

Religion and Ideology: A Critical Analysis of George W. Bush's Discourse in the Post-9/11 Era

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Abstract:

At the wake of the 9/11 attacks in the United States, former President George W. Bush delivered a number of speeches. By employing religious discourse, he provided a global context in which Americans could accept a set of foreign policy agendas. In this regard, the aim of this paper is, first, to show that the president's religiously based discourse implies reference to the myth of the chosen nation, revealing the main underlying assumptions of it. Second, this study tries to unearth the ideological impetus within the president's discourse while considering its tight connection with United States foreign policy in the post-9/11 era. To this end, the paper draws on Fairclough's framework of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA). The findings reveal that there are related premises of the chosen nation myth, and ideological components embedded within President Bush's religious discourse involving the endorsement of the United States as the world hegemon.

Keywords: Discourse; Religion; Ideology; President Bush; The myth of the chosen nation.

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1. INTRODUCTION

The terrorist attacks of 9/11 in the United States set directions on different levels, from political discourse to foreign policy and wars waged against alleged perpetrators. At the dawn of those turbulent events, former U.S. President George W. Bush delivered a number of speeches. By

employing religious discourse on terrorism, he crafted the authority to dominate public response to the incidents.

Speeches on terrorism have been part of American politics. They, nevertheless, sound to be more popular with President Bush as a result of the 9/11 attacks. In such crises, American political leaders often have invoked religion in their political discourse from WWII, with President Franklin Roosevelt, to George W. Bush in order to legitimize political actions while conveying overtly or implicitly ideological perspectives. As such, political discourses are the target of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA).

In this respect, the purpose of this paper is threefold. First, it seeks to demonstrate that President Bush's political discourse has references to the myth of the chosen nation. Second, it attempts to unfold the underlying assumptions that form the backbone of the religious myth of the chosen nation embedded in President Bush's discourse. In this concern, this study cannot escape the urge of touching upon the myth's Protestant roots of the U.S. religious past. Third, it endeavors to unearth the ideological perspectives inserted within the president's selected speeches while considering its tight connection with U.S. foreign policy in the post-9/11 era.

In order to realize the aforementioned aims, this study attempts to analyze President Bush's political discourse, in the post-9/11 era, from a critical discourse analysis perspective. In so doing, it adopts an analytical framework which is based on Norman Fairclough's model for CDA.

This study sets out to answer the underneath research questions:

- How does President Bush employ religion in his post-9/11 political discourse?
- What are key ideologies that could be discerned within the president's religiously based discourse?

2. Literature Review

The research conducted on the political discourse of President Bush is certainly tremendous. This research paper summarizes a number of reviewed related studies which are chronologically presented as follows:

Riswold (2004) analyzed the speech of President Bush, *Address to Joint Session of Congress Following 9/11 Attacks*, looking at the religious themes. Relying on a qualitative interpretative method, she reached the conclusion that the president's speech represents a theological retribution as national policy as it asserts that America is God's favoured nation, justifies its disguised call for a holy war, and conveys an arrogance which weakens its own authority.

Chang & Mehan (2006) also examined the use of a religious mode by the Bush Administration. They compared the administration's discourse with the critics'. Their study found that the Bush Administration propagated a coherent account of the 9/11 events focusing on the religious mode of representation of good vs. evil. Their study showed that critics failed in constructing explanations of the 9/11 events because none of them generated coherent explanations for the events. Chang & Mehan (2006) concluded that the Bush Administration's discourse was effective for its articulation in a religious mode of representation.

In addition, Smith (2008) explored whether critics of ethical restraints on religious discourse have grounds to criticize President Bush's religious rhetoric. His essay showed that both qualitative and quantitative studies indicated that President Bush, often exceeding any other predecessor, used a "prophetic" mode of religious expression that adheres to providentialism. He found that the president's discourse is claimed by public reason advocates and their critics to be ethically questionable, even though it upholds democratic ideals, and thus, it fails to offer the religious guidance it professes.

