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RELIGIOUS INFLUENCES IN INAUGURAL SPEECHES OF U.S. PRESIDENTS

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Abstract: Inaugural speeches of U.S. Presidents are part of symbolic politics. They are part of the political traditions, and represent an important moment in presenting political visions for the future. The infusion of religious elements into politicians' speeches becomes a tool in increasing the number of cast votes and the notoriety. This paper analyzes the inaugural speeches of both Republican and Democrat U.S. Presidents in the past twenty years, starting at the end of the Cold War until nowadays. By means of content analysis we looked for religious elements while comparing the speeches of Democrat and Republican Presidents.

Key Words: symbolic politics, religion, inaugural speeches, Democrat, Republican, U.S. Presidents, Bill Clinton, George W. Bush, Barack Obama

Introduction

In a world characterized by permanent changes, religion and its values remain stable aspects of life. Inaugural speeches of U.S. Presidents are part of symbolic politics and present political visions for the next period.¹ Within this context, the infusion of religious elements into politicians' speeches in the United States of America and Europe becomes a tool in increasing the number of cast votes and the notoriety.

Taking the American case, research has shown that a large number of individuals consider the Republican Party as being friendlier toward religion than the Democratic Party.² Therefore, the paper aims to empirically investigate the presence of religious factors in the U.S. Presidents' inaugural addresses and the differences between them. The main research questions are the following:

- To what degree do inaugural speeches of the American Presidents contain religious elements and which are these?
- Are there major distinctions regarding the religious elements used in the inaugural addresses of the Democrat Presidents?
- Are there major distinctions regarding the religious elements used in the inaugural addresses of the Republican Presidents? and
- Which are the main religion-related differences between the speeches of the Democrats and of the Republicans?

Based on the aforementioned research questions, the analysis hypothesizes that the differences both between the inaugural addresses of the same President in two different mandates and between the Presidents from the same party are minimal and they are mainly related to the social-political and economic context. Furthermore, the paper presumes that the Democrats and Republicans differ, from a religious point of view, only at the level of intensity (references and frequency) with which they use religious elements.

The analysis focuses on the period starting at the end of the Cold War until nowadays. Thus, the analyzed discourses belong to George Bush (the mandate between 1989 and 1993), Bill Clinton (the first mandate between 1993 and 1997, the second mandate between 1997 and 2001), George W. Bush (the first mandate between 2001 and 2005, the second mandate between 2005 and 2009), and Barack Obama (the mandate between 2009 and 2013). The analyses are presented in the chronological order of the discourses.

The study consists in five levels of analysis: the analysis of the individual speeches, the comparative analysis of speeches belonging to the same President from two different mandates, the comparative analysis between discourses of the Democrat Presidents, respectively Republican

Presidents, and the comparative analysis between the inaugural addresses of the Democrats *versus* Republicans.

Theoretical framework

Being an important political factor in the United States of America and continually animating the American politics³, religion interrelates with the political sphere since the dawn of human culture and civilization⁴. Although the relationship between religion and democracy is characterized by ambiguity⁵, one of the most important moments when the aforementioned elements collide is when a state official is invested.⁶

Political communication, defined as a central part of political marketing⁷, is used as a rule either to inform and to persuade or to change attitudes.⁸ Speech acts not only rely on a specific situation, but they actively create it in order to persuade and to legitimize political goals.⁹ In this respect, while political communication has been usually perceived as being a medium through which information and persuasion are conveyed and exchange and through which the messages are simply transferred, the meaning remaining intact, nowadays, the intention of political communication is slightly different. Contemporary political communication focuses rather on the information flow than on the quantity of information or on the exchange of data, new meanings of the messages being created.¹⁰

Considering that political communication is characterized by the intention of the sender to influence the political environment, political actors shape the provided information.¹¹ By representing more than the outside world, a discourse, as part of political communication, is an essential way of creating, defining, and preserving group identities.¹² Within this context, religious elements and Divinity invocation seems to characterize presidential speeches.

The emphasis on religion, a major and a complex force in the contemporary world¹³, can be considered in the political discourse an emotional proceeding. Although politics tend to occupy the public sphere and the religion the individual and personal one¹⁴, the two clearly meet each other when the first needs the latter in order to emotionally influence and sensitize. However, studies show that there is an emotional deficit in the contemporary political communication. Thus, politicians should become more responsible with the feeling needs of the individuals.¹⁵ In addition, underlining that the key element of any message transmitted by political actors is that of significantly affecting the thinking, beliefs, and behaviors of individuals, the call for emotional information is imperative.¹⁶ By manipulating emotions, politicians usually gain political power in order to achieve their goals. Thus, while positioning themselves within the “we” group, which is rational, moral,

and correct, politicians tend to reject everything that belongs to “them” (e.g. extremism, terrorism).¹⁷

