

Resisting the New Legal Orthodoxy: “Religious Freedom” as Battle Cry in Religious Right Culture War Rhetoric

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In the Spring of 2012, the rapidly growing movement to legalize same sex marriage hit an obstacle as North Carolina residents voted to amend their state constitution to make marriage between one man and one woman the only legal domestic union. Religious Conservatives, such as the Christian Action League of North Carolina’s Mark Creech, led the wave of support for the so-called “Marriage Amendment.” This paper explores motivational logic in and implications of Mark Creech’s theologically-infused political action rhetoric. The terministic screen in Creech’s address at a Marriage Amendment Rally is identified through a careful cluster-agon analysis. The paper then highlights how the theological logic animates and constrains the terministic screen of the rhetoric. Beyond providing insights into this particular case study, understanding the logics at work in Creech’s speech can aid rhetorical scholars in understanding the logics at work in the culture war political action rhetorics of other Religious Right rhetors.

Introduction

On April 30, 2012, Rev. Mark Creech gave the keynote address at the “Marriage Amendment Rally” at Poovey’s Chapel Baptist Church in Hudson, North Carolina. The rally, and Creech’s speech, called conservative Christians to actively support Amendment One, or as Creech called it – the marriage amendment, in North Carolina’s May 8, 2012 statewide election.

North Carolina 2011 Senate Bill 514 placed Amendment One on the ballot as a for and against vote by the citizens. The ballot read, “Constitutional amendment to provide that marriage between one man and one woman is the only domestic legal union that shall be valid or recognized in this State.” The Bill stated that a majority was needed to approve the constitutional amendment (Senate Bill 514, 2011). This amendment not only made it unconstitutional to recognize same sex marriages, including marriages deemed legal in other states, it also made it unconstitutional to recognize civil unions of any kind in the State of North Carolina (Amendment One, 2012). Amendment One drew considerable attention from around the nation (Dalesio, 2012; Blumenthal, 2012) and can be seen as representative of legislative and legal struggles over same-sex marriage in America at that time.

Rev. Creech’s political action rhetoric, including his April 30, 2012 address, was representative of the rhetoric of leaders in the Religious Right who opposed same-sex marriage. Creech was the leader and primary spokesperson of the Christian Action League of North Carolina, an organization that described itself as a “Christian public policy organization representing conservative evangelicals from seventeen denominations in the Tar Heel state” (About CAL, n.d., para. 1). When the Religious Right movement became a political powerhouse in the 1980s, the Christian Action League aligned themselves with much of its agenda (Carpenter, n.d.). The Christian Action League was affiliated with the American Family Association, a national conservative group that the Southern Poverty Law Center considered an anti-gay hate group (Three anti-gay groups, n.d.). In addition to leading the Christian Action League, Creech had numerous writing outlets and speaking engagements (“Rev. Mark Creech,” n.d.), suggesting that his rhetoric resonated with conservative evangelical audiences.

The majority of Creech’s (2012) keynote address was an argument for why the audience should support Amendment One. Creech’s reasons appealed to the audience’s deepest motivations. Creech devoted the most time to the argument that the audience should support the amendment because God had designed marriage to be between a man and a woman. Second, Creech claimed that passing the marriage amendment would create a better world for the audience’s children. Third, Creech argued for the marriage amendment by claiming that heterosexual marriage was the “cause of Christ.” Fourth, Creech argued that it was the obligation of Christians to be politically engaged on biblical issues and that marriage was the

key biblical issue. Finally, Creech argued that the amendment would protect religious freedom and the rights of religious citizens.

The remainder of this paper explores the appeals and implications of Creech's rhetoric by identifying the terministic screen in his address at the Marriage Amendment Rally. First, I identify the internally consistent logical framework of the speech through a close analysis of the speech's implicit strategies. Second, I argue that the specific theological logic contained in Creech's rhetoric, for example, that God's people are in a holy war against liberals, played a role in the speech's larger internally consistent logic system. The theological logic therefore animates and constrains Creech's political action text in ways that offer his audience deep and broad motives of purpose, fear, and urgency. Furthermore, I propose that understanding the logics at work in Creech's speech can aid rhetorical scholars in understanding the logics at work in the culture war political action rhetorics of other Religious Right rhetors.

Internal Logic, Terministic Screens, and Cluster-Agon Analysis

Kenneth Burke's (1974) conception of terministic screens provides insights into ways symbols use humans and humans use symbols. Whether or not the symbol user is aware of its existence, a terministic screen is an internally coherent perspective through which a human interprets the world. Terministic screens are visible as they work in texts through systematic vocabularies with internal logics. All humans communicate through terministic screens and those terministic screens are manifested, therefore observable, in symbolic communication. A terministic screen is not deterministic of what a rhetor will say, in fact it may not necessarily predate the text, but it does act as a constraint that influences a rhetor's rhetorical choices with its coherent logic. This theory impacts how I view the political action text in this study by claiming there is a coherent system of symbols within the text, a system that has placed constraints on the development of the text and can be identified through the text.