On the other hand, a number of CDA studies have been investigated mainly on analyzing President Bush's speeches. Sarfo & Krampa (2013) conducted a critical analysis on six speeches on terrorism by President Bush

and Obama. Drawing on van Dijk's model of CDA, their study revealed that both presidents projected terrorism negatively while they projected anti-terrorism positively by carefully selecting emotionally charged vocabulary and expressions.

Zheng (2015) also investigated on critical discourse analysis by examining President Bush's speeches of "*9/11 Address to the Nation*" and "*Address to the Nation on the Five-Year Anniversary of 9/11*". Relying on Fowler and Kress's framework of CDA, he focused on analyzing classification. His study showed how language and ideology are influenced and determined by the social structure and power. It also revealed President Bush's deep-rooted ideology that America is the most dominant country in the world.

Besides, Beshara (2018) critically analyzed an excerpt from President Bush's Sept. 20, 2001 speech, scrutinizing the phrase "the war on terror" (WOT). He applied CDA together with Lacanian psychoanalysis. His aim was to deconstruct/recode the WOT rhetoric. He concluded that the WOT indexes a significant archive of American exceptionalism, tracing it back to the rise of neo-conservative movement, and that it legitimizes the logic of Islamophobia.

A considerable body of literature studied President Bush's discourse. It focuses on excerpts from a number of the president's speeches, shedding light on the notions of terrorism, axis of evil, Islamophobia, the use of religion in general, etc. This article is different in that it relies on Fairclough's framework of CDA highlighting the religious notion of the myth of the chosen nation and thus it contributes to the literature of CDA on President Bush's discourse.

3. The Myth of the Chosen Nation: Significance and Historical Origins

Amongst the most persistent myths, which lie at the heart of American exceptionalism, is the myth that America is the chosen nation. America is exceptional for the only reason that God chose the Americans and their nation for a special mission in the whole world. Whereas the myth of the chosen nation has its earliest religious roots in the Hebrew Bible, the

American myth of the chosen nation has its deepest historical origins back to the past of the Pilgrims and Puritans who crossed the Atlantic Ocean in two waves during early 17th century and set foot in the American wilderness.

In order to get the picture of how the myth of the chosen nation voyaged from ancient Israel to the United States, it is necessary to turn the clock back to England during the times of William Tyndale. In 1530, with his publication of the Pentateuch in Germany, Tyndale found and promoted the notion that England had a covenant relationship with God. That is, God had made an agreement with his chosen people who were promised that they would be blessed if they stayed faithful to their God and respected his word, but cursed if they disobeyed him (Hughes, 2018, pp. 33-35).

According to Hughes (2018), even though William Tyndale had never professed that England was God's chosen nation, yet the covenant theme connoted so. As a result, Tyndale's perception of covenant was the ground on which "the notion of chosenness would slowly germinate until, finally, it would spring full-blown in the United States" (Hughes, 2018, p. 36).

Historically speaking, upon the ascendance of King James I to the throne in 1603, the Puritans' lives were made extremely painful. They endured years of torment at the hands of their king. The only refuge from harassment was Leyden in the Netherlands in 1608. Then, these Puritans, known as Pilgrims, crossed the Atlantic Ocean and settled Plymouth Colony in 1620 to be the earliest religious settlement in the New World. Later in 1630, the second largest wave of Puritans, who could not bear anti-Puritan policy of King Charles I, fled England and established the second settlement in Massachusetts Bay Colony. (Hughes, pp. 38-39; Brogan, 2001, pp. 33-42).

Now, the myth of the chosen nation stepped forwards into full daylight. The Puritans of New England found it easy to consider themselves as a chosen people. They were granted the New World, their promised land, because they were endowed with a divine double mission: setting up a New

Jerusalem where they could establish a new “Holy Commonwealth,” and spreading the Word of God all over the New World (Paul, 2014, p.138).

Within the notion of mission lies another perception of leadership by example. The Puritans postulated that they had formed a covenant with God to build a society on the basis of biblical norms. They wanted to provide a new model of the due form of government, civil and ecclesiastical. John Winthrop said to the first settlers: “We must consider that we shall be as a City upon a Hill; the eyes of all people are upon us” (Brogan, 2001, p. 43). This city, erected high on a hill, was intended to set an example which would be seen and emulated by the rest of the world on the other side of the Atlantic Ocean.

This way, the Puritans of America pointed to the myth of the chosen nation that denoted mission and leadership by model. After all, the myth of the chosen nation has lingered in the shadows of United States political discourse ever since the days of the Puritans. In this regard, this research paper tries to demonstrate that the myth of the chosen nation is echoed in President Bush’s discourse following the 9/11 terrorist attacks. In order to achieve this aim, the next part is devoted for the analysis of the president’s religious discourse from a critical linguistic point of view.

4. CDA of President Bush’s Post-9/11 Discourse

4.1. Theoretical Framework

4.1.1. Discourse

Discourse is basically defined by Fairclough (2010) as being “language as a form of social practice” (p. 16). This implies that language is a part of society and a socially conditioned process. In addition, Van Dijk perceives discourse as “text in context” (Hussein, 2016, p. 86). Discourse is, accordingly, a wider term than text; it refers to a verbal production in its situational social context.

As this paper analyzes discourse of political speeches, namely by President Bush following the 9/11 attacks, the definition of political discourse is, thus, paramount. Van Dijk (1997) views political discourse as “a form of political action, and as a part of political process” (p. 20). As

such, he localizes the analysis of political discourse within critical discourse analysis.

4.1.2 Critical Discourse Analysis: Language and Ideology

Critical discourse analysis does not consider language as independent from social studies. However, it perceives language as a form of social practice. In other words, language users do not function in isolation, but rather they do so in a set of cultural, social and psychological frameworks. Therefore, important to the analysis of discourse is the role of context (Flowerdew & Richardson, 2018, p. 5). Van Dijk (1997) also holds that the study of discourse, namely political discourse, “should not be limited to the structural properties of text and talk itself, but also include a systemic account of the context and its relations to discursive structure” (p. 15). That is, when conducting CDA, it is essential to understand social, historical factors around text production.

Accordingly, critical discourse analysis is an interdisciplinary approach to language analysis that is concerned with the issues of language, power and ideology. That is, the correlation between discourse and ideology is focused in CDA. More particularly, there is a tight relation between politics, ideology and discourse in the sense that political practices are exclusively discursive as well as ideological, and political ideologies are “largely produced by discourse” (Van Dijk, 2006, p. 728). Therefore, politics is thoroughly ideological so are its practices and hence its discourses. Besides, discourses render ideologies noticeable because, as Van Dijk (2006) states, it is solely in discourse that ideologies may be explicitly conveyed and formulated as well. In this respect, the aim of this research paper is to unearth the ideological incentives implicitly conveyed in President Bush's political speeches. To this end, this research paper draws upon Fairclough's approach to critical discourse analysis.

4.1.3 Fairclough's CDA Framework

According to Fairclough (2013), there are three dimensions of discourse. The first level is the text which is the product of the second two

levels. The process of production and interpretation is the second dimension of discourse. The third level is social conditions of production and interpretation. These are social factors which contribute in the text organization as well as in affecting its interpretation. The analysis of a specific discourse requires analysis in each of these three dimensions and their interrelations.

In correspondence to the aforementioned dimensions of discourse, Fairclough (2013) provides a framework to CDA in three stages which are:

- Description which is concerned with formal properties of the text. In this stage, Fairclough (2013) brings about the tradition of textual and linguistic analysis.
- Interpretation which is concerned with the relationship between text and interaction.
- Explanation which is the stage concerned with the relationship between interaction and social context.

4.2 Research Methodology

The research design that this study adopts is the qualitative method of data analysis. The methodological framework is based on CDA as conceived by one of its founding theoreticians, Norman Fairclough. This research paper draws upon the three dimensional model of discourse analysis as framed by Fairclough (2010) in his book *Language and Power*.

The main corpus of data, in this study, consists of full official transcriptions of two political speeches that were delivered by former U.S. President Bush following the terrorist attacks of 9/11. The first speech, entitled “*9/11 Address to the Nation*,” was delivered on the evening of September 11, 2001, at 8:30 p.m. from the Oval Office. The second speech is “*Address to Joint Session of Congress Following 9/11 Attacks*.” It was delivered by the president before Congress on September, 20, 2001. The full transcripts of the speeches are found in and retrieved from the website of American Rhetoric: <https://www.americanrhetoric.com/>.

The choice of these speeches is not taken haphazardly, yet with motivation and purposeful selection. The researchers find that the present speeches are salient corpora to be studied from a critical discourse analysis perspective for two reasons, they are religion-laden speeches and they pertinently adhere to the discourse of ideology as well.

Furthermore, the analysis of President Bush's both speeches proceeds simultaneously. It is conducted in two stages: the first stage is concerned with the description and interpretation of relevant linguistic structures of both texts. The second stage relates to the explanation of discursive and social practices.

4.3. Data Analysis and Discussion

4.3.1. Description and Interpretation

This section deals with the description of the salient linguistic features of President Bush's speeches. At the same time, it works on the process of text interpretation. The most distinguished features of President Bush's speeches can be demonstrated in intertextuality, figures of speech and religious expressions.

Intertextuality is defined as "the presence of a text in another text" (Guerra, 2013, p. 60). This means that intertextuality involves borrowing from other previous text. In this research paper, it is mirrored in the use of quotation and allusion. The following statement stands for a direct quotation from Psalm 23 in President Bush's first speech: "Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I fear no evil for you are with me" (Bush, 2001). Within the above biblical quotation, President Bush positions God with the United States of America. This could be interpreted as constructing the United States as being good and justice as long as the president frames an alignment with God and religion (Lazar & Lazar, 2004, p. 236). This alignment, thus, reinforces the myth of the chosen nation.

The use of allusion by President Bush, in his second speech, corresponds to the borrowing of the term "mission" as he puts it in this quotation: "Great harm has been done to us. We have suffered great loss.

And in our grief and anger we have found our mission and our moment. [...] We will rally the world to this cause by our efforts, by our courage” (Bush, 2001). Within this allusion, there is a noticeable religious reference to biblical mission. This could be taken to mean that the United States found its “mission” as a result of the “great harm” that was caused by the terrorists. In addition to that, the biblical sense of the word “mission” connotes the idea of chosenness. The American nation is, hence, destined to lead the world in this divine mission which is a strong echo of the United States being the chosen nation.

Moreover, part of the art of political discourse is the use of stylistic devices. Therefore, any critical linguistic study on political discourse takes the analysis of figures of speech into consideration. A figure of speech is an expression in which words are used in a sense that is different from their literal meaning. Both speeches, particularly the second one, are densely packed with these literary expressions. This study focuses on two of them: metaphor and anaphora.

The employment of metaphors in political discourse is intentional for they have to do with the argumentative nature of political discourse. As a result, the analysis of metaphors is, as Fairclough (2016) states, of a paramount focus in political discourse analysis. The following are examples quoted from President Bush’s speeches:

- “Terrorist attacks can shake the foundations of our biggest buildings, but they cannot touch the foundation of America. These attacks shatter steel, but they cannot dent the steel of American resolve” (Bush, 2001).

This statement carries out a metaphor which conveys the meaning of United States everlasting greatness. President Bush describes “the nation’s philosophical foundations” (Ching, 2020, p. 439) as more profound than the skyscrapers’ physical base, and as stronger than the material that braced those buildings’ structures. He also depicts the resolve of the United States as more robust and thus more enduring than the buildings which were targeted by the terrorists. Hence, America is “a great nation” and the

Americans are “a great people” (Bush, 2001) because of their deep philosophical foundations and resolve.

- “We’re the brightest beacon for freedom and opportunity in the world. And no one will keep that light from shining” (Bush, 2001).

In this metaphorical expression, President Bush compares the United States to a “light” which is shining very high, it lights from a beacon which stands very high, the whole world can see it. This brings back about Winthrop’s simile of “a City upon a Hill” upon which are “the eyes of all people,” in addition to the religious connotation of the word “light” which is divine light. President Bush’s use of superlative form in “the brightest” that is coupled with the biblical sense of divinity exhibits another underlying premise of the American myth of the chosen nation.

- “Our nation, this generation will lift a dark threat of violence from our people and our future” (Bush, 2001).

This statement expresses another metaphorical connotation which is about depicting the United States, more specifically, the American soldiers, as being the good side fighting a battle for the right cause, a battle which is initiated by darkness which stands for the evil powers of violence. This could be viewed as the United States epitomizes goodness, and thus, emphasizing the myth of the chosen nation.

Furthermore, anaphora is a rhetorical device which involves the repetition of a word or group of words in successive clauses. It joins “diverse members, still with the one and same word.” (Holcomb, 2007, p. 87) Anaphora appears throughout both speeches. These are some instances:

- “A great people has been moved to defend a great nation” (Bush, 2001).

In this example, President Bush uses anaphora to impose the idea of union. The word “great” creates a feeling of togetherness and belonging; shared greatness by all Americans who together belong to “a great nation”.

Henceforth, President Bush's view of the American people and his country as "a great nation" reverberates the myth of the chosen nation.

- "Whether we bring our enemies to justice, or bring justice to our enemies, justice will be done" (Bush, 2001).

This text carries out another instance of anaphora in which both terms "enemies" and "justice" are repeatedly used. This figure suggests that to charge al Qaeda members in the court by the United States is indistinguishable from militarily eliminating them. In addition, President Bush assumed so confidently reinforcing his aim with the biblical echoes of "justice will be done." This could be interpreted as a reinforcement of the myth of the chosen nation.

Additionally, President Bush employs religious expressions in his discourse. Some of them read as follows:

- "Tonight, I ask for your prayers for all those who grieve, [...] And I pray they will be comforted by a Power greater than any of us [...]" (Bush, 2001).
- "God bless America" (Bush, 2001).
- "[...] please continue praying for the victims of terror and their families, for those in uniform, and for our great country. Prayer has comforted us in sorrow, and will help strengthen us for the journey ahead" (Bush, 2001).
- "freedom and fear, justice and cruelty, have always been at war, and we know that God is not neutral between them" (Bush, 2001).
- "In all that lies before us, may God grant us wisdom, and may He watch over the United States of America" (Bush, 2001).

The above examples indicate that President Bush uses a theological lexical register towards different ends: to calm and reassure a nation traumatized by the 9/11 terrorist attacks, to rally support in favour of military response and prepare for war. Besides, the religious mode is invoked by the president to reinforce the idea that the American people have been chosen by God. This is indicated in President Bush's prayer for

God's providence. He insists on blessings, strength, wisdom and protection of God all along the nation's "journey" (Bush, 2001) of fighting terrorism. All these are, hence, underlying premises of the myth of the chosen nation.

4.3.2 Explanation

The analysis of a discursive event as a social practice, based on Fairclough's model of CDA, explains the relationship between the discursive and social processes. Its purpose is to look at the situational level and unearth the hidden ideology (Fairclough, 2013). Thus, this stage considers the context, power relations, and major points which are presumably related to the main ideology in President Bush's religious discourse.

The context of President Bush's political speeches emphasizes a historical view. Therefore, it is crucial to provide a historical context about the situation in the United States during the significant event of the 9/11 terrorists attacks. Since the 1890s, the United States has lived a period of technological development and economic boom. Moreover, following the end of the Cold War, the U.S. has "drenched the nation in a sense of military invincibility" (Chang & Mehan, 2006, p. 5). It emerged as the most powerful country, the sole superpower in the world.