In spite of what research claims about the deficit of emotional issues within political discourse, a survey conducted in March 2012 on a national sample of 1503 adults living in all United States emphasizes that 38% of Americans believe there is too much expression of religious faith and prayer from political leaders. Although the percentage saying there is too much expression of religious faith by politicians has increased across party lines, this view is far more widespread among Democrats than Republicans.¹⁸

In the discourses of American politicians, religion elements become indispensable. In this respect, there is the belief that the United States has been uniquely and continually blessed by God and thus, the country plays a “divinely authorized leadership role in the world”. While invoking God’s name and blessing, presidents develop, in their inaugural addresses, themes like sacrifice, virtue, or American’s example in the world.¹⁹ A study comparing U.S. presidential inaugural addresses of the 19th and 20th centuries stresses that the most frequently expressed values are liberty, equality, belief in God, patriotism, justice, personal responsibility, and peace.²⁰ Another study, conducted on fifty-two inaugural addresses, concludes that there are eleven inaugural addresses themes: civic virtue, nonpartisanship, national unity, general policy principles, cooperation with the Congress, popular support, a providential supreme being, the American mission, political continuity, the president’s role as defender of the Constitution and union, and federalism.²¹

As Tocqueville has noticed while talking about America as compared to the Europe, the atmosphere of the country is a religious one, the issues of civil religion become a tradition. This means that every individual and group have the obligation to carry out God’s will on Earth. The concept of “civil religion” belongs to Rousseau, who emphasizes the simple dogma of it: the existence of God, the life to come, the reward of virtue and the punishment of vice, and the exclusion of religious intolerance.²² Civil religion seems to be a vital element for human progress in order to counteract the power of egoism and greed and in order to guide nations towards sympathy and love.²³

In this context, inaugural addresses usually serve as “liturgies of the civil religion”.²⁴ Due to the fact that inaugural addresses do not have much political significance, they tend to become ritualistic performances. However, they are cultural performances that affect the future behavior of the president and nation. Thus, for instance, the cultural belief that Americans are a chosen people with a worldwide mission has influenced American foreign policy.²⁵ In this context, the references to God seem to have only a ceremonial significance within speeches from solemn occasions. In this respect, one might even say that an American President must mention Divinity in order not to lose votes.²⁶

God's invocation in inaugural addresses of U.S. Presidents has now a tradition dating back to the beginnings.²⁷ In a context in which very few states underline the rituals related to the transfer of power, the American tradition of calling God goes back to Washington's first "So help me God", in 1789. From that moment on, references to God appear in forty-two of fifty-four perorations, within the entire speeches, and only Washington, in his second inaugural, did not mention the Divinity at all. Furthermore, Jesus has never been mentioned in an inaugural address.²⁸ Moreover, references to Divinity, especially at the end of the addresses, have been substitutions for the term "God": Almighty Being, Great Author, Invisible Hand, Parent of the Human Race²⁹, or the Being who is supreme over all, the Infinite Power that rules the destinies of the universe, the Power whose providence mercifully protects our national infancy, and Him Who has not yet forsaken this favored land³⁰. Usually, the American Presidents refer to religion and God in general, without a particular frame. Therefore, it becomes an empty sign.³¹ Thus, one may conclude that the relationship between religion and politics is positioned within the field of symbolism³².

Methodological framework

The method used in answering the research questions is content analysis. The unit of analysis consists of the inaugural speeches belonging to the aforementioned Presidents³³. Using a mixture of quantitative and qualitative elements, the study aims to underline the following categories: the references to Holy elements (for example: Bible, God), the references to Christian values (for example: love, hope, tolerance, compassion), and the references to the democratic values as a frame for the relationship between human beings and between different nations (for example: freedom, equality, diversity, unity, friendship). All the above elements are considered to be part of what is generically called *religiosity*. The analysis is exhaustively focusing on the way religious elements are used. However, it may be claimed that there is a strong resemblance between all the inaugural addresses in terms of length, structure, past references or problems to be solved.

An analysis of US Presidents' inaugural addresses

This part of the research presents the analysis of the individual discourses of each President considered. Moreover, in the case of Bill Clinton and George W. Bush, the two inaugural addresses are compared in order to emphasize possible differences in perspective.

he analysis of George Bush's inaugural address³⁴

From the entire range of analyzed inaugural addresses, George Bush's seems to be the most filled with religious elements. The discourse is created as an advice and an impetus to Americans to help the others and to appreciate moral values.

The speech contains several distinguishing aspects. Firstly, after the traditional address to the former President, Ronald Reagan, he begins his discourse by emphasizing that he has taken the executive oath on the same Bible that George Washington did 200 years ago. Thus, from the very beginning, he underlines his ultimate set of beliefs, the ones stated in the Bible. Secondly, in the initial part of his inaugural address, as a first act, he says a prayer. The entire text of this prayer is listed below:

“Heavenly Father, we bow our heads and thank You for Your love. Accept our thanks for the peace that yields this day and the shared faith that makes its continuance likely. Make us strong to do Your work, willing to heed and hear Your will, and write on our hearts these words: “Use power to help people.” For we are given power not to advance our own purposes, nor to make a great show in the world, nor a name. There is but one just use of power, and it is to serve people. Help us to remember it, Lord. Amen.”³⁵

In this prayer there are two main parts: a thankful part and an asking part. In the thankful part, the main values are obedience, love, peace, and faith. He also asks for power but in the sense that the power should be used in the name of God and in order to help and serve other people. Thus, based on this prayer, he considers himself a prophet with a supreme goal in life: gaining strength in order to help the others.

Christian values are largely used and some of them are repeated from the initial prayer. Generosity, love, kindness and friendship are measures of non-materiality. The importance of “*better hearts and finer souls*” is oppositely presented to material possessions as cars, bank accounts or gold.

The idea of engaging in activities that are filled with moral principles is continuously underlined: “America is never wholly herself unless she is engaged in high moral principle”³⁶. Moreover, the goals of all the Americans are raised to the level of universal purpose: “It is to make kinder the face of the Nation and gentler the face of the world”³⁷. The speaker names several categories of people that need help: homeless persons, abandoned or poor children, addicted individuals, criminals, young women and mothers. A permanent sense of responsibility for the others is accentuated: “They need our care, our guidance, and our education, though we bless them for choosing life”³⁸.

The references to the relationship with others continue throughout the entire text of the discourse. He deems his companions “*friends*” and emphasizes the idea of unity and no differences between human beings: “For this is a day when our nation is made whole, when our differences, for a moment, are suspended”³⁹. Considering the Americans’ kindness as the only resource that grows in time of need, George Bush speaks of “a new engagement in lives of others, a new activism”, involving both the old and the young generation into the country’s mission.

Another concept that is intensely mentioned and discussed is freedom. In a world struggling for free expression and free thought, George Bush claims that “freedom works” and “freedom is right”. Moreover, he shows a universal justice view in which they, the Americans, are the ones who know the way to create “a more just and prosperous life for man on Earth: through free markets, free speech, free elections, and the exercise of free will unhampered by the state”⁴⁰. Freedom is compared to a kite that “can go higher and higher with the breeze”.

As a peace missionary, the speaker delegates to himself and to the people of America the goal of protecting peace worldwide by “keeping our alliances and friendship around the world strong”. Moreover, the sense of belonging is emphasized by a strong sense of unity: “No matter what your circumstances or where you are, you are part of this day, you are part of the life of our great nation”⁴¹.

The last part of the inaugural address is again abundantly filled with moral values. Considering tolerance, hope, unity, diversity and generosity to be specific characteristics of Americans, George Bush, identifying himself with the entire people, stresses the importance of doing the right things and solving the problems: “For our problems are large, but our heart is larger”. The Divinity is mentioned again both by emphasizing His unbounded love and in the traditional ending phrase: “God bless you and God bless the United States of America”⁴².

To conclude, the main religious message of the George Bush’s inaugural address is contained in the prayer from the beginning of the speech. It refers to the mission of helping others by respecting moral values and by cultivating the idea of the freedom of every human being. The speech begins and ends with references to the Divinity. Moreover, throughout the entire discourse the Christian values are permanently emphasized and are considered as a supreme base to all Americans’ actions.

The analysis of Bill Clinton’s inaugural address

This part of the paper presents the analysis of the two inaugural addresses from the two mandates of Bill Clinton. After an individual perspective, the two discourses are compared in order to underline resemblances and differences.

The analysis of Bill Clinton's first inaugural address⁴³

While the inaugural address of George Bush is a call for helping others, the Bill Clinton's discourse is rather a call to renew America. With more emphasis on the democratic values, the speaker begins by underlying the American ideals of "*life, liberty, the pursuit of happiness*".

At the end of a politically unstable world, Clinton's references to freedom and unity are abundant. He pleads for the decrease of inequality and the eradication of the "deep division among our people". Moreover, he calls for justice by evoking several disadvantaged groups of people and several social issues:

"But when most people are working harder for less; when others cannot work at all; when the cost of health care devastates families and threatens to bankrupt many of our enterprises, great and small; when fear of crime robs law-abiding citizens of their freedom; and when millions of poor children cannot even imagine the lives we are calling them to lead—we have not made change our friend"⁴⁴.

Based on this context and addressing the audience as "*my fellows*", the speaker stresses the importance of acting together now to enrich living conditions for everybody and make them appropriate. Additionally, at the end of the discourse, the idea of diversity in unity is reiterated: "An idea ennobled by the faith that our nation can summon from its myriad diversity the deepest measure of unity"⁴⁵.

Thus, the idea of both opportunity and responsibility is given shape: "We must do what America does best: offer more opportunity to all and demand responsibility from all". The necessity of helping others is translated into a high level of involvement for both the helpers and the helped. As part of the idea of acting on self-idealism, several specific contexts are mentioned: "helping troubled children, keeping company with those in need, reconnecting our torn communities"⁴⁶. In this respect, Bill Clinton emphasizes a powerful truth that includes references to help: "we need each other. And we must care for one another"⁴⁷.

Framing the entire speech on the idea of renewing America, the call for respect and care for others is transposed into the abnegation of self-advantages: "Let us put aside personal advantage so that we can feel the pain and see the promise of America"⁴⁸.

The importance of universal peace is also mentioned: "We earn our livelihood in peaceful competition with people all across the earth"⁴⁹. However, contextualizing America as a worldwide leader that wants to globally impose its values, its action within the international community

is characterized either by “*diplomacy whenever possible*” or by “*force when necessary*”. Thus, the main goal is that of perpetuating democracy: “Our hopes, our hearts, our hands, are with those on every continent who are building democracy and freedom. Their cause is America's cause”⁵⁰.

References to Divinity are visible only in the last part of the inaugural address. Mentioning hope and faith and emphasizing again the idea of helping others, Bill Clinton cites from the Scripture: “And let us not be weary in well-doing, for in due season, we shall reap, if we faint not”⁵¹. Relying on God's help, the speaker reminds the audience again of the importance that every citizen should respond to the call to service. In this context, the traditional final phrase is not missing: “*God bless you all*”⁵².

The analysis of Bill Clinton's second inaugural address⁵³

Calling his audience as his *fellows*, Bill Clinton prepares for the beginning of his second mandate a discourse that emphasizes the beginning of a new millennium in which America remains the world's indispensable nation. In this context, the references to the past, the achievements and the future promises are deeply noted. In the beginning of the inaugural address, the ideas of equality and liberty are stressed by framing them within the “conviction that we are all created equal” and within the past experience of abolishing slavery.

Making an incursion into the past, the speaker talks about the accomplishments of the American people regarding the help given to those in need and to create welfare for everybody. In this respect, the main values mentioned are citizenship, opportunity and dignity. Moreover, the importance of providing opportunities to everyone and of making lives better remains one of the goals for the future:

“The preeminent mission of our new government is to give all Americans an opportunity—not a guarantee, but a real opportunity—to build better lives”⁵⁴.

In addition, in a context in which there are still many problems to be solved, the respect for freedom and unity is extremely important. Thus, “*a new spirit of community*” is invoked. This implies

“taking time out of our own lives to serve others” and “assuming personal responsibility not only for ourselves and our families, but for our neighbors and our nation”⁵⁵.

However, serving others presumes a high level of unity. In this regard, by naming the division of the race as a constant curse of America, Bill Clinton aims to underline the plague of religious and political division that still exists. Therefore, a call for generosity and love is made.

Additionally, as an ambassador of the Divinity, the speaker promises rewards for those who cherish unity:

“Great rewards will come to those who can live together, learn together, work together, forge new ties that bind together”⁵⁶.

Continuing the discourse with the idea of “the new spirit of community”, Bill Clinton emphasizes the importance of this value at the international level as well. Thus, in a context in which there are no longer two major hostile camps, peace becomes a new framework in which the world can live: “We will stand mighty for peace and freedom, and maintain a strong defense against terror and destruction”⁵⁷. In this respect, America assumes again its universal mission role in which “the world’s greatest democracy will lead a whole world of democracies”⁵⁸.

The last part of the discourse abounds more in Christian values. Thus, references to the human heart, to the human spirit are made. Within this framework, the idea of equality is reiterated by citing Martin Luther King:

“Like a prophet of old, he told of his dream that one day America would rise up and treat all its citizens as equals before the law and in the heart”⁵⁹.

Bill Clinton advises the American people to face the new demands “with faith and courage, with patience and a grateful and happy heart”. In this regard, the call for God’s blessing, as part of the final traditional phrase of the speech, is deep and intense: “May God strengthen our hands for the good work ahead—and always, always bless our America”⁶⁰.

A comparative analysis between the two Bill Clinton’s inaugural addresses

While the first Bill Clinton’s inaugural address was held soon after the end of the Cold War, the second discourse was made at the beginning of the new millennium. Thus, although the two speeches are very much alike, the topics are slightly different. The following table emphasizes the main religious elements and values used.