Identifying and understanding terministic screens seems then to be an important work of rhetorical scholars. Burke (1974) claimed, "the injunction, 'believe that you may understand' has a fundamental application to the purely secular problem of 'terministic screens'" (p. 47). When one has identified the particular terministic screen that is guiding the observations and understands the logical pattern that holds the screen together, the observations will then be clear and understandable as they fit the pattern of the screen. In other words, understanding terministic screens will help the rhetorical scholar understand the texts emerging from the terministic screens. The process can, and perhaps must, also be reversed; the rhetorical scholar can identify and understand a particular terministic screen by understanding a rhetor's texts. Furthermore, once identified, a particular terministic screen can allow a critic to foreshadow what and how that screen's adherents may think and speak about various undeclared issues (Olson, 2009). This rhetorical theory directly connects with rhetorical methods. A text itself provides evidence of the terministic screen that a rhetor is operating from as the words of the text can reveal an internally consistent logical frame. A cluster-agon analysis of the text will help the rhetorical scholar identify those themes.

I used Burke's cluster-agon analysis in my study in order to identify the terministic screen revealed in Creech's April 30, 2012 speech. Burke (1968) claimed that the dramatistic method was "the most direct to the study of human relations and human motives is via a methodical inquiry into cycles or clusters of terms and their functions" (p. 445). The interrelationships between the associated clusters in the text itself are the rhetor's motives in which he or she communicates the text (Burke, 1973, p. 20). This approach brings with it a dramatistic understanding of texts, but it answers the questions directly from a close, careful, and rigorous analysis of the text (Burke, 1973, p. 69).

In my close reading, I identified the dramatic alignment and interrelationships as directly revealed in the text. I answered two basic questions: "what goes with what?" and "what is opposed to what?" (Burke, 1973, p. 69). The first question was answered by identifying what symbols were linked together in a text. At times this clustering of terms together was literally that terms were placed next to one another or were repeatedly mentioned together (Brummett, 2011, p. 107). Symbols of a text could also be

recognized as “going together” by sharing a common value, characteristic, or setting. Another way terms could be clustered together was that they were on the same side of a struggle described in the text. This leads me to identify ways terms in a text may be opposed to one another. Symbols in a text may be placed in opposing clusters of terms if the text presents the symbols in conflict with one another or simply as a contradiction to one another (Brummett, 2011, p. 110).

The Internal Logic of a Culture War’s Marriage Battle

The explicit tactics in Creech’s speech, discussed in the introduction, provided a useful overview of the text. However, a deeper level of analysis, identifying the implicit strategies of a text, is needed to discover the text’s terministic screen. In this section I describe my cluster-agon analysis of Rev. Mark Creech’s (2012) keynote address.

The Cosmic War Between Good and Evil in North Carolina

My cluster-agon analysis of Rev. Creech’s marriage amendment speech identified the relational alignment of terms in the text, thus revealing a crucial piece of his terministic screen (See Appendix). The analysis shows how certain terms clustered together through a variety of relationships, while other terms conflicted with each other. The analysis revealed a clear division of terms into two large and evenly-sized opposing clusters. Each cluster focused on a single key term that was surrounded by numerous related satellites of terms.

In the following sections I describe the findings of my cluster-agon analysis. First, I describe the key terms for the two large clusters in conflict in Creech’s speech and the sources of authority in the terministic screen which act as a ground for the rhetoric’s logical framework. Then, I carefully explain the inner-workings of each cluster, first the positive and then the negative, detailing the smaller satellites of terms surrounding the key terms and the relationships between the satellites of terms within the cluster and how they contribute to the textual conflict.

Authoritative sources and logical grounding. Before explaining the driving conflict in Rev. Creech’s terministic screen, it will be helpful to identify the authoritative sources that serve as a grounding for the logic, and therefore the relationships and judgments in the terministic screen. Creech’s logical framework was grounded in sources that would likely be held as authoritative by his religious audience. Creech’s terministic screen positioned God, and then the Bible, Jesus, and “facts” as the authoritative sources supporting the dramatic relationships at work in the speech (See Appendix). Creech repeatedly claimed, twenty-three times in all, that God was the ultimate source and advocate of traditional marriage and, in the logical framework, thus a supporter of the marriage amendment. For example, approaching the end of his speech, Creech proclaimed, “I believe God defines marriage.” God’s position as the ultimate authority also served as the grounding of Creech’s identification, description, and condemnation of people opposed to Amendment One. God, then, served as the ultimate grounding for the conflict between the two sides of the debate over Amendment One.

Next, underneath the authority of God in Creech’s terministic screen, Jesus and the Bible, mentioned ten and six times respectively, were sources of authority that revealed God’s will. Creech claimed, “Its only in the first two chapters of Genesis that we can discern God’s purpose for human relationships, sexuality, and marriage.” This quotation demonstrated the logic that God’s position on marriage was only known through the Bible. This logic was also demonstrated with Creech’s use of another Bible passage to show Jesus’ affirmation of the Genesis Bible passage as God’s position on marriage. Creech’s rhetoric repeatedly rooted his position in these three sources of authority. For example, he called marriage between a man and a woman the “purpose of God” and the “cause of Christ.” The final term, invoked three times, that served as an authoritative grounding in Creech’s terministic screen was the term “fact.” Creech’s rhetoric claimed that the “facts” of the situation supported the marriage amendment and its promised end results and displayed the folly and falsehood of the opponents of Amendment One.