In the midst of American economic, political and military world superiority, the incidents of 9/11 occurred across three states in the U.S. on a peaceful morning of Tuesday, September 11, 2001. They were a series of hijackings and suicide attacks which resulted in the collapse of the Twin Towers in New York City, a partial fall down of the Pentagon's west side in Virginia, and the crash of United Airlines Flight 39 in a field in Pennsylvania (Dudziak, 2003, pp. 1-2).

Not only did the 9/11 terrorist attacks shatter normal patterns of American lives, but they generated a public crisis. Besides, these series of terrorist attacks caused 2 976 fatalities, over 25 000 injuries and substantial long term health consequences, in addition to property and infrastructure damage (Dixon & Stern, 2004, p. 15).

As for power relations in the President's speeches, they are shaped through the language he uses. In this regard, he states: "we're the brightest beacon for freedom and opportunity in the world. And no one will keep that light from shining" (Bush, 2001). The President's statement sounds an indication of his reverence for the status of the United States as the world hegemon.

Not long after this message, President Bush, in his second speech, launches into another series of declarations through which he places the United States in an aggressive relationship with the terrorists. In one instance, he says: "Americans should not expect one battle, but a lengthy campaign, unlike any other we have ever seen" (Bush, 2001). Accordingly, this declaration explains an aggressive foreign policy of the Bush administration.

Furthermore, the analysis of the salient linguistic features of President Bush's speeches shows that there are hidden ideological messages which covertly state that the United States is:

- A good nation
- A nation under God
- A nation endowed with a mission

All along his both speeches, President Bush implicitly as well as explicitly sends ideological messages in representing the United States and its people as purely good. He emphasizes very well the goodness of his nation as opposed to the only evil side of its terrorist enemies. Second, President Bush constantly positions God with the American people and their country. He covertly frames an alignment between God and the United States. This is another ideological perspective of the U.S. as being a nation under God. Finally, President Bush indirectly reiterates the ideological message of mission from God. He portrays the war he declared against terrorism as a mission of good fighting against evil. All in all, the main points that the United States is a good nation, under God, destined to lead the war and the world in a divine mission are underlying premises of the U.S. myth of the chosen nation.

5. CONCLUSION

Through the lenses of Fairclough's theory and model to CDA, the present study was undertaken in order to demonstrate that President Bush's political discourse has references to the myth of the chosen nation, and to unfold the underlying assumptions that form the backbone of it. It also tried to unearth the ideological standpoints embedded within the President's selected speeches of *9/11 Address to the Nation*, and *Address to Joint Session of Congress Following 9/11 Attacks*.

This research paper attempted to answer its two questions. The first question is: How does President Bush employ religion in his post-9/11 political discourse? The findings of the study's analysis demonstrated that President Bush employs a religious mode through the use of references to the notion of the myth of the chosen nation, using different linguistic techniques. He resorts to intertextuality, figures of speech (metaphors and anaphors) and religious expressions.

The second research question is: What are key ideologies that could be discerned within the president's religiously based discourse? The findings of the second part of the analysis revealed that there are three key ideological components embedded within the President's religiously based discourse which implicates that the United States is a good nation, a nation under God, and a nation endowed with a divine mission. This study found that these are underlying premises making up the backbone of the religious myth of the chosen nation hidden in President Bush's discourse. The president asserts that the United States epitomizes only what is good against the forces of evil, framing an alignment between God and his country. He also claims a divine mission for his nation to lead the war against terrorist enemies.

Finally, this paper shed light on the possible interrelatedness between textual features and power relations as underpinned in Fairclough's conceptual framework of CDA. It concluded that by tapping into the religious discourse of the myth of the chosen nation, President Bush

discursively constructed an aggressive and hegemonic foreign policy of the United States in the post-9/11 era.

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