Table 1. – A comparison between the religious elements and values in the two inaugural addresses of Bill Clinton

Bill Clinton’s first inaugural address			Bill Clinton’s second inaugural address		
Holy elements	Christian values	Democratic values	Holy elements	Christian values	Democratic values
God, Scripture	Hope, faith,	Liberty, freedom,	God	Hope, faith, dignity,	Liberty, freedom,

	help, respect for life, care	unity, peace, opportunity, responsibility diversity		help, love, generosity, gratefulness, happiness	unity, peace, opportunity, responsibility, equality, citizenship, spirit of community
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While the first inaugural address focuses on the idea of renewing America after a long period of tensions, the second inaugural address aims rather for a reviewing, summing-up, and making of new plans. However, the contents and messages of the two discourses are similar. In both speeches, America is perceived as a universal leader that must perpetuate freedom and be a model of unity and inequalities eradication. Moreover, both addresses make profound references to the need of helping each other, to a new spirit of community, and to responsibility.

As the table shows, there are more Christian and democratic values in the second discourse. However, there are more references to certain values, as hope, faith or freedom in the first discourse. Additionally, although the first address refers both to God and to Scripture as well, the final blessing message seems to be more elaborate and intense within the second speech, mainly because of the enthusiasm of a new beginning.

The analysis of George W. Bush's inaugural address

This part of the analysis aims to individually and comparatively present the references to religious elements within the two inaugural addresses of George W. Bush.

The analysis of George W. Bush's first inaugural address⁶¹

Invoking the long story of America, George W. Bush begins his first inaugural address by emphasizing its nation's role of friend, liberator, servant of freedom, protector, and defender. In the country in which everybody has a place, "everyone deserves a chance" and "no insignificant person was ever born". The "inborn hope of our humanity" is the base for the faith in freedom and democracy.

From a country in which the "differences run deep", the speaker promises to build a nation of unity, of justice and opportunity. Moreover, to accomplish this grandiose goal, he relies on Divinity: "I know this is in our reach because we are guided by a power larger than ourselves who creates us equal in His image"⁶². Within this frame, George W. Bush describes America as a nation committed to its ideals and principles of gentleness, respect, correctness and forgiveness: "A civil society demands from each of us good will and respect, fair dealing and forgiveness"⁶³.

Labeled as a courageous nation and aiming to reform, build and defend, America is also termed as compassionate. In this respect, the need to care for others is strongly stated:

“Abandonment and abuse are not acts of God, they are failures of love. And the proliferation of prisons, however necessary, is no substitute for hope and order in our souls”⁶⁴.

As a Government and a nation’s responsibility, the suffering of others implies duty and represents a priority for everybody: “all of us are diminished when any are hopeless”. In addition, in a world of deep pain and needs, George W. Bush considers that only Divinity, through pastors’ prayers, can re-edify hope and welfare. Thus, within a great religious acceptance and unity, a high level of importance is given to the churches, synagogue and mosque. The call for help whenever there is somebody in need is again mentioned: “America, at its best, is a place where personal responsibility is valued and expected”⁶⁵.

Reaffirming the need for “*civic duty*” and for “*spirit of citizenship*”, the speaker imperatively continues his discourse by encouraging the audience to reach justice and compassion, to seek a “common good beyond personal comfort”, to serve the nation and the neighbors, to involve in “building communities of service and a nation of character”. Fulfilling service to one another becomes the major theme of the speech. Thus, the promise of all Americans must be that of making “a more just and generous country” and that of “affirming the dignity of our lives and of every life”. By invoking the power of an angel to direct a storm, the final traditional phrase is a blessing message: “God bless you, and God bless America”⁶⁶.

The analysis of George W. Bush’s second inaugural address⁶⁷

After a first mandate in which the entire world has witnessed the power of terrorism, George W. Bush emphasizes in the second inaugural address the importance and force of universal human freedom, the only weapon against evil. Thus, the liberty of one country depends on the liberty of other countries. Within this framework, the speaker invokes the everlasting beliefs of America governed by the “Maker of Heaven and earth”, namely equality and liberty: “every man and woman on this earth has rights, and dignity, and matchless value, because they bear the image of the Maker of Heaven and earth”⁶⁸. The value of human dignity is respected and cherished: “there is no justice without freedom, and there can be no human rights without human liberty”⁶⁹.

By attaching the role of universal leader to his country, George Bush proclaims the end of tyranny in the world as the ultimate goal. Although using arms when needed remains a constant, freedom must be the permanent choice: “the moral choice between oppression, which is always

wrong, and freedom, which is eternally right”⁷⁰. In this respect, Americans’ mission is that of teaching other nations how to attain their own freedom: “*liberty will come to those who love it*”. Moreover, assuming a universal mission and addressing the international community, the speaker promises to help every oppressed nation: “When you stand for your liberty, we will stand with you”⁷¹. Quoting Abraham Lincoln and invoking the “*rule of a just God*”, George Bush stresses that “those who deny freedom to others deserve it not for themselves”⁷².

Addressing the American citizens, the speaker mentions the sacrifice and courage of those that are fighting against terror in order to make a “more prosperous and just and equal” country. Within the framework of “tolerance toward others”, of everything that is good and true, George W. Bush brings together the different faiths of the Americans:

“That edifice of character is built in families, supported by communities with standards, and sustained in our national life by the truths of Sinai, the Sermon on the Mount, the words of the Koran, and the varied faiths of our people”⁷³.

Moreover, “service and mercy, and a heart for the weak” sustain the idea of freedom. A message that emphasizes the value of liberty, the need to care for others, and the lack of racism is formulated. In a context in which the American nation has been threatened by foreign evil, the unity, support and hope of all citizens are vital: “We felt the unity and fellowship of our nation when freedom came under attack”⁷⁴.

Although “God moves and chooses as He wills”, the speaker shows a mark of optimism and hope in the achievement of freedom. The final phrase is a traditional blessing: “May God bless you, and may He watch over the United States of America”⁷⁵.

A comparative analysis between the two George W. Bush’s inaugural addresses

Basing the following comparison on the above analysis, this part of the paper aims to emphasize the resemblances and the differences between the two inaugural addresses of George W. Bush. The next table represents a concise overview on the main religious elements and values in the two discourses.

Table 2. – A comparison between the religious elements and values in the two inaugural addresses of George W. Bush

George W. Bush's first inaugural address			George W. Bush's second inaugural address		
Holy elements	Christian values	Democratic values	Holy elements	Christian values	Democratic values
God, prayer, churches, synagogue, mosque, angel	Help, love, faith, forgiveness, good will, compassion, generosity, dignity	Freedom, equality, justice, unity, friendship, opportunity, respect, correctness, responsibility, citizenship	The Maker of Heaven and earth, God, varied faiths of our people	Help, love, tolerance, truth, mercy, care, hope	Freedom, equality, justice, unity, liberty

As the above table summarizes and as the entire discourses underline, there is a large amount of affinities between the two speeches. The main similarities refer to the invocation of the past heritage, to the general call for help, love, hope, liberty and justice, and to the need to rely on God's will.

However, given the very different contexts in which the two discourses have been addressed, there are deep disparities. The differences originate in the fact that the second inaugural address is made after the terrorist attacks of September 2001, attacks that have shocked an entire world. The sets of differences are presented as follows.

First, based on the abovementioned context difference, the theme of the two addresses are distinct. While the first discourse uses the call for compassion and involvement as a main theme, the second discourse accentuates extremely the idea of freedom and its importance as a universal goal.

Second, as the above table clearly emphasizes, both the set of Christian values and the set of democratic values are narrower in the second speech as compared to the first one. While in the first discourse, George W. Bush talks more about forgiveness, generosity, compassion, opportunity, respect or responsibility, the second discourse underlines more the ideas of help and freedom.

Third, however in the same respect, there are important differences regarding the number of times that a certain key-word is used. While *God*, *love*, *justice* or *unity* are elements used for an almost similar number of times, the major divergences are related to words like *hope*, *freedom*, or *liberty*. Thus, while the first speech uses *hope* for 2 times, *freedom* for 5 times and *liberty* for only one time, the second discourse uses *hope* for 8 times, *freedom* for 27 times and *liberty* for 15 times.

Concluding, although the two George Bush's inaugural addresses are mostly similar in structure and in the traditional aspects, the second discourse is focused only on one theme and is formulated as a more in-depth call for freedom.

*The analysis of Barack Obama's inaugural address*⁷⁶

In a context of war against terrorism and totalitarian regimes and of a violent international economic crisis, the inaugural address of Barack Obama is based on a deep call for getting together and solving existing problems. Invoking peace as one of the most important aspects of life, the speaker emphasizes the capacity of American people to mobilize and to be optimistic: "we gather because we have chosen hope over fear, unity of purpose over conflict and discord"⁷⁷.

Mentioning the Scripture, Barack Obama emphasizes the God's gift that Americans carry forward from generation to generation, namely the equality, liberty and the right to be happy: "the God-given promise that all are equal, all are free, and all deserve a chance to pursue their full measure of happiness"⁷⁸. In addition, as an incursion into the past and as tribute for those that sacrificed themselves, the values of prosperity and freedom are mentioned. In the same regard, the call for non-discrimination of any type is present:

"they saw America as bigger than the sum of our individual ambitions; greater than all the differences of birth or wealth or faction"⁷⁹.

Considering its nation as the most prosperous and powerful nation on Earth and assuming this universal leader role, the speaker talks about the things that need to be done in order to accomplish a state of welfare for everybody. Within this framework, the market is perceived as a provider of wealth and freedom by creating opportunities for everybody. Moreover, the call for help and kindness is deep and imperative and it implies profound self-sacrifices:

"It is the kindness to take in a stranger when the levees break, the selflessness of workers who would rather cut their hours than see a friend lose their job which sees us through our darkest hours"⁸⁰.

At the international level, the emphasis is on a diplomatic and friendly relationship with every other nation. Thus, the call is for humility, cooperation and mutual understanding:

"America is a friend of each nation and every man, woman, and child who seeks a future of peace and dignity, and that we are ready to lead once more"⁸¹.

Along the same non-discriminating and international path, Barack Obama stresses the necessity to tolerate diversity in unity by referring to the religions of the Americans: “We are a nation of Christians and Muslims, Jews and Hindus - and non-believers”⁸². However, the references to the Muslim world are more specific by emphasizing the importance of mutual interest and of mutual respect: “To the Muslim world, we seek a new way forward, based on mutual interest and mutual respect”⁸³.

Assuming again the role of peace ambassador all over the world, the speaker underlines the importance of not accepting anymore the suffering of the people from poor countries and he promises help for a better life: “we can no longer afford indifference to suffering outside our borders”⁸⁴.

Invoking the founders of the country and their enthuse about progress and development, Barack Obama emphasizes the values on which every individual must rely: “hard work and honesty, courage and fair play, tolerance and curiosity, loyalty and patriotism”⁸⁵. All these values imply responsibility for self and for the others. The end of the discourse is marked by the call for hope and virtue. In addition, the reference to God’s grace as a supreme help for freedom is underlined. The final phrase is the traditional blessing message: “God bless you. And God bless the Unites States of America”⁸⁶.

A comparison between Democrats’ inaugural speeches

Each of the three analyzed Democratic discourses has been addressed in a specific context. Whether it is the end of the Cold War, the beginning of a new millennium, or the beginning of an economic international crisis period, the resemblances between the inaugural discourses are explicit. The following table summarizes the main Christian and democratic values within these speeches.

Table 3. – A comparison between the religious elements and values in the inaugural addresses of Bill Clinton and Barack Obama

Bill Clinton			Barack Obama		
Holy elements	Christian values	Democratic values	Holly elements	Christian values	Democratic values
God, Scripture	Hope, help, happiness, respect for life, faith, dignity, love, generosity, gratefulness, care	Liberty, freedom, unity, diversity, peace, equality, responsibility, opportunity, citizenship,	God, Scripture, Christians and Muslims, Jews and Hindus - and non-	Hope, help, pursuit of happiness, tolerance, humility, honesty	Liberty, freedom, unity, diversity, peace, equality, responsibility, welfare, cooperation,

		spirit of community	believers		understanding respect, fair play, loyalty
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A few elements or frames repeat in every situation: the need to solve the existing problems and inequalities, the mission of America to perpetuate freedom and democracy, the need to self-sacrifice in order to create welfare for everybody, and the goal of creating both opportunities and responsibilities as well.

However, there are slight differences as well. One of the main differences lies in the way the Divinity is mentioned. While Bill Clinton cites from Scripture, Barack Obama calls God more often and mainly by emphasizing His gift of equality, freedom and right for happiness. Moreover, Barack Obama transmits a message of tolerance to all religions but more specifically to Muslims.

However, as the above table shows, Bill Clinton refers to a larger amount of Christian values, namely love, faith, generosity, gratefulness or care. In the same respect, Barack Obama, in a context of crisis, underlines the need for tolerance, humility and honesty.

As for the democratic values, the resemblances are more diverse. Thus, besides the common values of freedom, unity, diversity, unity, peace or responsibility, while Bill Clinton emphasizes the ideas of citizenship and of spirit of community, Barack Obama pays attention to cooperation, understanding, respect, fair play, and loyalty.

So as to conclude, given the different socio-economic and political contexts, the inaugural discourses of the two Democrats, Bill Clinton and Barack Obama, are mostly similar regarding the references to religious elements and values.

A comparison between Republicans' inaugural speeches

Representing two different generations, George Bush and George W. Bush have similar, although in some respects different, views. Leading America in two unstable periods, the end of a war and the beginning an unprecedented terrorism threat period, both father and son have pragmatic perspectives. While George Bush advises for help and appreciation of moral values, George W. Bush calls for compassion, involvement and help in achieving freedom. However, as the table below shows, there are several differences in the way religious aspects are perceived.