The cosmic war expressed in state politics. My analysis of Rev. Creech's "Marriage Amendment" speech revealed an underlying conflict between two clusters of terms; one cluster with the key term "good" and the other cluster with the key term "evil" (See Appendix). First, Creech framed the speech with a description of his work at the Christian Action League as "exposing" and "curing" the evil in the world. Creech depicted evil in the world as attitudes and actions that arrogantly defy God, God's ways, and the good of others in order to promote deviant self-interests. In the particular situation addressed in the speech, "evil" is attempting to "redefine marriage." Second, as Rev. Creech presented his work combating something negative, he also presented his work as being done on behalf of a larger good. Creech presented the Christian Action League as working to promote the "common good" and preserve what is good in culture. Creech concluded the speech rooting his marriage arguments in God's "goodness," exposing the divine grounding of terms. In this speech, Rev. Creech depicted "good" as necessarily rooted in the divine, revealed in the scriptures, and benefiting humanity. While Creech claimed that the stakes of the battle over Amendment One are extremely high, the logic signals that North Carolina Amendment One is a particular battle in a larger war between "good" and "evil."

The conflict between good and evil is central to the terministic screen in Rev. Creech's "Marriage Amendment" speech. While good versus evil may initially appear to be a simplistic conflict, my cluster-agon analysis uncovered two complex opposing clusters of terms supporting the key terms. These complex opposing clusters display the dramatic relationships generating from and contributing to the central conflict between good and evil. My analysis of Rev. Creech's speech revealed that the two opposing clusters were near perfect reflections of one another.

The Cluster of Good

I will now further highlight how the parallel opposing clusters display the strength of the clash between good and evil as it manifest conflicts between the cluster's various supporting terms. As revealed above in the discussion of the speech's agon, the cluster of terms for what Rev. Creech was advocating for in his speech centered around the term "good" (See Appendix). Within the logical framework of Creech's rhetoric, "good" is grounded in the goodness of God. According to Creech's logic, God's goodness is revealed most clearly in the Christian Scriptures, is consistent with human experience and "facts" about the world, and provides clear guidance to the ways of human flourishing and the common good. The nature and importance of the "good" in Creech's positive cluster will be more fully explained in the following analysis of the various satellites of supporting terms.

The good agent. "God's people" acts as the term for the agents in Creech's positive cluster. The term is also the identity that Creech is clearly inviting the audience to take upon themselves. This identity places great dignity for the audience as belonging to God and great responsibility to act on God's behalf. Early in the speech Creech stated, "Christians are the ones who keep the world from going completely rotten and as light they arrest the darkness by exposing the evils of their day." At the end of the speech he called for "the passionate intensity of God's people to save America, to save our state from moral ruin." The logic's motivation for action based in an identity as God's people is complemented and strengthened by the logic that the positive clusters key action, and the good associated with it, is dependent on God's people. God's people, as the agent in the "good" cluster, are connected to satellites of motivating purposes, an attitude, and types of agency with which they take the primary good action.

The good purposes. In Creech's terministic screen the people of God act for the purposes of the "cause of Christ" and the "good of children." Creech explicitly stated these purposes at a transition point in his speech: "I hope you're not only thinking about the cause of Christ, but I hope you're thinking about your children, your grandchildren, and what kind of world they're going to be living in." In the logic of the speech, Creech lifted the issue of the definition of marriage as exclusively a man and a woman to the level of theological primacy as to call it the "cause of Jesus Christ." This motivation would be central for agents identified as the "people of God." Creech expanded the motivational purpose beyond what some might call the religious realm of life, saying "it's not only a spiritual battle, but it's also a battle about them (our children) and their future." Creech further emphasized the purpose of benefiting the children by

having the audience affirm their love for their children and grandchildren and promising that the marriage amendment will help the audience pass on a better world for their children.

The good attitude. The motivational force of the two purposes of Creech's terministic screen led to an attitude that would distinguish the actions of the people of God. I have distinguished this attitude as "passion" and it acts as the third satellite in the "good" cluster. Toward the conclusion of the speech, Rev. Creech made an emotional plea for the audience to "be passionate." He argued that the stakes of the battle between good and evil, manifested at the time in the vote for Amendment One, were extremely high and demanded passionate action. Furthermore, Creech claimed that the political opposition, operating on behalf of evil, were full of passion and the side that engaged the battle with the most passion would win the battle.

The good agencies. The primary term in this agency satellite is "Christian action to protect traditional marriage." Creech began, and framed, his speech by emphasizing the necessity of "Christian action" to expose and combat the "evil of their day." Creech defined "Christian action" as "being involved in the political process."

The secondary terms in the agency satellite reveal more specific agencies available for the "people of God" to exercise the central agency of "Christian action to protect traditional marriage." The agency terms are similar to the action steps identified in the discussion of Creech's explicit strategies. The specific means that God's people can use to take Christian action to protect traditional marriage are voting, educating, and giving financial support. Voting was the most significant secondary agency. