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Compromising the Manichaean Style: A Case Study of the 2006 State of the Union Address

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ABSTRACT

This study examines Manichaean style as a sub-genre of the rhetoric of civil religion to determine the impact of turning away from it. The 2006 State of the Union Address of George W. Bush is employed as a case study. While the Manichaean style is useful in constituting an audience, its uncompromising religious nature makes it difficult to abandon or to adjust to non-life threatening issues. When Bush turned away from the Manichaean style in 2006, he failed to restore his popularity and reduced the level of enthusiasm of the audience he had successfully constituted after the attacks of 9/11, which he had sustained through the 2004 election. This study also reveals that within the Manichaean style certain rhetorical strategies are more pronounced than others.

KEYWORDS: Manichaean, George W. Bush, State of the Union Address, Civil Religion

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"It's easy to mock the simplicity of the George Bush view of the world. Some of it does indeed appear Manichaean." Prime Minister Tony Blair (2010, p. 431).

I. INTRODUCTION

In the presidential election of 2000, George W. Bush did not carry the popular vote and many questioned the legality of the electoral count based on the controversial Supreme Court ruling in *Bush v. Gore* (Smith & Prosise, 20001). Subsequently, the President intensified his brand of civil religion and constituted a supportive public (Frum, 2003). His speechwriter, Michael Gerson, an evangelical Christian who was hired from the *Wall Street Journal*, narrowed the President's rhetoric to this Manichaean style (Medhurst, 2004). For example, the President's first Inaugural made references to Biblical texts including the image of an angel riding in the whirlwind and guiding the storm that is America's story, a passage reminiscent of the Book of Revelation. Bush envisioned America not only as a "rock in a raging sea," but "a seed upon the wind." He claimed its citizens would not ignore "the wounded traveler on the road to Jericho."

However, making references to Biblical language is not uncommon in the rhetoric of civil religion. Embracing the Manichaean style (defined in detail below) is unusual because that sub-genre of civil religion is uncompromising, dividing the world between good and evil, light and darkness. The tragedy of September 11, 2001 allowed the President to reinforce his Manichaean style and hence constitute for the first time a large segment of the public that supported his presidency.

After the attack of 9/11, President Bush engaged in series of rhetorical moments. In his address to the nation from the Oval Office, he was stoic; in his eulogy at the National Cathedral Bush was appropriately somber. However, the intensity of his Manichaean style was not fully felt until he delivered his call for action to a joint session of Congress on September 20th. For the first time during the crisis, the President defined the enemy in a detailed way and aligned that enemy with the forces of darkness. The United States' mission of spreading democracy was allied with the forces of light. The Manichaean dialectic between good and evil was established: Neutrality was eschewed; nations that harbored terrorists would be considered enemies. There was no middle ground. The crisis and the way he dealt with it were immediately followed by Bush's approval rating shooting to 93 percent, a 43 percent gain from the time of his first Inaugural. Less than five years later in his 2006 State of the Union Address, Bush turned away from this brand of civil religion dropping the Manichaean style in all matters except for his rhetoric addressing the war on terror.

This study investigates the President's rhetorical turn of January 2006 to determine not only its impact on his presidency and his party but what it says about attempts by politicians to abandon the constitutive Manichaean style and return to the instrumental rhetoric of compromise and consensus. Bush delivered this State of the Union Address to a joint session of Congress on January 31st, 2006 from 9:12 P.M. to 10:03 P.M. (EST). By that date, the President's approval ratings had suffered a precipitous drop, slipping below 40 percent. The war in Iraq had been underway almost three years, and was on the brink of degenerating into a civil war. The scandal

at the Abu Ghraib prison revealed in 2004 had compromised the United States' moral standing around the world. The war in Afghanistan, which had been underway since 2001, still saw 4,000 Taliban loyalists dominating southeast Afghanistan. Pockets of Al Qaeda units had sprung up in various countries outside of the Middle East. They helped topple the pro-western war lords in Somalia, who would not be restored to power until 2007. Schwartz & Huq (2007) provide a review of relevant poll data showing the significant decline Bush's approval ratings following the 2004 election to the 2006 State of the Union Address.

On the domestic front, things had gone no better for the President. After winning the election in 2004 by turning out his constituted public including enthusiastic supporters from the religious right, he immediately claimed he intended to spend the "political capital" he had earned in the election. The President began by launching 60 days of "conversations" on Social Security, which were to consider such options as raising taxes and/or the retirement age, and allowing younger workers to put part of their payments into private accounts. The discussions led to attacks by the Democrats and the AARP that were followed by a decline in his support ("Bush Shifts. . ., 2005). Some in the news media claimed that the administration had mishandled relief for victims of Hurricane Katrina, which smashed into the Gulf Coast and breached levies in New Orleans on August 29, 2005 ("Congress condemns . . .," 2006). National Guard troops did not enter the city until September 2nd. Michael D. Brown, the Director of FEMA, whom the President had praised on his first tour of the area, came under increasing criticism for not responding effectively to the crisis (Hsu & Glasser, 2005). In October of 2005, the failed nomination of Bush's White House counsel, Harriet Miers, to the Supreme Court further eroded his credibility. Like the foreign policy context, the domestic one may have induced the President's advisors to move him toward accommodation and away from the more divisive Manichaean style.

Thus, the 2006 State of the Union Address presented the President with the opportunity to rescue his flagging popularity and his agenda. Bush and his advisors faced several opportunities and challenges: Should he continue to ground his rhetoric in civil religion particularly in its Manichaean form? Or did this speech present an opportunity to depart from his confrontational and religious style in order to reach out to the opposition party and/or independent voters? To assess how Bush addressed these concerns, this study moves through three stages. First, it traces the foundations of Manichaean rhetoric and establishes its characteristics as a sub-genre of the rhetoric of civil religion. Second, after further exploring its immediate context, the study summarizes the 2006 State of the Union Address in terms of its significant points of departure from the Manichaean style. Third, the study considers whether reducing the use of the Manichaean style contributed to the further reduction of enthusiasm of Bush's constituted audience.

II. MANICHAEAN RHETORIC AND CIVIL RELIGION

Perhaps nowhere do the spheres of rhetoric and public affairs merge so obviously as in the realm of civil religion (Goldzwig, 2004; Hart, 1977; Hart & Pauley, 2004; Medhurst, 2002). Its primary tenets hold that America is a chosen land, John Winthrop's and Ronald Reagan's "shining city set on a hill," populated with a chosen people who are on a mission to set an example for the rest of the world (Bellah, 1975; Levinson, 1979). For guidance, this people

relies on its "Creator," its patriotic saints, and its sacred documents, especially the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution.

Several studies have explored the use of the rhetoric of civil religion in politics (See, for example, Dorsey, 2004; Smith, 2005). Recently, Pahl examined how the rhetoric of sacrifice operates in American civil religion and how it may rationalize violence. He claims that Americans have "found ways to consider blessed some rather brutal attitudes and behaviors" (Pahl, 2010, p. 3). He is particularly concerned that citizens substitute violence against scapegoats for solutions to social problems: "American 'civil religions' . . . have borrowed from Christianity . . . to prop up their fragile power" (Pahl, 2010, p. 4).

Particularly relevant to this study is Medhurst's (2004) examination of George W. Bush's use of the religious rhetoric in the 2000 election campaign, which explains that Bush used this style to turn out self-identified Christian voters in large numbers. Also relevant is Bostdorff's (2003) study of Bush's use of civil religion following the tragedy of September 11th, 2001 tying it to the "saints" of World War II (See also Riswold, 2004). Building on these studies, I argue that within this broad spectrum lies a narrower take on civil religion which is Manichaean in nature. Before I more clearly define that Manichaean rhetoric, I want to examine Bush's attraction to it and its own foundations.

While it is obvious from previous studies that George W. Bush's use of Manichaean rhetoric is compatible with his Methodist orthodoxy, political events early in his and his father's career may have increased his sensitivity to the Christian right and its rhetorical preferences. In 1978, George W. Bush ran for Congress from the district in west Texas that centered on the city of Midland. He was challenged in the primary by a member of the Christian right even though George H. W. Bush in the summer of 1978 had met with a leading clergyman from Midland in an effort to gain support for his son and to dissuade the Christian right from fielding a candidate.[1] The Christian right rejected Bush's advice; and though his son won the primary, he lost the general election in part because the Republicans had been divided in the primary. As an advisor to his father's run for re-election in 1992, George W. Bush witnessed Patrick Buchanan's challenges to his father in various primaries. Buchanan's ability to rally the Christian right weakened George H. W. Bush in the primaries by enhancing skepticism of his commitment to the Christian right's agenda. Thus, when his son ran for governor of Texas and then president of the United States under the guidance of Karl Rove, he embraced the Christian right and touted his own religious conversion and commitment. The Manichaean persona appealed to Bush because of his association with fundamentalist religious themes (Frum, 2003). Recall that during the December 14, 1999 Republican primary "debate," Bush listed Jesus as his favorite philosopher (Buttery, 1999). Upon winning the presidency, he began faith based initiatives. After the presidential election, as we have seen, the Inaugural revealed that Bush would reinforce his civil religion by adopting a Manichaean style (Hariman, 1995).

[1] At the request of George H. W. Bush, the present author served as a third party witness to the conversation between Bush and the minister from Midland. Bush's chief political advisor at this time was Lee Atwater; his main protégée was Karl Rove.

The tenants of Manichaeanism are not unfamiliar to members of the religious right because Manichaeanism was a sub-species of Gnosticism. During its inception, Gnosticism denigrated the physical world and argued that attaining transcendent wisdom was more important. It had its own texts including the preaching of John the Baptist, the Book of Revelation attributed to St. John the Divine (though the apostle himself was not a Gnostic and thought the practice to be heretical), and the gospel attributed to St. Thomas.[2] For example, Tyconius' Fourth Century commentary claimed that the Book of Revelation was a symbolic representation of the struggle between good and evil. Christians believed that Jesus was the *logos*, the divine word of God, and the "light of the world." Hence, darkness became a metaphor for the unenlightened and evil, establishing a dialectical divide.

The contemporary Christian right embraced this dialectic, but did not accept all of the tenets of the heretical Gnostic religion. For example, Gnostics believed that salvation comes through divine wisdom rather than faith. Gnostics divided humankind into three classes: Those with *gnosis*, who needed no aid for spiritual salvation; those who rejected Gnosticism but could attain a lesser salvation through faith in Christ; those with no divine spark were the unenlightened and would not be saved.

The evolution of Manichaeanism helps us understand its rhetorical manifestation in our time. The Gnostic assertion that wisdom was the light of world explains in part why some Gnostics became Manichaeans. For example, in the Fourth Century, St. Augustine became a Manichaean before he was converted to Christianity. Even before St. Augustine's time, many Gnostics were absorbed into the Manichaean movement because of its compatibility with the Book of Revelation, which creates a sharp divide between God and Satan, light and dark, good and evil.[3] Manichaeanism was founded by Mani, a Babylonian prophet, who experienced a revelation and began to preach in Persia in 242 C.E. Shapur I banished Mani, who then returned to his birth place in Baghdad (Hourani, 1991, p. 9), where he attempted to unite groups who embraced the Gnostic divide into one religion. He saw himself as the natural extension of Zoroaster, Jesus and Buddha; his religion became popular despite being persecuted across the Middle East and Asia. Over time the dialectic divided of Mani incorporated terms from other cultures such as sun/day/heat versus dark/night/cold. The dialectic relied on archetypal metaphors that pervaded many cultures and extended into American public address. Thus, while the whole theology of the Gnostics and the Manichaeans was not accepted into American civil religion, their style was.

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[2] The fourth gospel of the New Testament and the Book of Revelation are attributed to John the Divine, the youngest of the apostles, though some scholarly evidence disputes that fact. Most believe that John the apostle wrote his gospel in Ephesus, along with his letters before he was exiled to the Island of Patmos in 95 A.D, where he received inspired revelations. He returned to Ephesus to preach these revelations, and most likely his followers wrote these into the Book of Revelation. The point here is that regardless of the author, these works inspired a movement that contributed to a Manichaean rhetorical style.

[3] However, the ground work was also laid by the Essene colony at Qumran on the Dead Sea. They divided humans into the "sons of light" and the "sons of dark," who included Jews who had abandoned tradition. The Essenes envisioned a 40 year war between the two sides.

It was effective because it became a way, to use Charland's (1987) terms, of constituting a public.

The generation that witnessed the Second Great Awakening understood that the mobs that contributed to the rise of Jacksonian Democracy were open to religious appeals. Thus, orators such as Daniel Webster converted the civic republicanism of Washington, Madison, Hamilton, Jefferson, and others, into a civil religion of emotional patriotism. Webster made the Union into the transcendent embodiment of the Constitution, which served as holy writ by which he could call a public into being (Smith, 2005). That move helped those who followed, particularly Abraham Lincoln, expand civil religion with appeals to natural rights. In fact, even at the age of 28, Lincoln said that respect for the law should "become the political religion of the nation" (Basler, 1953, p. 112). In 1858 in Springfield, Illinois accepting the nomination for senator, Lincoln went so far as to paraphrase Jesus when Lincoln claimed that "a house divided against itself cannot stand." The Gettysburg Address elevated the Declaration of Independence to new stature among America's sacred documents, shifted the war's aims, and re-constituted the Northern public in terms of its moral compass (Wills, 1992, Chapter 4).

These same orators reveal the troubled impact of the rhetoric of civil religion. Though Lincoln was martyred and became a saint in the pantheon of American civil religion, he spent a good deal of time in his 1858 debates with Stephen A. Douglas backtracking from his "house divided" remark. Because of the declaration in Springfield of 1858, seven states seceded from the Union before Lincoln took the oath of office in March of 1861. Over time Webster became a victim of his own civil religion learning that if one imbues political agendas with transcendent values, one cannot compromise those agendas without appearing to be a heretic. When Webster, as Secretary of State, enforced the fugitive slave law that he had agreed to as part of the Compromise of 1850, he lost his shot at sainthood and fragmented his public (Smith, 2005, pp. 251-261).

The sub-genre as "Manichaean construct" can be found in Marsden's (1980) research on evangelism in America. His construct has been used by scholars in communication studies (See Daniles, et. al., 1985). In the present study, I focus on this Manichaean version of civil religion that can be found in many contemporary texts popular with the Christian right. It can be characterized in the following ways. First, it takes an uncompromising view of the world that divides all things and people into two camps – good/evil (light/dark, ignorant/wise, up/down, heaven/hell). Second, it is ideological rather than pragmatic; thus it is uncompromising in the pursuit of moral excellence. Third, it claims to deal with serious life and death, or material versus spiritual issues; hence, it surfaces in debates over abortion rights, same sex marriage, and stem cell research. Fourth, it often seeks to simplify problems, hence in America the attraction to frontier metaphors of good guys and bad guys. Fifth, it is capable of lacking detail and employing false dichotomies, as we shall see later in this study. Sixth, it engages in direct, confrontational rhetoric. Seventh, due to its dialectical nature, the Manichaean style is more likely than other styles to rely on narratives with heroes, villains and good and evil nations and forces. Eighth, it can be effective in the short term, but may prove troublesome if compromised. And even in the short term, Ivie (1987) has shown that a Manichaean rhetorical style may undercut efforts to present rational arguments or to transcend the good versus evil juxtaposition.

III. BUSH'S MANICHAEAN APPEALS

By the time of his first Inaugural, Bush's Manichaean light-dark contrast not only simplified complex issues and incited supporters, it also led to political polarization and public mobilization. After 9/11 Bush deployed Manichaean rhetoric to rationalize his policies. For example, six days after the 9/11 attack, Bush returned to the White House from Camp David after meeting with his national security advisors. On this particular Sunday, he told awaiting reporters that "This crusade, this war on terrorism . . . would rid the world of evil doers" (Bush, September 17, 2001). As we have seen, Bush's September 20th, 2001 speech to a joint session of Congress is a masterful example of essentializing a conflict in terms of good versus evil (Murphy, 2003: Bostdorff, 2003). To paraphrase Hariman, by that time, Bush had produced a "coherent repertoire of rhetorical conventions" (1995, p. 4). Bush would often return to the Manichaean style. For example, in his State of the Union Address of 2002, he characterized North Korea, Iran, and Iraq as an "axis of evil" (2002).[4] In the State of the Union Address of 2003, Bush referenced to the sinners of the Second World War:

> Throughout the 20th Century, small groups of men seized control of great nations, built armies and arsenals and set out to dominate the weak and intimidate the world. In each case, their ambitions of cruelty and murder had no limit. In each case, the ambitions of Hitlerism, militarism, and communism were defeated by the will of free peoples . . .

An off-shoot of this Manichaean style, as West and Carey (2006) point out, was a cowboy style that took no prisoners; for example, the President wanted Osama Bin Laden "dead or alive" (September 17, 2001). In 2003, Bush would form a posse of nations to hunt down the terrorists and confront an evil dictator, Saddam Hussein. Often when using the Manichaean style, Bush over-rode the generic norms of the State of the Union by imposing a narrative structure on it.[5]

During his run for president in 2004, Bush disregarded the common wisdom that one should run toward the middle after the primary season. Instead, he presented himself as an unapologetic religious conservative and continued to use apocalyptic appeals to solidify his base and his image. He opposed human stem cell research, same sex marriage, and a woman's right to an abortion. His conservative nominees to the Supreme Court were approved. During the 2004 campaign, he energized the Christian right and consolidated his constituted public. He carried

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[4] When the phrase drew criticism from the media and other sources, David Frum, the speechwriter responsible for the phrase, was asked to resign. Frum then wrote, *The Right Man (*2003) in which he claimed that "An American overthrow of Saddam Hussein – and a replacement of the radical Baathist dictatorship with a new government more closely aligned with the United States – would put American more wholly in charge of the region than any power since the Ottomans, or maybe the Romans" (2003, pp. 232, 233). I cite this passage to demonstrate how deeply the Manichaean style penetrated the President's speechwriting staff. Michael Gerson, Bush's head speechwriter until he moved over to the political unit, was an evangelical Christian. Marc Thiessen, who succeeded him, was also an evangelical Christian from the staff of Senator Jesse Helms.

[5] Campbell and Jamieson (1990) claim there are three "processes" that character this genre: "(1) public meditations on values, (2) assessments of information and issues, and (3) policy recommendations" (139). While these elements are present in Bush's State of the Union speech, they do not dominate them and certainly don't characterize them up until 2006.

not only the Electoral College but the popular vote. Bush was the first sitting Republican president since Calvin Coolidge to make net gains in Congress for his party in a run for a second term. Bush won the election by a margin of 60,693,281 to 57,355, 978; that is more than a three million vote difference and about ten million more votes that Bush received in 2000 (Election Results, 2004). A majority of men AND women voted for Bush.

Riding this wave of support, he reinforced his Manichaean image in the 2005 Inaugural. He condemned "ideologies that feed hatred and excuse murder . . . and raise a moral threat." He told his audience that "they bear the image of the Maker of Heaven and earth." He personified the "soul of a nation [that] finally speaks." The Manichaean divide was clear: "There is no justice without freedom, and there can be no human rights without human liberty." The light and dark metaphors reappeared: "We have lit a fire . . . in the minds of men. . . . [O]ne day this untamed fire of freedom will reach the darkest corners of our world." He referred to the truth "of Sinai, the Sermon of the Mount, the words of the Koran, and the varied faiths of our people." This strategy was so successful that Bush did not need to veto any piece of legislation until after his State of the Union Address of 2006. In short, from his Inaugural of 2001 to the State of the Union Address of 2006, Bush's Manichaean style reinforced his followers and guided his policies. However, by January, 2006, the President's approval rating had slipped below 40 percent. What had happened?

IV. IMMEDIATE CONTEXT

The slide of the President's popularity from the election of 2004 to the State of the Union of 2006 is steep due to many factors; the most dramatic include, as we have seen, eroding support for the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, the scandal at Abu Ghraib, attacks on the President resulting from his Social Security "conversations," the failed response to Katrina, and the failed nomination of Harriet Miers.

In January of 2006, the news media, the President, and the Congress battled to set the national agenda. On January 25, for example, the President visited the National Security Agency to highlight national security issues, on which his ratings were highest. On January 26, 2006 during a press conference, Bush tested themes he would present to the Congress and the world five days later in the State of the Union Address. He claimed that "We have a responsibility to lead" the world. He defended his administration's "terrorist surveillance" program, called for the renewal of the Patriot Act, and promised to protect the "civil liberties of our people." However, he only used Manichaean rhetoric when he alluded to the "dark ideology" of America's enemies. Bush created no domestic Manichaean enemy, even when one might have presented itself such as when Katrina flooded New Orleans.

Another relevant arena for the agenda battle was the confirmation process for Samuel Alito, the President's nominee to the Supreme Court following the Miers debacle. During Bush's presidency, the partisan side of the confirmation process had worked its way into nominations to the lower courts (Smith, 2006). In the press conference cited above, Bush endorsed Alito because he "interprets" the law rather than making it. In fact, Bush focused his Saturday radio address of January 28, 2006 on the nomination. Senators advanced the nomination by invoking cloture on a vote of 75 to 22 and then confirming the nomination mainly along partisan lines just

before the State of the Union Address. With the earlier appointment of John Roberts as Chief Justice, conservatives believed that Alito's confirmation gave them a majority in favor of restricting abortion rights, a key plank in Bush's civil religion. This victory presented Bush with a rhetorical opportunity.

The President also tried to control the international agenda. In the January 26 press conference, he sounded a Manichaean note when he commented on the Palestinian election of Hamas members to its parliament: we "can't be a partner in peace if your party has an armed wing [and] if it calls for the destruction of Israel." On January 27, he was visited by Saad Hariri, the son of the assassinated former prime minister of Lebanon, who had opposed Syrian hegemony over his country.

However, outside events often intervene to shuffle national priorities. The day before the State of the Union Address, for example, Coretta Scott King died, an event that underlined civil rights issues and the fact that National African American History Month was nigh. These were not unrelated to the context because following hurricane Katrina allegations of racism regarding the distribution of aid to New Orleans were hanging over the nation.

V. STATE OF THE UNION, 2006

According to reliable sources, President Bush laid out the broad themes of the speech with his writers and then revised it with them in the days leading up to the State of the Union Address (Deans, 2006). Bush insisted on an informal speech with short sentences. But was there a departure from the zenith of his reliance on a Manichaean style in the 2005 Inaugural at hand? That would be a risky gamble given that State of the Union Addresses are most effective when they review the programs that support the major goals annunciated in Inaugurals. The weekend before the address, the President reviewed various sections of the speech at Camp David. Bush then rehearsed the speech in the White House theater (Deans, 20006). In short, the President was very likely aware of the shift away from the Manichaean style in the address.

The President's speech began on a religious note which hinted that the Manichaean style might once more be invoked. He acknowledged the passing of Coretta Scott King and in the next paragraph reminded the Congress that the Capitol was where they had gathered in times of "national mourning" (Bush, 2006B). He also established a dialectic between "two parties, two chambers, and two elected branches," but instead of deploying a Manichaean image of the dialectic, for example, that it would be a struggle to the death, or fight between good and evil, he minimized it by saying there "will always be differences and debate."

In the next few paragraphs, the President addressed issues that were certainly part of his civil religion, but he did not discuss them in Manichaean terms: "We seek the end of tyranny in our world." In its place, America seeks to establish democracies. The President pointed out that in 1945 there were only 24 "lonely democracies" but today "there are 122." Furthermore, "we are writing a new chapter in the story of self -government," one that included women voting across the Middle East. Democratization of the world was emphasized over the war on a specific enemy.

A few sentences later, however, the President once again donned the mask of Manichaeanism when he condemned nations which had not embraced his America's vision including Syria, Burma, Zimbabwe, North Korea, and Iran. This led to the President's description of the enemy, "radical Islam – the perversion by a few of a noble faith into an ideology of terror and death." He isolated and illustrated this evil group by accusing Osama bin Laden of "mass murder." These forces with a "dark vision of hatred" seek to "seize power in Iraq" and use "the weapon of fear" around the world. He supported his claim with examples of the school children murdered in Beslan and the commuters killed in London. "We will not surrender to evil" because we "love our freedom, and we will fight to keep it." Applause greeted this juxtaposition, which the President reinforced by claiming the United States shall stay on the offensive on such major fronts as Afghanistan and Iraq.

Continuing in this vein, the President claimed that "Our work in Iraq is difficult because our enemy is brutal." (On August 10th of 2006, Bush continued in this vein when he referred to terrorists as "Islamic Fascists.") In the State of the Union Address, the President claimed that those who had died fighting for democracy "live in the memory of our country." Then came a passage in the speech that would haunt the congressional elections later in the year and be contradicted in the State of the Union Address of 2007. Bush claimed that "As we make progress on the ground, and Iraqi forces increasingly take the lead, we should be able to further decrease our troop levels." (In 2007, he would call for a 21,000 troop increase, known as the "surge.") More importantly to this study, the President's compromise on "troop levels" in January of 2006, undercut not only the urgency of the war on terrorism but the Manichaean tone of the preceding paragraph. If he was fighting such an evil foe, why was he reducing troops?

The abandonment of the Manichaean style was even clearer in the next passage. Bush criticized his enemies as well as his allies. He called on Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Palestine and Iran to make more progress toward democracy. By including Egypt and Saudi Arabia, he may have appeared more objective than in past addresses and more a friend of human rights, but such criticism of friends compromised the Manichaean dialectic by muddling the divide between good and evil, friends and foes.

In the next segment of the speech, the President softened his civil religion even more when he talked about its compassionate side. He began with Africa where "Americans believe in the God-given dignity and worth of a villager with HIV/AIDS, or an infant with malaria, or a young girl sold into slavery." After calling on Congress to help with the situation, Bush seemed to transition into domestic matters: "Our country must also remain on the offensive against terrorism here at home." He promptly called for the re-authorization of the USA Patriot Act by pointing to "the conspiracy" we failed to detect in 2001. However, the transition to the home front was a false one, as the President quickly returned to international relations and called for backing our allies in a bi-partisan appeal that invoked Franklin Roosevelt, Harry Truman, John Kennedy, and Ronald Reagan. If this bi-partisan praise did not remove all doubt about retaining the Manichaean style, the next bi-partisan ploy did.

When Bush talked about Social Security, he compared himself to former President Clinton noting that they both became eligible for Social Security in 2006. While the line drew a laugh, the use of humor undercut the serious Manichaean persona he had projected in earlier speeches.

This lighthearted bi-partisan play also opened the audience to question the President. For example, when Bush mentioned his "conversations" on Social Security, Democrats hooted loudly rebuking the President. Such disrespect had not greeted the President in any of his previous State of the Union Addresses.

Ignoring that reaction, he continued with his domestic agenda: "Here at home, America also has a great opportunity." The next segment of the speech was devoid of the Manichaean style altogether; the President was all business: "I will set out a better path: an agenda for a nation that competes with confidence; an agenda that will raise standards of living and generate new jobs." Perhaps because he intended to talk about material things – "small businesses ... tax relief ...non-security discretionary spending" – he or his writers decided the Manichaean tone would be inappropriate. These were not matters of faith, nor were they matters of life and death. Maybe that is why the domestic section included so much Washington inside-the-beltway jargon: "Mandatory spending," "earmark reform," "cost of entitlements," "medical liability reform," "advanced energy initiative," "nano-technology." The speech had gone from an inconsistently characterized struggle regarding foreign threats to a laundry list of programs that Bush believed provided a "better path" on domestic affairs. With little development and a staccato delivery, the President called for tax relief, elimination of government programs, a line-item veto, open markets, immigration reform, affordable health care (not grouped with Social Security where it would have made more sense), portable coverage, development of alternate energy programs, incentives for innovation, funding for the physical sciences, research and development tax credits, and increases in the number of math and science teachers.

After showing that violent crime, welfare cases, and abortions had declined, he argued that "these gains are evidence of . . . a revolution of conscience." He claimed that "wise policies" of the government have "played a role" in the conversion process. Bush warned that there was work to be done because the "direction of our culture" revealed deterioration of our basic institutions. He pointed to unethical conduct of public officials and "activist courts that try to redefine marriage." However, again refusing to embrace the Manichaean style, the President claimed that "our culture" was not "doomed."

A further indication that the President and his staff were losing enthusiasm for the Manichaean style by 2006 was clear by this point in the speech: The frontier metaphors were missing. It is a bit of stretch to consider Bush's remarks about protecting America's borders as cowboy rhetoric, but that is the only place in the address that comes close to using it. Another indication that Bush had taken off the mask of Manichaeanism was his lack of descriptive detail. For example, Bush directly claimed that "we will never surrender to evil," without providing the vivid descriptions of it that had marked his previous speeches. He did call on Americans to "defeat the dark vision of hatred and fear," but gave no definitions or examples of what he was talking about.

His discussion of scientific research involving ethical decisions also indicates an abandonment of the Manichaean style. Bush's rhetoric is a milder version of his past appeals; he endorsed "science and medicine that do not cut ethical corners" but instead "recognize the value of every life." He called for legislation to ban medical research into human cloning, "creating or implanting embryos for experiments, creating human-animal hybrids, and buying, selling or

patenting human embryos" because "human life is a gift from our Creator." It was the most religious moment of the speech but far from the Manichaean tone of previous speeches.

Continuing in a moral vein, Bush then called for more ethical conduct in both parties, a thought that would have been more logically grouped with the passage on American cultural decline. From there he jumped to how his "hopeful society" would deal with HIV/AIDS. The use of "faith-based groups" figured in the equation. However, with no transition, the President moved into his conclusion recalling the "ideological conflict we did nothing to invite." The lines that follow are so abstract in comparison to his previous Manichaean crispness that they were almost meaningless: "Sometimes it can seem that history is turning in a wide arc, toward an unknown shore. Yet the destination of history is determined by human action, and a very great movement of history comes to a point of choosing." The passage places human action above divine providence creating more distance from the Manichaean persona he had projected from the bully pulpit in the past. To conclude, he relied on his moderated civil religion to call on Americans to exercise their courage: "We will renew the defining moral commitments of this land." Without telling his audience what those commitments were, he concluded his address: "And so we move forward – optimistic about our country, faithful to its cause, and confident of the victories to come. May God Bless America."

In immediate reactions to the speech, pundits generally considered it to be "realistic" and "somber."[6] David Gergen (Lehrer, 2006), advisor to presidents Richard Nixon, Gerald Ford, George H. W. Bush, and Bill Clinton, noted the bi-partisan cast of the speech. These reactions were typical of those immediately following the speech. However, they fail to reveal deeper strategies and more telling problems with an address that also contributed to its compromising the Manichaean style.

VI. FALSE DICHOTOMIES

The inconsistent tone of the address was reinforced by several tactics. The most obvious of these was the reliance on the fallacy of false dichotomies. The President had become so notorious for using the fallacy of false dichotomies that the tactic was satirized in a Doonesbury cartoon of August 6, 2006 (Trudeau). The opening line of the cartoon is attributed to Bush and reads, "So do we stay the course or do we cut and run?" Compare that to these lines from his State of the Union Address seven months earlier: "We will choose to act confidently in pursuing the enemies of freedom – or retreat from our duties in the hope of an easier life. We will choose to build our prosperity by leading the world economy – or shut ourselves off from trade and opportunity." Neither of these "choices" included all of the possibilities, but they did reduce a complicated situation into a simple one for the viewing public, a tactic common in Manichaean rhetoric.

President Bush was not the first president to use this fallacy, nor, I suspect, will he be the last. However, he was more open to this fallacy than most presidents because of his traditional

[6] See, for example, the comments of David Gergen, political commentator, Thomas "Mack" McLarty, former Clinton Chief of Staff, and Kenneth Duberstien, Republican public relations advisor, on the PBS News Hour with Jim Lehrer (2006).

reliance on Manichaean rhetoric. The foreign policy section of the speech was built around a false dichotomy between terrorism and democracy, and between "dictatorship" and "liberation." Only six months after the speech, the world would learn that terrorists could be elected to office in democratic regimes. The militant representatives of Hamas in Palestine and Hezbollah in Lebanon were duly elected into their respective parliaments.

Regarding the domestic front, Bush established a false choice between surveillance to ensure security and the failed security system of the pre-9/11 years. Realizing that some had questioned his authority, Bush claimed to have "authorized a terrorist surveillance program" based on his constitutional powers. He further rationalized his choice citing past presidents and the federal courts ruling in his favor. Simplifying the situation, the President said, "If there are people inside our country who are talking with Al Qaeda, we want to know about it, because we will not sit back and wait to be hit again." However, Bush did not acknowledge that under his program library records, university research, and purely domestic phone records had been examined.

In the domestic section of the speech, Bush established another false dichotomy between those who would retreat into isolationism, centralization, and anti-immigration policies and those who would take his "better path." That path was a compromise that included building a fence along the Mexican border and providing work permits to aliens. His path also included tax reduction even in the face of mounting budget shortfalls, which the President chose not to acknowledge in his speech. He did propose cutting 140 programs that were not performing up to standard, but he did not detail a single one of them. He asked for a line-item veto to reduce pork barrel spending, but provided no example of a program he would cut.

Finally, at the end of the next to last paragraph of the speech, the President described several historical examples of choices that great men faced. Lincoln could have accepted "disunity" but instead chose to free the slaves. Martin Luther King could have "stopped at Birmingham or at Selma." Oddly and out of balance with the Lincoln example, Bush left it to the audience to fill in the rest of the enthymeme in King's case. Bush concluded rather vaguely, "We must decide: Will we turn back, or finish well?" The choice ignores several other alternatives.

VII. INARTISTIC PROOFS

Since the State of the Union Address of 1982 when Ronald Reagan acknowledged Lenny Skutnik, the hero of the crash of the Air Florida airliner into the Potomac only days earlier, presidents have consistently placed persons of note in the gallery so they could be recognized during the State of the Union Address. In 2006, however, Bush not only placed persons of note in the gallery, he framed them into his civil religion by reading from a letter from their relative, a soldier killed in Iraq. It was a moment of high drama which enthymematically reminded the audience that Bush was Commander-in-Chief and returned to the funeral theme of his opening. Bush established the moment this way:

> Marine Staff Sergeant Dan Clay was killed last month fighting in Fallujah. He left behind a letter to his family, but his words could just as well be addressed to every American. Here is what Dan wrote: 'I know what honor is. . . . It has been an honor to protect and serve all of you. I faced death with the secure knowledge

> that you would not have to. . . Never falter! Don't hesitate to honor and support those of us who have the honor of protecting that which is worth protecting.' Staff Sergeant Dan Clay's wife, Lisa, and his mom and dad, Sara Jo and Bud, are with us this evening. Welcome. (Sustained applause.)

The patriotic appeal was in the tradition of the emotional commitment called forth by civil religion. The President claimed that the letter to the wife was also addressed to the public, which expanded its application; he supported this claim by reading the phrase "to protect and serve all of you." Instead of simply having the wife of the deceased soldier present, Bush included the mother and father; those who watched the speech saw the family in the House Gallery. The passage served to conflate loyalty and honor to our troops and "America's military families" with support for the war effort. The President argued that we must "never falter" in either course. The audience was invited to valorize the soldier's comments and his character as opposed to the images of evil constructed elsewhere in the speech. In short, the soldier provided one side of the dialectic and the forces of evil provided the other. However, whereas a Manichaean speaker would have sharpened the contrast, Bush chose to leave that step to the audience.

In another use of inartistic proofs, the President buttressed his civil religion by praising his own Supreme Court appointments. At the end of the crime section, the President elided into recognition for Chief Justice John Roberts and Associate Justice Samuel Alito. Their appointments underscored his commitment to appointing those who do not "legislate from the bench," in other words those who interpret the constitution strictly and who would reverse those who had legislated from the bench, such as the authors of *Roe v. Wade*. However, Bush did not issue a Manichaean condemnation; there is no discussion of abortion as an "evil." Again, the audience had to fill in the message.

VIII. DIRECT ADDRESS

Over the years, presidents have used the tactic of ostensibly addressing one audience while appealing in reality to another. Ronald Regan's famous line at the Berlin wall is a classic use of this trope: "Mr. Gorbachev, tear down this wall." An appeal to someone who is not present dramatizes the moment, identifies an "evil one" or a "wise one," and converts the present audience into observers of the speaker addressing another person, persons or object. The tactic is common in Manichaean rhetoric because of its religious nature. Whether an appeal to "our Father in heaven" or a God to "save us," or condemning Satan and his minions, Manichaean speakers often invoke direct address to make a point.

Bush constructed the figure of speech this way: "Tonight, let me speak directly to the citizens of Iran: America respects you, and we respect your county. We respect your right to choose your own future and win your own freedom. And our nation hopes one day to be the closest of friends with a free and democratic Iran." Given the time difference, censorship, and lack of access to media, it is clear that few "citizens of Iran" heard these remarks. At best, they may have been a signal to moderate forces inside the country. More likely the comments were meant to show a president who is reasonable and willing to work with a country that is hostile to U.S. aims. The

passage functions to showcase the President reasoning with his foes. In this way, Bush's use of direct appeal is a break with the traditional construction of the tactic in Manichaean rhetoric.

IX. ORGANIZATION

In another break with Manichaean style, Bush's speech lacked a coherent narrative. Whether one examines the Book of Revelation or Bush's address of September 20th, 2001, effective Manichaean rhetoric involves clear heroes and demons, who clash in a compelling dialectical story. That is not the case in Bush's 2006 State of the Union Address. This address lacked sufficient transitions; large divisions of the speech seem thrown together.

Unlike Manichaean rhetoric, the speech had no sustained organizing principle or theme. It opened with a tribute to Corretta Scott King, moved into a discussion of foreign policy, shifted to domestic affairs, offered some initiatives, and then out of the blue defined the good works of a hopeful society. Because of these shifts in theme and tone, the address is difficult to follow and sounds incoherent at times. In some parts of the address, enumeration was welcomed because so few transitions have been provided to let the audience know where the speaker was or where he was going. This is not unusual in State of the Union Addresses. They are often a hodge podge of programs that reflect the input of many executive departments. They "vary greatly" and often catalogue "unrelated concerns or policies"(Campbell & Jamieson, 1990, p. 53). However, this State of the Union Address is unique because the President was willing to abandon the Manichaean style as an organizing principle that had worked effectively before. While Bush's previous State of the Union Addresses had been exceptions to Campbell and Jamieson's (1990) rule, this one reinforced it.

It would have been more effective and more aesthetically pleasing to have employed either the "initiatives" theme or the "helpful society" theme to organize the entire speech. The President would have had no difficulty talking about initiatives in Iraq and around the world to give coherence to his foreign policy section in the context of the entire speech. Or the President could have extended his "helpful society" to the world, a helpful society that brings democracy and liberty to the world.[7]

X. CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS

While the Manichaean style is effective at constituting an audience of loyal supporters during a crisis, this study reveals that the Manichaean style may not be suitable for political compromise in the long run, particularly regarding domestic issues and consensus building. The first

[7] Months before this address, the President's chief speechwriter Michael Gerson had become a political advisor in Karl Rove's shop. The 2006 State of the Union was entrusted to William McGurn, a former editor from the *Wall Street Journal*, who had worked with Gerson. Senator Jesse Helms' former writer, Marc Thiessen also worked on the speech. In fact, Gerson resigned on June 14, 2006 from his position as a political advisor. (Deans, 2006).

implication of this study is that the Manichaean style is most effective during crisis, particularly those involving life and death struggles. When a country is attacked by an external force, it is less difficult to demonize the attackers than when one is simply dealing with a domestic policy dispute. Crises provide opportunities to call a people into being and Manichaean rhetoric is very effective at doing that.

Charland (1987, pp. 139-141) argues that constitutive rhetoric creates a collective identity, a trans-historical subject, and the illusion of freedom to call its audience into being. Starting with his first Inaugural and particularly in his September 20th, 2001 address to a joint session of Congress, Bush met Charland's criteria by using a Manichaean style. However, Manichaeanism is not a style that one can turn on and off. It lends itself to the constitutive dimension of rhetoric, as opposed to the instrumental, which often seeks compromise and pieced together consensus among various groups.

The dilemma Bush faced during the construction of his 2006 State of the Union Address was how to retain some elements of the Manichaean style when it came to addressing the war on terror and how to move a more instrumental style when addressing other issues. Unfortunately, the Manichaean style does not blend with less dramatic rhetorical styles. An extension of this study might explore the use of the Manichaean in campaign rhetoric as opposed to what kind of rhetorical style is required to govern. As the example of Daniel Webster shows, the Manichaean style may be very effective in constituting attacks on slavery, but it is not effective when trying to pass a compromise that is made up of various elements formerly condemned, such as the Fugitive Slave Act.

The second implication of this study is that withdrawing from the Manichaean style is problematic because once this style is invoked speakers use a very serious persona to constitute an audience that exists in a quasi-religious sphere where compromise is unacceptable. Charland claims that speakers reveal "a unified and unproblematic subjectivity" (1987, p. 139). Good contends with evil; the forces of light battle the forces of darkness. Foreign policy threats lend themselves to this style because they deal with life and death struggles. However, while some domestic issues such as abortion, capital punishment, and stem cell research concern mortality, most other domestic issues do not. Thus, once one takes an audience to an un-compromised and uncompromising level, it is difficult to return to practical matters and expect the audience to follow. However, that is often what is required in State of the Union Addresses which, by their nature, cover myriad issues. Inflation, taxes, and the proper funding of schools are not life and death issues and therefore, do not lend themselves to Manichaean rhetoric. If policy making is the art of compromise, then in general it does not lend itself to uncompromising rhetorical styles.

That may explain why the President shifted from Manichaean to pragmatic rhetoric when moving from foreign to domestic policy in his 2006 State of the Union Address. In the same speech, Bush performed as a preacher from the bully pulpit in the docket of the House of Representatives and as a political leader advancing an agenda open to compromise. In the former case, he fell into a moderate civil religious tone. In the latter case, he portrayed Congress as a place of dialectic that leads to consensus and cooperation, further distancing himself from his Manichaean persona.

Available poll data, while subject to other variables, certainly indicate that the public was unmoved by the speech. There are no noticeable improvements in Bush's approval ratings.[8] Before the speech his decline in popularity with the public in general was matched by similar declines among his strongest support group. Baylor University, in conjunction with Gallup, took a poll in the fall of 2005 which revealed that nearly 40 percent of evangelicals surveyed did not agree that the Iraq war was justified, and that 38 percent no longer had a high level of trust in the President.[9] In short, while Bush may have maintained support from Evangelicals, it was not nearly as enthusiastic as it had been up to 2004. After the 2006 State of the Union, the polls by *Time Magazine* prove typical and show that Bush was unable to re-energize his support from independents. The pre-State of the Union poll gives the President a 41 percent approval rating with 55 percent disapproving, and 4 percent undecided; after the speech, the changes are barely perceptible. The approval rating is 40 percent; the disapproval rating is 54 percent, with the rest undecided. Whether you examine the Fox News polls or the Pew polls, the result is the same. The speech had no measurable effect. In fact, a CBS Poll (2006) of those who watched the speech revealed that only 32% of viewers believed that Bush could accomplish the goals set out in the speech, down 9% from the year before.

The third implication of this study is that using the Manichaean style affects rhetorical tactics. Unless carefully crafted, speeches relying on the Manichaean style will promulgate the use of false dichotomies because of the uncompromising dialectics the style creates. The Manichaean style eliminates the middle, divides its subjects into good or evil, light or dark. Sometimes such divisions are not subtle enough to contain reality. The result can damage speakers' credibility and/or argumentation.

Furthermore, the Manichaean style tends to flourish in the narrative mode. The conflicts it portrays are more dramatic when enfolded into a story line with heroes and villains, good and evil empires. Within this framework, a presidential speech can be enhanced by using persons in the audience to reinforce the values of the story line or embodied the type of heroes that are being praised. Bush's use of a letter from a soldier and the placing of the family of the soldier in the House gallery provide a case in point.

Yet another impact of the Manichaean style is its reliance on apostrophes or direct address of another. Because of the dramatic setting and narrative, it does not seem unnatural for Manichaean speakers to invoke God or condemn their enemies directly. In fact, such tactics often reinforce the dramatic nature of the moment at hand.

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[8] For a compilation of major polls see http://www.pollingreport.com/BushJob.htm.

[9] It is fascinating to note that the poll was not released until September 12, 2006 (Pinsky, 2006). Was Baylor protecting the President? The poll also shows that 94.8 percent of Americans believe in God; only 5.2 percent self-identified as atheists. Fifty-four percent "embraced" an involved God that has Manichaean features. Forty percent embraced a more distant God, "who really does not interact with the world" or is "a cosmic force which set the laws of nature in motion."

The final implication of this study is that Bush's abandonment Manichaean style was permanent in his State of the Union Address and only sustained in his rhetoric concerning the war on terror. By the State of the Union Address of 2007, Bush's party had lost both houses of the Congress and the President took an even more conciliatory approach than he had in 2006. There is no Manichaean rhetoric in the 2007 address; in fact, in the opening, Bush uncharacteristically refers to "uncertainty in the air." He is ready to make a deal to achieve "affordable healthcare." He favors "comprehensive immigration reform" which includes a temporary worker plan. While he favors taking "the fight to the enemy," he does not couch his policy in Manichaean terms. Instead he calls for supporting "our troops in the field and those on the way." The 2006 State of the Union Address was a turning point in Bush's rhetorical style, not an exception to it. By 2007, his Manichaean persona had evaporated completely from his State of the Union Address.

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