Table 4. – A comparison between the religious elements and values in the inaugural addresses of George Bush and George W. Bush

George Bush			George W. Bush		
Holy elements	Christian values	Democratic values	Holy elements	Christian values	Democratic values
God Bible, prayer, Heavenly Father,	Faith, love, hope, help, tolerance, generosity obedience, kindness	Freedom, unity, friendship, diversity, peace	God, The Maker of Heaven and earth, prayer, churches, synagogue mosque, angel, varied faiths of our people	Faith, love, hope, help, tolerance, generosity, forgiveness, good will, compassion dignity, truth, mercy, care	Freedom, unity, friendship, equality, justice, opportunity, respect, correctness, responsibility citizenship, liberty

Although the number of calls for Divinity is equal in the two cases, the inaugural address of George Bush is more remarkable. By repeatedly addressing his audience as “my friends”, in comparison to “my fellows” as George W. Bush does, the father profoundly emphasizes the need and respect for God. Besides the deep prayer at the beginning of the speech, George Bush relies his entire discourse on Divinity marks. However, the son underlines the need for unity by invoking different types of religions and faiths.

Moreover, the set of Christian values that George W. Bush emphasizes is wider. Thus, besides the common values of faith, love, hope, help, and tolerance, the son refers to forgiveness, compassion, dignity, truth, mercy and care. In addition, the father makes more mention of obedience.

The same difference continues on the democratic values level. Thus, besides freedom, unity and friendship, George W. Bush underlines more justice, opportunity, respect, correctness, responsibility or citizenship.

In conclusion, as a consequence of age, experience and context differences, the inaugural addresses of George Bush and George W. Bush are slightly distinct mainly regarding the depth of Divinity references.

A comparison between Democrats and Republicans' inaugural speeches

While Republicans have more conservative policies by supporting individual rights, small government, and freedom for business, Democrats

have more liberal values tending to sustain social programs that help disadvantaged groups.⁸⁷ Considering these differences, one would have expected to find deep differences among Democrats and Republicans' inaugural addresses from a religious point of view. However, the study shows that these differences are minimal and are more a matter of intensity and not of reference. The following table summarizes the use of religious elements and values from the two aforementioned perspectives.

Table 5. – A comparison between the religious elements and values in the inaugural addresses of Democrats and Republicans

Democrats			Republicans		
Holy elements	Christian values	Democratic values	Holy elements	Christian values	Democratic values
God, Scripture Christians and Muslims, Jews and Hindus - and non-believers	Hope, help, faith, love, dignity, generosity, care, tolerance, happiness, respect for life, gratefulness, humility, honesty	Liberty, freedom, unity, diversity, peace, equality, responsibility, opportunity, citizenship, spirit of community, welfare, cooperation, understanding, respect, fair play, loyalty	God, The Maker of Heaven and earth, Heavenly Father, Bible, prayer, churches, synagogue, mosque, angel, varied faiths of our people	hope, help, faith, love, dignity, generosity, care, tolerance, obedience, kindness, forgiveness, good will, compassion, truth, mercy,	Liberty, freedom, unity, diversity, peace, equality, responsibility, opportunity, citizenship, friendship, justice, respect, correctness

Regarding the Holy elements, both groups refer to God within the text of the discourse and within the final traditional blessing message. However, the Republicans tend to give Divinity a more personal and intimate name, by calling Him “the Maker of Heaven and earth” or “Heavenly Father”. In addition, both Democrats and Republicans refer to different religions and place emphasis on the importance of mutual respect and acceptance. Still, another difference relies on the fact that Republicans enlarge the set of Holy elements by including allusions to Bible, prayer or angel.

The references to Christian values are highly similar between Democrats and Republicans. The common features represent reference to hope, help, love, care, dignity, generosity, or tolerance. In addition, while Democrats pay attention to happiness, respect for life, gratefulness, humility, or honesty, Republicans stress obedience, kindness, forgiveness, compassion, truth, and mercy.

Based on a general call for freedom, equality and unity, the main difference between Democrats and Republicans regarding the democratic

values lies in more stress upon the former on the idea of responsibility versus the idea of opportunity of the latter. Moreover, a more empirical perspective can be noticed in the Democrats' view by emphasizing the need for cooperation, understanding or loyalty.

Conclusions

Emphasizing the relationship between religion and politics, this paper has aimed to analyze and compare the inaugural addresses of the American Presidents, from George Bush to Barack Obama. Starting from the general question of how religion elements are used within these speeches, a general conclusion can be drawn. Regardless of the political belonging and the different addressing styles, American Presidents tend to invoke Divinity, Christian and democratic values similarly.

The analysis shows a more pragmatic face of Democrats over Republicans. Thus, on one hand, Bill Clinton and Barack Obama call for renewing America, for building a new spirit of community, for getting together in order to solve existing and upcoming problems, and for creating opportunities and providing responsibilities as well. On the other hand, George Bush and George W. Bush advise helping others, appreciating moral values, being compassionate, getting involved, and helping others in achieving democracy. However, both groups attach to America the label of universal leader and emphasize its mission to impose and perpetuate democracy.

Notes:

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