

In countries with large religious populations but relatively little religious freedom, a justification like this is likely to be an important supplement to defenses based on human happiness.

Cross's project is a valuable one, and his conclusions in *Constitutions and Religious Freedom* about the significance and determinants of basic protections for religious freedom are important. The limitations of his analysis are most relevant in contexts where religious freedom is already well-protected in these fundamental ways, and they are less weaknesses than areas for future attention.

***God Wills It: Presidents and the Political Use of Religion.* By David O'Connell. New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publishers, 2014. ix + 319 pp. \$54.95 Cloth**

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David O'Connell's *God Wills It* is a detailed study that makes important contributions, but it does not consistently live up to the author's bold claims.

O'Connell's ambition is to write a study similar to that of George C. Edwards, whose work continues to stir debate, especially with scholars of rhetorical criticism. Edwards' significant study examined the broad effects of presidential rhetoric, concluding that it has little cumulative influence on the public (*On Deaf Ears: The Limits of the Bully Pulpit*).

O'Connell follows on Edwards' work but focuses specifically at religious rhetoric. In particular, he examines the extent and effect of modern presidents using religious rhetoric to promote "major presidential objectives." Although he occasionally makes bolder claims about all presidential religious rhetoric, his central argument is that religious rhetoric does not help presidents build support for their policy priorities.

Content analysis and case study selection are both somewhat subjective enterprises. O'Connell helpfully explains his methodological choices in

some detail, presents the criteria he used to identify major presidential objectives, and lists all of the resulting cases. He restricts his analysis to presidents in the age of the “modern presidency,” a good choice given the transformation of the office in this era. His case list is extensive, and it appears that his selection methods capture most of the cases he should include. But one glaring omission is apparent from George W. Bush’s time in office — the faith-based initiative. This policy was central in the Bush campaign and was one of Bush’s top domestic priorities his first term. As I and other authors have documented, Bush was able to accomplish some of his policy goals through executive action, but the legislative portion of the faith-based initiative was a major policy failure.

O’Connell measures rhetorical success based on presidential approval ratings, polling data on support for specific issues, congressional actions, and the tone of editorial coverage. Most of these measures make sense, but all of them measure end results of a complex cause-and-effect process. Members of Congress take many factors into consideration when casting a vote; pressure from their party’s president is one significant influence, but so are many others including personal political beliefs and constituent concerns. Polling data can gauge likely shifts in public opinion, but it cannot reveal what specific causal factors affected the change.

Reliance on news editorials is particularly curious. Editorial boards and columnists are known for their ideological perspectives and have a smaller, albeit elite, range of influence than mainstream news outlets. O’Connell’s analysis of editorials shows how opinion writers respond to presidential speeches — interesting data to be sure, yet not demonstrative regarding how the rhetoric affected news coverage. Analysis of news coverage of speeches and the progress of policy initiatives would indicate better what was communicated to the public and to what extent journalists communicated the president’s message.

O’Connell supplements his case studies with an experiment, a good methodological choice for testing some of his ideas. His findings are instructive and suggest that, at least among Columbia students, religious appeals have little effect.

Among O’Connell’s contributions is his distinction between two types of religious speech: communitarian rhetoric that unifies, and coalitional rhetoric that divides. His comprehensive analyses of presidential speeches include minor speeches in addition to high-profile addresses, adding important depth to the case studies.

In the case study chapters, O’Connell includes lengthy excerpts from many speeches, giving the reader a feel for the use of religious and

moral imagery. O'Connell's detailed work examining databases of presidential speeches offers an important scholarly contribution. The analysis becomes most subjective, however, when he asks not just when and where presidents employ religious rhetoric but seeks to answer *why*, imputing motivations.

O'Connell notes that "[Presidents'] linguistic choices, which are based on polls and the expert advice of their speechwriters and press secretaries, are strategic" (7). This description oddly misses the personal views of presidents themselves that shape the direction of the administration and its priorities, greatly affecting speech content. Presidential historians who conduct archival research routinely offer evidence of presidents heavily editing prose and pushing back with speechwriters in the drafting process.

The book would benefit greatly from further editing. The introduction focuses too much on trying to convince the reader of the book's strengths when it would be wiser to straightforwardly lay out the basic plan and purpose of the research. Readers need not worry that they will miss any conclusions they are supposed to draw; the author's voice and opinions are quite pronounced throughout the book.

Studies like this one remind us of the strengths and limits of qualitative social science. O'Connell's work is strongest in collecting and identifying use of religious rhetoric in policy speeches. The work is weakest in its attempts to impute motivation and its many claims of "proving" cause and effect (e.g., "Each case study chapter will prove..." 7). So many factors — conscious and subconscious — weigh into presidential rhetoric and decision making that social science never quite meets the level of *proof*. Our methods point to patterns and relationships, but they can only reveal small pieces of a complex web of factors that explain political behavior. O'Connell's research offers constructive insight into an area of presidential rhetoric that is rarely studied, but it draws conclusions beyond the scope of the methods employed.

Presidents employ a wide range of rhetorical strategies, and religious rhetoric is more natural in certain types of speeches and on certain occasions. Although O'Connell is rather dismissive of their arguments, Karlyn Kohrs Campbell and Kathleen Hall Jamieson have argued in their influential work that different types of presidential communication serve distinctive purposes and warrant variation in rhetorical styles (*Presidents Creating the Presidency: Deeds Done in Words*, Chicago). They contend, for example, that a president uses different tones, styles, and rhetorical choices when responding to a national tragedy than when making a direct policy appeal to the public.

O'Connell looks at how presidents employ religion in one type of rhetoric, policy speeches. This is an important, and — as he likes to remind the reader — often overlooked subject. His conclusions offer insights into this process, but the study cannot speak to the many other times when presidents choose religious imagery and themes. In other words, this study focuses on types of presidential appeals that are most likely to use divisive coalitional rhetoric. A study of other aspects of presidential speechmaking would be much more likely to find ways in which presidents routinely, and often successfully, employ communitarian religious rhetoric that has unifying power.

***Nations under God: How Churches Use Moral Authority to Influence Policy.* By Anna Grzymała-Busse. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2015. xiv + 421 pp. \$95.00 Cloth, \$29.95 Paper**

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Grzymała-Busse explains the ability of churches to attain desired policy outcomes based on what she calls “institutional access,” essentially a privileged position in establishing policy in areas of importance to the church.