context, and nationalistic perspectives are intrinsically linked with perceptions of identity and depictions of threats to that identity (2018, p. 15). Thus considering what constitutes identity and its construction are key to understanding how rhetoric such as Trump's in 2016 (and beyond) activated and persuaded so many members of the American electorate.

As noted in Chapter 2, when groups who share identities become focused on who does or does not 'belong' in their narratives, the identity could develop into an exclusionary nationalism. Braunstein notes that American visions of national identity centre 'oneness' ('e Pluribus Unum' on currency, 'One nation under God' in the US Pledge of Allegiance (Bellamy 1892)), an idea that can imply a homogeneity that is conducive to erecting boundaries as society diversifies (Braunstein 2018, p. 186). Romney's rhetoric establishing oppositional relationships between the Christian United States and 'secularists' and Muslims reinforced separation and oppositional posture that Marti notes has been present in the history and systemic establishment of the United States since the founding—people of colour are 'less than' white Americans, especially white Christian Americans (Martí 2019). In Romney's pitch for the presidency, Muslims and secularists are named outsiders regardless of citizenship. This lays the groundwork for Trump's more inflammatory rhetoric to follow.

Who is considered inside and who is considered an outsider in these narratives, could arguably be tied to a citizen's 'deep story.' The deep story sounds simplistic: it is 'a story that feels as if it were true' (Hochschild 2016, p. 16). But scholars, including Whitehead and Perry, Marti, and particularly Hochschild, demonstrate the complexity of the creation, maintenance, and malleability of American deep stories.

Hochschild's astonishingly thorough work investigating Tea Party voters in Louisiana as a curated sample of citizens reveals an extremely complex set of contributing factors and experiences that weave the tapestry of the American right wing's deep story. Some elements are consistently present: nostalgia, selective recollection, and a particular perception of the American Dream (a perception rooted in a nuanced, but distinctly white supremacist perspective), and firmly cleaved to the nobility of struggle and abhorrence of those who get a free ride (Hochschild, 2016).

Marti describes the American Dream as 'the idea that all who are willing to make the effort can achieve their own desired destiny,' a dream that is ingrained, like the founding of the nation, with 'a religiously grounded racial bond rooted in an idealized past of Pilgrims, Puritans, and other white Christian religious dissenters pursuing the freedom of their convictions,' (2019, p. 108-9). It is a dream that is obscured from citizens of colour throughout the history of the nation. In Hochschild's research, achievement of this Dream is understood through the lens of the Southern states that make up the former Confederacy, the geographical centre of slavery. Through their framing, poverty that, for many, originated in farming as sharecroppers during and after slavery was actually a step toward becoming plantation owners; despite a system that made that success quite unlikely. The slaves who enabled the plantation owners' success were a non-entity in poor whites' journey to the American dream—they identified with white plantation owners. Hochschild notes, 'The poor white did not see himself 'locked into a marginal life' but as a 'potential planter or mill baron himself,' a part of the Dream is that feeling of hope, aspiration, and potential (2016, p. 208).

The aspirational aspect is essential because 'conservatives identify 'up' with the 1 percent, the planter class. . .it showed you were optimistic, hopeful, a trier. . .even when matters seemed hopeless.' (Hochschild 2016, p. 217). This alignment with the elite enables members of society who may seem quite distant from someone like Donald Trump to relate closely to him and his message. Trump's messaging, however tailored to the American context and a particular moment in time, is rooted in a deeper movement that has global reach. Norris and Inglehart note that Trump's 'campaign rhetoric has been strongly counter-elitist' despite being a member of the elite class himself (Norris and Inglehart 2019, p. 4). He is utilising the tools of populist rhetoric, flavoured with authoritarian ideology (Norris and Inglehart

2019).Populism pushes the establishment elite aside, emphasising that power belongs with the common people which, superficially seems positive. But in its discrediting of established structures, a door is opened for manipulation and elevation of figures with authoritarian agendas. (Norris and Inglehart 2019, p. 444). Norris and Inglehart note that authoritarian ideologies emphasise two premises: 'sharp distinction between 'Us' and 'Them'' and that the security of the 'in' group is under threat (2019, p. 444). Recalling the analysis of Trump's rhetoric in Chapter 6 of this thesis, his language and narratives are clearly within this framing. This is the top-down view of a messaging strategy that is articulated to draw boundaries and establish a vacuum wherein Trump is the one leader who is capable of stepping in. Hochschild notes this jeopardy in her work with his supporters, and articulates the view of his messaging from the bottom up,

> Not only does Trump evoke emotion, he makes an object of it, presenting back to his fans as a sign of collective success. His supporters have been mourning for a lost way of life. Many have become discouraged, others depressed. They yearn to feel pride but instead have felt shame. . .Trump allowed them both to feel like a good moral American and to feel superior to those they consider 'other' or beneath them.
>
> (Hochschild 2016, p. 15)

This perceived jeopardy to the populace and the ideological desperation to protect it at all costs is most frequently cited as a reaction to cultural and economic change over time, though debates persist as to which elements wield more impact (Whitehead and Perry 2018, Norris and Inglehart 2019, Hochschild 2016, Gorski 2017). In the context of this research Trump and the MAGA movement, following the groundwork established by Romney before them, have articulated a long simmering frustration and perceived marginalisation of a swath of Americans, formulating a successful nationalistic agenda that clearly delineates who is 'in', who is 'out' and that the need for action is emergent. The Republican party follows suit, though not entirely made up of 'ambassadors' of Christian nationalism in the vein of Whitehead and Perry, but assisted by accommodators of the narrative (2018).

7.2.5 Developments in American Civil Religion

Returning to the first research question: given the intertwining of faith and patriotism in the United States, does the use of religious language in recent campaign speech reflect or support the continued existence of a civil religion; and if so, does this reflect Bellah's theory of American civil religion as envisioned in his 1967 essay or has a new, different interpretation of civil religion developed in the United States? The answer to the first part is clearly yes, it is evidenced in the remarks of nearly every candidate, in a clear and consistent way, that the intertwining of religious narratives and the history of the nation, the idea that the nation was founded with a kind of mandate to continue with the divinely legitimated purpose bestowed through this relationship between God and the republic continues to resonate. What form that religion takes is complex.

If we return to Wuthnow and his modification of Bellah's theory divided by political ideology into conservative and liberal paths, one of which, the conservative path, denotes a priestly execution of America as 'the best hope of humankind,' with a sacred obligation to not only maintain its elevated position but to expand American values including democracy into areas where corruption seems evident in the approaches taken by McCain, Romney and to an extent, Clinton (Wuthnow 1988b). Each refer to the American mission and engage with the narrative as a leader intending to shepherd. Once elected president, Obama also engages with the theory in this way, likely owing to his shift in perspective as the literal head of state. This would seem to undermine the idea that the priestly path is primarily one owned by conservative actors. In light of the remarks examined here, it seems to be more of stylistic application of the same civil religion assumed when one takes assertive external ownership of the role leading the nation (whether one has yet earned the office or not). The priestly course as optional, regardless of party ideology, is supported by the fact that the primary path that Obama takes when engaging in civil religious rhetoric over the breadth of his two terms. Most often his version focuses on community and peer to peer uplift, the concept of being our 'brother's keeper,' which falls definitively in the prophetic realm and far more in line with Bellah's original thesis, which requires an ideology that prioritises community and mutual obligation. Candidate Hillary Clinton is by far the most secular of all eight candidates reflected in this work.

One could debatably argue that Trump does present a type of prophetic message, but with a warning of apocalyptic danger, it certainly falls outside of Bella thesis. Trump also lacks a mandate to embody an example of a blessed nation to others, putting him outside the priestly narrative. His perspective holds no regard for external perspectives at all; it is very internally focused.

If Wuthnow's ideological paths are no longer reflective a religious rhetoric in candidate speech, yet the elements of Bellah's original thesis remain intact for most of the other candidates, where does that leave civil religion? One consideration is that American civil religion, as Bellah theorised it, exists as it always has, but as something of a relic, a fixture of the nation's understanding of history that is an accepted a tool of persuasion and nostalgic idealism but no longer evolving and changing shape in a uniformly diagnosable manner. This does not make it irrelevant for study. In fact, if civil religion were acknowledged as credible theory of political historical development in the American context, then the power of civil religion should not be underestimated. In light of the research here, and potential future work involving narratives emerging from this work, the risk of civil religious canon and devices being weaponized as a tool of oppression in emerging discourses of populist, Christian nationalism in American politics is nigh and its ongoing examination emergent.

In my view, there is a very clear progression amongst the republican candidates, intentional or not, from what McCain (2008d) begins in his rhetoric of separation between the righteous men,' humble Christian men', who lead his idealised abstraction of the United States of America in its mission. Following the rhetoric through to Romney's oppositional narrative of the United States, a 'Christian America,' against 'secular extremists,' 'violent jihad', and 'theocratic tyranny' (2007, Romney 2012d, Romney 2012c, Romney 2012b). This separation of the United States in its mission first by McCain then with its enemy clarified by Romney, those who would be non-Christian, both Muslim and secular, leads to the repetition of an idea that takes hold as something entirely separate from civil religion. Romney calls it preservation of 'Americas greatness.' when Trump assumes the mantle, it becomes 'Make America great again.' Both candidates are moving into a more troubling rhetorical realm: Christian nationalism, 'a unique and independent ideology that can

influence political actions by calling forth a defines of mythological narratives about America's distinctly Christian heritage and future' (Whitehead 2018, p. 147).

This ideological path diverges entirely from Bellah's altruistic thesis (1967). Indeed when this mission is bolstered by narratives and language establishing discourses of power and oppression globally and domestically, and when that mission is framed and justified with allusions and overt references to perilous, imminent, loss of life, shelter, means, value systems (2015, 2016b, 2016a, 2016d, 2016c, 2016)--the very way of life of a specific religious group: white American evangelicals, we are no longer in the realm of civil religion at all, that common historical narrative bond has been replaced by tools long established in populist movements, which are utilised to divide and enrage the audience. I will now reflect for a moment on how Trump's campaign utilised those techniques to build a movement by referring back to scholarship discussed in Chapter 3, some of which now seems regretfully short sighted.

One element of Chapp's work, that was marginalised in his findings (which conclude with the 2008 election) is role of 'culture war narratives' (2013, pp. 72-74). Culture wars 'drive a wedge into the American public, asserting that there are exactly two religious groups in American politics, and they are locked in an intractable political conflict over the moral standing of the nation' (Chapp, p. 8). He asserts culture war narratives are independent of civil religion, though at times using the same linguistic toolbox, declaring that there is 'virtually no evidence of an increase in the hostility of religious rhetoric or in the extent to which religious rhetoric has been used to call attention to cultural others' (p. 74). Whilst this could be somewhat accurate in the context of pre-2008 rhetoric, and even in some of the research here, I suspect part of this optimism is down to what is considered religious rhetoric in Chapp's work.

His research focuses on overtly religious language and that associated with civil religious narratives, and his definition of this is quite narrow. Religious rhetoric by candidates like Romney was along these lines, but the words were also juxtaposed with a selection of named 'others.' Initially, those others may have not appeared to be part of religious rhetoric, but when considering the full context of the language that would have qualified under Chapp's sample parameters, they are clearly part of the discussion and the relationship between that rhetoric is absolutely calling attention to Islam and secular actors as 'cultural others.' This type of intent and framing becomes even more overt in Trump's rhetoric and is consistent with Christian nationalism,

which 'can serve as an ethno-nationalist symbolic boundary portraying non-whites and Muslims as threatening cultural outsiders' (Whitehead 2018, p. 153). This establishing the 'other' as non-white also supports Gorski's later perspective on Trump's rhetoric, 'rife with blood and apocalypse' which invigorated the protective instincts of what turned out to be Trump's dominant voting bloc, white evangelicals who 'did not vote as whites or as evangelicals, but as *white evangelicals*' (Gorski 2018, p. 361).

Trump's speeches really bring the flawed foresight of Chapp's prognostication to light, as he notes that religious rhetoric in secular campaign speech almost never evokes emotions of anxiety, anger or sadness; this belies the most obvious of directives that underwrite Trump's apocalyptic rhetoric (Chapp 2013, p. 70). While audience reaction is largely outside the scope of this project, it is worth mentioning an element of political psychology that comes into play when religious political rhetoric is delivered to a willing audience. Chapp notes that when in an angry state, individuals tend to think heuristically, resisting thoughtful analysis and are more prone to hostility toward outsiders, 'creating an automatic prejudice…from thin air' (Chapp 2013, pp. 9-10). No doubt Trump's catastrophic tone and warnings of 'lawlessness' 'violence' 'hatred' 'barbarians' and 'crying mothers' would have no problem eliciting such reactions and with the audience in an inflamed state, a powerful agenda can be inserted. When paired with oversimplification, also a tool of populist persuasion, this language creates a powerful framing for the jeopardy Trump is warning of. Wodak elaborates that,

> Far-right populism attempts to reduce social and economic structures in their complexity and proposes simple explanations for complex and often global developments…routinely draw[ing] on well-known and established stereotypes of 'the Other' and 'the Stranger', whose discursive and socio-political exclusion is supposed to create a sense of community and belonging within the allegedly homogenous 'people'.
>
> (Wodak 2021)

Gorski notes that the nationalist 'wishes to fuse religion and politics, to make citizenship in one the mark of citizenship in the other, to purge all those who lack the mark, and to expand the borders of the kingdom as much as possible, by violent means if necessary' (Gorski 2017, p. 17). But the MAGA narrative is distinctly insular.

The priestly narrative of Romney was decidedly expansionist, but Trump's apocalyptic scenarios frame the nation as in need of imminent rescue and defence, not pro-active expansion. This isolationist narrative brings a darker aspect of nationalism than Gorski depicts. Trump predicts the end of life as we know it, the attackers and those who damage from the inside are named, the stakes are depicted with a remarkable urgency, but unlike most apocalyptic narratives, there is little faith in the inevitable transcendence of the true believers. Perhaps this can be correlated to Trump's rhetorical improvisation affecting narratives, but to be truly apocalyptic in the American protestant sense, would there be such alarm? Would there be a need to act or should there be relief, and faith in the grace of a God that would protect and value his true servants? That element is missing in Trump's vitriol, it is all doom and gloom. That said, it is not illogical to think that given the nationalist path they desire, that salvation or even the conquest narrative that Gorski pairs with nationalist agendas would follow. We just did not see a lot of it in Trump's 2016 rhetoric. An examination of Trump's 2020 rhetoric in future work could reveal such progression.

At this point it becomes conspicuous to not have discussed the numbers. This project consciously steered away from what 'works' and focused on what 'is' in terms of the language. The reality is that evangelicals who ascribe to Trump's rhetoric are a minority of the population of the country, but they now dominate the narrative of the Republican party, which only adds to the urgency of continued study of the Christian nationalist discourse emerging from the party, both with attention to nuances as in studies like this one, as well as Whitehead and Perry's, and in larger content analytical work, especially of political communication in new media. Wodak notes, the exponential impact of fast developing mediated practices such as Twitter and Facebook, enabling 'a rhetorical feedback loop' that 'far-right populists seem to have quickly learned to leverage…using them to reach larger audiences, mobilize followers and gain power' (Wodak 2021). If we return to the earlier discussion of the impact of anger on decisions (Chapp 2013) and of oversimplification (Wodak 2021) and place these techniques withing the precisely targeted medium of social media outreach, it is not difficult to see how we find ourselves amidst federal investigations and international espionage intended to undermine key tenets of democracy. The need for continued attention to this subject area could not be clearer.

Gorski notes 'the religious nationalist narrative is best understood as an Americanized version of the 'golden age' myth. It emphasizes the great deeds of the past, particularly the economic vitality and military strength of the United States, not to mention it is sexual purity and religious piety. Its core trope is moral decline, which supposedly results from religious decline' (Gorski 2017, p. 33). But he also notes a struggle between religious nationalism and radical secularism, hoping for a middle avenue that could host a level of dialogue and compromise that lead to a more functional American society, but I would argue that the radical secularist element he describes is fairly inconsequential in the US context. Conversely, in the post-Trump world, the other side is an outsized force that has become the dominant voice of the republican party, and in a two-party system, this is a problem which outpunches its numeric population.

To conclude this discussion on the current state of civil religion as gleaned from this research, it is clear that American civil religion in the vein of Bellah has proven its established relevance in political discourse in the United States. Though modifications to the theory along partisan ideology seem to be flawed, perhaps beyond repair, for in this research, crossover between candidates has not followed partisan lines, in fact one candidate, Donald Trump, completely broke the mould. Trump took the power and legitimacy that underwrites civil religion as an accepted tenet of Americans' understanding of their country and citizenship and shaped it into a completely different form: toward a white Christian nationalism; an extreme, populist narrative which demands continued engagement along with further work monitoring civil religion in action.

7.3 Discourses of Power Revealed by this Research

A key premise of critical discourse analysis is the seeking and articulation of discourses of power which underpin the language being analysed. I considered this a crucial factor in determining my methodology. Given the experiences that led me to this intellectual path, the idea of separating the impact and power dynamic from the words seemed impossible. But I did not anticipate the significance of the discourse that would emerge as the progression of political language over these 12 years was brought to light. The language in these speeches, particularly those by republican candidates, reveal a systematic increase in othering language toward minority groups, specifically Muslims, non-white immigrants, and Black Americans, and at times by

implication, women. The emergence of this discourse is most clearly led by increasingly overt and aggressive language in President Trump's rhetoric but has its roots in Romney's language in the 2012 campaign. It is customary for a party's presidential nominee to take over staffing and strategy for the executive management of the party infrastructure. Thus, with Trump's victory in 2016, this discourse has been adopted by the republican party as well.

The use of political speech legitimised with religious themes, terminology and framing may not seem new. Certainly, elements of it are discussed in media discourse on a regular basis. Academic inquiry has also begun to seek clarification on aspects of several of them. Wodak has begun to explore this discourse with her work on normalisation of overtly shocking language in political rhetoric and its force in promoting populist agendas, primarily in Austria. But she engages with Trump's rhetoric as well, noting particular alarm at the power of social media platforms to transmit populist rhetoric efficiently and effectively (Wodak 2021). But there is uniqueness to the development of these discourses as located in the specific speeches in this project, that when placed in the context of the evolving demographics of the United States, the language begins to shape a discourse of white Christian nationalism that requires our attention. I will explore the context, background and specific linguistic elements and choices which contribute to this discourse in the section to follow.

7.3.1 Statistical context and roots of the discourse

In Chapter 6 (6.4.1), I touched on the divided nature of the American electorate in the framing of the 2016 election choice. Statistically significant blocs of voters seem to be living in different realities, with some issues like whether 'illegal immigration is a problem' showing a fifty plus percentage point difference depending on political party affiliation (Pew 2016) . On examination of the full set of speech data, it appears that this division continues and is shaping other important discourses beyond civil religion and spanning beyond just the 2016 election.

Further context to this perception gap can be found in the extensive research on social values conducted by PRRI (Public Religion Research Institute). In multiple studies, they find huge statistical differences in basic perception of events and realities between white Americans and those who are not white. The context of this statistical reality was the increasing attention to officer involved shootings of black

men, including Michael Brown in St. Louis, MO, and subsequent protests (Jones 2014). The research pre-dates the Black Lives Matter movement and the extrapolation was an effort to explain an understanding gap of the police/citizen relationship, and was expanded with further work in 2016 (Jones 2016b). In an article written in 2014, well before Trump came to prominence beyond his endorsement of the Birther narrative (6.4.1), Jones described the disparity this way:

> Incongruous community contexts certainly set the stage for cultural conflict and misunderstanding, but the paucity of integrated social networks—the places where meaning is attached to experience—amplify and direct these experiences toward different ends. . .the social networks of whites are a remarkable 91 percent white. . .[and] fully three-quarters (75 percent) of whites have entirely white social networks without any minority presence.
>
> (Jones 2014)

The data from PRRI describes two completely different realities, and a lack of engagement with the realities of those who are of different racial backgrounds than their own. These statistics hold for white Americans but not for minority groups, who have social networks that are far more diverse (Jones 2014, Jones 2016b). This disconnect in terms of the lived experience between races was further inflamed by coded rhetoric such as the Birther movement championed by Trump, which undermined Barack Obama's legitimacy as an American, a manifestation of 'exclusionary patriotism'[63] which ballooned in Trump's 2016 presidential rhetoric (Devos and Ma 2013, Devos and Banaji 2005, Serwer 2020, Pasek et al. 2015). Additionally, the numbers have not been going the way of those who may ascribe to such narratives: the U.S. Census Bureau indicates that by 2042, the US would not be a majority white nation, a demographical shift that is unprecedented in the modern nation-state era (Jones 2016b, p. 41).

[63] From Chapter 6: In research specific to perceptions of Obama, Devos and Ma found that, *the relative difficulty people had seeing Obama as an American was a function of the extent to which he was construed as a Black person. Indeed, Obama was implicitly viewed as less American than McCain, Clinton or even Blair when race was stressed [in the study].* *(Devos and Ma 2013)* In analysing Trump's speech, there are repeated tendencies to cast non-white citizens as not-American, directly and by constructing an abstraction of what/who is American, with conspicuous absent groups. This is a practice that began with his engagement with the Birther narrative.

The lion's share of PRRI and Jones' research was conducted prior to Donald Trump's presidential campaign, and the language and entrenchment of othering narratives that followed it; though it does coincide with Romney's othering of Islam and Muslim nations, an issue with a thirty point gap in perception depending on party association (Pew 2016, Pew 2007). Into this tense and divided populace, Trump brought an established persona, anchored in the Birther movement and popular culture; using apocalyptic framing of language and overtly provocative references to immigrant groups and minority protesters, repeatedly emphasising a narrative that Christian America is either 'dead', or nearing its demise (Trump 2015). The inevitable result of his straw man construct of the oppression of white evangelicals generates a corresponding discourse of subjugation of those who fall outside the conception of 'American' that is being constructed.

A common rhetorical device in political speech, the straw man fallacy occurs 'when one misrepresents an opponent's position in a way that imputes to it implausible commitments, and then refutes the misrepresentation instead of the opponent's actual view' (Talisse 2006, p.345). Wodak notes the prevalence of straw man fallacies in several contexts in populist discourse, specifically noting the use of 'political correctness', 'thought police' and other allegations of persecution that serve to create the illusion of empowerment for the targeted audience that? 'takes power back' (Wodak 2017, p. 82-5). In the case of Trump's rhetoric, wishing to avoid engagement with problematic behaviours and positions on race, immigration, police violence and gender discrimination, he deflects attention and inquiry into the substance of his positions and/or statements by constructing a narrative of persecution of evangelical values and 'censorship,' juxtaposed with language denigrating the 'other'. He does this by erecting a false dichotomy where America is facing a choice between either 'lawlessness', 'violence', 'threats' or his election to save them. This shifts the attention of the audience away from negative self-perception and toward a defensive stance in which he positions himself as saviour.

Hence, the dominant power discourse to be identified in my analysis of candidates' speeches is that of intersectional oppression by way of the language delivered by Trump himself; oppression that is now mechanised by the Republican party apparatus. Furthermore, and unique to this data set, this trajectory of agenda had the tacit support and development of republican political actors prior to Trump's rise,

who set the stage by engaging in othering rhetoric in conjunction with American mission. This research reveals that this discourse is not solely a creation of Trump's campaign rhetoric but was established and normalised prior to his running for office, by Romney's rhetoric. What Trump did establish was the normalisation of overtly provocative and controversial language in conjunction with religious rhetoric.

The development of this discourse and its, as yet, under examined growth during the Trump presidency and 2020 campaign, demand a sense of urgency to continued examination of the use of these rhetorical techniques and their impact. Work by PRRI and Wodak since 2014, have begun to examine the rationale and success of what is now called 'the MAGA movement', but the work done so far does not age well with the full knowledge of the developments since 2016 (Wodak and Krzyzanowski 2017, Wodak 2021, Jones 2014, Jones 2016b). Jones predicts *The End of White Christian America* in his book (2016b) as a last gasp before diminishing relevance, and that may be accurate in some sense. But if so, that impending death is being preceded by a powerful cry of protest and structural defiance which is seeping into many aspects of public life in the United States.

7.3.2 Social media impact on discourses of oppression

A further concern related to this nationalistic discourse is the urgent need to understand and engage the mediatisation of this agenda via social media platforms. From the 2008 election's innovative use of Twitter and Facebook for fundraising, organising, and traditional style campaign messaging (messaging which primarily were format changes from printed outreach) (4.5.1), to the overwhelmingly negative impact of campaign messaging on the same mediums in 2012 (5.3.1). From the documented, proven Russian interference via Facebook and Twitter messaging and troll accounts, the impact of candidate Donald Trump's tweeting habits in 2012 and the emergence and prevalence of what came to be known as 'fake news' (6.3.1), political communication, religiously targeted and otherwise, is now being consumed in completely new ways.

I discussed the impact that anger has on decision making in section 0. Wodak notes that social media encourages 'ever-faster reactions' which when framed with language which strikes that quick reflexive centre of emotion, can cause real damage (2017, 2021). She elaborates that social mediated communication 'engender[s] more

and more frequently the kind of unreflected, short-term decisions that lead to crises; it is this acceleration that goes hand in hand with and foregrounds performance over content and expertise, and that allows lies to persist and complexities to be fallaciously reduced' (Wodak 2021, p. xiv). In the case of political narratives mediated through platforms such as Facebook and Twitter, the messaging is also supported by more traditional mediums. In addition to candidates' remarks, television media often works in synchronous harmony with the messaging that is algorithmically appearing before passive consumers online. This 'feedback loop' creates an echo chamber effect which, in the eyes of the voter, may superficially seem organic when it is clearly open to extremely complex manipulation. Much of the research on this topic focuses on Trump and his inflammatory rhetoric, but the reality is that his use of these tools is well known but not isolated. It could be argued that Obama's campaign was the first to pioneer the use of social media for campaign benefit, primarily for financial ends. Any agenda has the same tools at their disposal, be they liberal or conservative, emancipatory, or oppressive, thus continuing scholarly attention to how this media discourse develops is essential.

7.4 Conclusion

To return to my research questions, my analysis of the candidates' speeches has demonstrated the continued existence of a civil religion in the vein of Bellah, one that largely follows his aspirational mandate, universal conception of God and interweaving of historical events and actors, civil responsibility and faith (1967). However, the direction of that civil religious responsibility is highly dependent on the user. While scholars such as Wuthnow observe an ideological split between conservative and liberal approaches to civil religion, his suggestion that the prophetic and the priestly paths belonging to the liberal and conservative paths respectively no longer seems to hold. As I demonstrated in Chapters 4 and 5, Obama follows the prophetic path as a candidate in 2008, and once elected president, also engages the priestly path, which Wuthnow classified as conservative (Wuthnow 1988a).

Presidential candidates choosing the outward facing 'priestly' narrative, which contains a mandate to embody the values of a nation blessed by God, face a choice which creates the clash ingrained in the application of civil religion over centuries of American history. When American civil religion is interpreted as a mission, should it be embodied as evangelical in nature, possessing a mandate to convert and grow the

kingdom, as expressed by McCain and Romney? Or is it more symbolic, as embodied by President Obama when speaking of the mission of the nation to set an example for the world. Or, alternatively, is it an understanding of a nation that is in peril, in need of walls, protection, isolation and a weeding out of those who detract from those who are part of candidate Trump's depiction of the Christian nation? These are the versions of civil religion that emerge from this research. All except the latter are forms that are connected to Bellah's original theory, but in new ways that were previously unexplored.

As for the second research question, what does this research tell us about the discourses and agendas that religious language supports and legitimises and are they connected to power structures which support their candidacy such as political parties. The discourses which emerged from this research involve intersectional othering of groups that fall outside the exclusionary narrative of who is American, supported, disseminated, and legitimised by Romney's rhetoric in 2012, then by Trump's rhetoric of white Christian nationalism in 2016. This discourse is further distributed and developed by the political and media organisations that construct and direct related content. Engagement with these discourses over time would no doubt reveal further organisational support in need of investigation, but as I established in Chapters 2 and 3, research in this area often focuses on a single speaker or speech. Perhaps much of this discourse could have been revealed with a focus on Trump's rhetoric, but it would have been inaccurate in terms of organisational support and the building of the message from before Trump's rise. By engaging with multiple election cycles, but still in a qualitative nuanced way the organisational support develops, which is essential for accurate engagement with the discourse.

To conclude, having collated the data and discussed the relevant findings, discourses and developments in American civil religion as revealed in this research, in the chapter that follows I will discuss future research opportunities stemming from this work and conclude the project.

Chapter 8 : Conclusion

8.1 Key Findings

This project began with two research questions:

- Given the intertwining of faith and patriotism in the United States, does the use of religious language in recent campaign speech reflect or support the continued existence of a civil religion; and if so, does this reflect Bellah's theory of American civil religion as envisioned in his 1967 essay or has a new, different interpretation of civil religion developed in the United States?
- What can analysing religious language in campaign speech tell us about the discourses and agendas that the language supports and legitimises? Are those underlying discourses reflective of the power structures which support their candidacy such as political parties?

In response to the first question, clear evidence of Bellah's civil religion emerged in nearly every candidate's speech, though the ideological associations that Wuthnow developed seem to be holding less consistently (Bellah 1967, Wuthnow 1988a). In the speeches examined here, the most clearly articulated presentation of Bellah's civil religion were offered by Obama and Romney, and to an extent, McCain, and all three of these candidates assumed the 'priestly' path of rhetoric (usually associated with conservative civil religion). Obama's assumption of the priestly perspective once he became president, undermines Wuthnow's designation of said path as conservative, it appears that once elected the role of President of the United States the singular leadership attached to the role internationally may force the lens of civil religion's aspirational mandate outward, and the president into the role of national priest regardless of party association or ideological perspective. Additionally, Trump's campaign rhetoric diverged completely from either implement. He was not on Wuthnow's priestly path as he was not framing civil religious language toward a mission of conversion or evangelism of other areas in need of guidance, and he was not prophetic in the sense of Bellah's presentation of the aspirational mandate, which is still a component part of Wuthnow's ideological split (Bellah 1967, Wuthnow 1988a). Instead, Trump's rhetoric was insular and protective, and exclusionary of many American citizens, which pulls it afoul of Bellah's essential criteria for civil religion.

To revisit Bellah's criteria, American civil religion requires: a unitarian God (Trump's God was Evangelical Protestant in presentation), Integrated and accessible to every citizen and historical elements of society (Trump is detailed in his description of those who fall outside the framing of being 'American' establishing an exclusionary patriotism) and an aspirational mandate to live up to the blessings granted to the nation(Trump's rhetoric does not frame the mandate as aspirational, but something that formerly existed and is in peril). Lüchau frames the last criteria as an element of 'prophecy,' and one could argue that Trump does present a form of prophecy in that he is implying knowledge of an exclusively received message that requires action by his audience, however his message is apocalyptic, not aspirational, thus it is outside the civil religion narrative (Luchau 2009). Hence Trump's language diverges from civil religion completely and instead shows signs of turning toward a white Christian nationalism.

This emerging narrative of white Christian nationalism is tied to the answer to the second question, asking what discourses of power emerge from the language studied in this project. The discourse which emerges is one of oppression of specific, non-white minority groups in the service of the nationalist agenda. The risk of religious language and devices being weaponised was a concern implied in the introduction to this project and there does seem to be a progression toward such a discourse here. A rhetoric of othering begins in the language of McCain, escalates with Romney, and detonates with Trump, focusing on Muslims, non-white immigrants. The surrounding context to this language (Birtherism (6.4.1) and Evangelical bias toward Clinton based on gendered expectations of the faithful (6.5.1)) also pulls women and Black Americans to this discourse of rhetorical oppression. The connected nature of othering language across Republican candidates also indicates an organisational association with said agendas by the party itself. The customary takeover of management of the party by the victorious candidates' staff ensures this was the case after Trump's victory in 2016.

In answering both questions, the methodology of critical discourse analysis proved particularly useful. By thoroughly accounting for the contextual elements of the speeches, I was able to more fully interpret the meaning of the linguistic structures that emerged from the language itself. These enabled observations including that the influence of personal religiosity was often deflective in nature, rather than beneficial

when engaging religion in the candidate's campaigns. Obama and Romney, the two candidates with the most overt personal religiosity, spent significant effort clarifying or deflecting from their own beliefs in favour of a more unitarian faith perspective, often by engaging in civil religious rhetoric instead.

8.2 Contributions and Limitations

An unexpected discovery which emerges from the language is the importance of nominalisation and transitivity in relation to religious language. This is a factor that is tied closely to the methodology, as existing scholarship using content analysis is severely limited in examining such elements. The words which indicate transitivity are often not categorically religious and appear throughout the speech and would be difficult to pick up with software driven analysis. One needs to observe the speaker to audience relationship in the language throughout the speech in order to note the anomalous positioning surrounding certain topics. Thus, a targeted scan may not necessarily note such data.

One thing is certain, with the increasing impact of new media, future scholarship must be interdisciplinary and multi-modal. There simply is no credible way to understand such a complex construct without considering multiple aspects of it. In the case of this research, decisions had to be made to exclude certain aspects which would be of interest, but of lesser impact such as the role of the speechwriter and the degree to which the audience 'buys in' with their votes (an avenue best left to more statistically driven political scientists, in my opinion). But it is clear that by focusing on the theory of civil religion as a focal point, utilising a methodology that was nuanced and requires heavy consideration to context and language, and accounts for discourses of power, this research has generated unique and valuable discoveries and outlined the current manifestation of civil religion in the United States. Future work with similarly interdisciplinary approaches could glean further developments in our understanding of how civil religion is mediated and communicated to the voting public.

As established in Chapter 2 & 3, research in this area often focuses on a single speech or speaker (Healey 2010, Frank 2009, Fontana 2010, David 2011, Coe and Reitzes 2010). Few of these findings would have emerged had the scope of this project not encompassed both multiple election cycles but also a balanced distribution of

candidate remarks. Owing to the parameters of this sample, the evolution of Republican rhetorical othering of Muslims and other non-white citizens would have appeared to be a turn initiated in the 2016 election when in fact it began earlier, in Romney's 2012 rhetoric. Engaging with the same candidate in multiple cycles also bore fruit, showing the difference between Obama's presentation of civil religion and particularly his framing of the American mission as a candidate vs. as the president. Engagement with Obama's presentation of over multiple cycles also enabled a more nuanced and thorough picture of religious elements of his candidacy than exists in current scholarship.

8.3 Future Directions of this Research

The troubling emergence of white Christian nationalism as a divisive and powerful force outlined in Chapter 7 certainly justifies the need for continued deep analytical work to understanding how religious language is being utilised to push forward political agendas, why and by whom. Understanding whether this Republican break with American civil religion is permanent, replacing the priestly use of civil religion by political actors seeking the presidency is something to be monitored closely. This research project commenced prior to the 2020 election cycle and applying these methods to that election could bear very interesting results.

Current President Joseph Biden presented a far more traditional campaign messaging, which I would expect may yield a return to a staider form of civil religion, somewhere between Clinton's almost entirely secular presentation and Obama's overtly unitarian one. Future Republican presidential candidates (and presidents) will demonstrate whether the party has wholly broken from the civil religious narrative or whether Trump's hard right toward Christian nationalism was anomalous.

Compounding this need is the immediate impact of messaging mediated through online platforms that can precisely target audiences who would be most receptive to it. Scholars like Wodak are scratching the surface of populist rhetoric and normalisation of shocking and formerly taboo language such as that used by Trump in 2016, but there is a significant need for more investigation that focuses on the religious legitimation piece of the discourse and folds in the 2020 election, as well as other powerful political actors.

Other avenues for continued work revealed by this project include applying the thicker analysis to religious rhetoric using other mediums of communication, possibly in concert with content analysis. In Chapter 6, I noted the volume of Donald Trump's tweets, most of which were archived much like transcripts of traditional speeches during his 2016 and 2020 campaigns and his presidency. Analysis of abbreviated messaging of this nature lends itself to software assisted content analysis, both in terms of volume and textual analysis. In concert with a qualitative approach to selections which could be flagged as warranting further investigation could bring much of the more subtle strategic manoeuvres to light. There is, in my opinion, an urgent need to show the proverbial 'strings' behind his performance in a convincing and accessible manner, with many of his supporters engaging in actions destructive to themselves, the government and democracy more generally. The Trump presidency, despite defeat in 2020, has resulted in separate realities and an openly hostile discourse, one which was documentable even before the 2016 campaign and only worsening now (Pew 2016, Jones 2016b).

8.4 Conclusion

I find myself returning to the scenarios which inspired this work, encounters with voters with questions about faith and policy and their chosen candidate, and I find this work does much to clarify how such impressions are framed and delivered to the public. Though there are certainly many remaining questions including how to equip laypersons with the tools to discern such nuances in language and framing as a passive consumer of such complex messaging. In this regard I am considering publishing both academically and with a more general audience and outreach in mind, as the aspiration for this research was both knowledge and impact. Certainly, ongoing engagement with religious rhetoric campaign discourse, including the 2020 election is an important next step, in addition to engagement with non-election cycle rhetoric. The need to continue exploring the role of religious rhetoric in association with agendas and discourses of oppression has emerged to be, contrary to Chapp's assertion (2013), not only a relationship which exists, but one with an urgent need of methodical engagement.

Appendix: Speech Analysis

The process of applying critical discourse analysis for this research was an evolution of technical methods, as described in Chapter 3. 0 In this section, I will go into the practical process of the transcripts in more detail. There are also additional resources as follows:

- Following this summary, I have included the worksheet template I used to structure my analysis of each transcript individually, as well as in synthesis with others in the election cycle. You will find that the headings correspond to chapter subheadings to an extent, and they in turn correspond to significant linguistic elements outlined in Chapter 3.3
- I had initially hoped to include the transcripts themselves as part of the appendix to the thesis. However, owing to the size of the documents (200+ pages for the transcripts alone) I have compiled them externally and linked them here: Transcripts by Election Year. In this location, the transcripts are titled to correspond with their citation in the text of the thesis (Obama 2008a, b, and so on) for ease of use.
- The transcripts are also linked in the bibliography with their respective citations.

As noted in Section 0, I began this research by utilising a curated selection of codes, via NVivo, but found this method lacking in nuance. However I did continue to look for the codes (Table 1: NVivo codes) when manually reviewing the transcripts. What I found was that there were far more references beyond the codes, so I broadened my filter to include all religious references based on wider knowledge of biblical and religious elements. For example, I included Biblical narratives initially thinking they would likely be thematic. But in practice references were often far more specific. Barack Obama using the felling of the walls of Jericho, for instance, would have been beyond my initial codes, and yet it was a thread that structured an entire speech (Obama 2008b). Another example is McCain's use of William Wilberforce as an example of a 'humble Christian man' (McCain 2008d). NVivo would have located 'Christian,' and expansion to contextual words would have revealed the remainder of the phrase, but to make the connection to Wilberforce required much greater context and understanding of Wilberforce as a historical figure.

Manual readings of each transcript revealed expanding layers of context, so I created a series of structured passes. I would review each transcript once, seeking overtly religious terminology, without reading the speech front to back, as to avoid impacting granular examination of the language with internalisation of the speech's intended narrative. The second analytical scan was to consider the structure of the speech, seeking linguistic elements that would impact positionality, relationships between parties in the speech, as well as nominalisation of terms- which can distance the speaker from difficult topics. For example when attacking their opponent, candidates tended to nominalise the action involved as it communicates a less accusatory tone. Hillary Clinton utilised this method when criticising Donald Trump, 'A man you can bait with a tweet is not a man we can trust with nuclear weapons' rather than stating it directly and with active language: Donald Trump cannot be trusted with nuclear weapons because he is reactive (Clinton 2016).

The third analytical pass is intended to interpret the language as presented. This is the pass where the speech is read start to finish, and areas with language flagged from earlier passes is examined closely along with surrounding context and considering the overall narrative of the speech. Finally impactful contextual factors were noted, and any corresponding aspects of the speech are flagged.

This process was completed for each speech, for each candidate individually, with a worksheet completed for each speech. Once all transcripts for that candidate were analysed, I completed a composite worksheet, using the sheets from the individual speeches to synthesise findings from the group. This contributed to greater understanding of that candidate's individual performance in that particular election and helped to point toward any trends or agendas that were present in multiple speeches. Once the composite worksheet was completed, the same process was applied to the other party's candidate.

For each election cycle, the accumulated worksheets and transcripts were considered as a group considering contextual factors, at the following levels: by individual candidate, comparatively between the two candidates of a given election cycle, by the election cycle as an event—accounting for discourses present in that election, then later as an election year unit of data in relation to other election cycles and as a whole sample: 2008, 2012, 2016. This multi-level analysis allowed for the emergence of

discourses that developed over multiple cycles, using varying degrees of ideological rhetoric.

The worksheet template follows.

Speech Analysis Worksheet

Speaker:
Date of speech:
Title:
Word Count:

Location:

Relevant context to location/event:

Participant Position/Roles:

Context of speech location/setting/situation:

Biblical narratives used:

Sacred language (coded and otherwise):

Historical Turning points linked to religion or belief:

Concepts and terms found in ACR, or links between religion and civil responsibility:

<u>Lexical factors:</u>

Pronoun Choice & Framing:

Word choices that convey tone:

Transitivity/ Repetition/ Linked concepts and phrasing for effect:

Nominalisation of verbs (to what purpose and context):

Notably neutral word/grammatical choices:

Structural choices, composition elements:

Additional style or thematic notes:

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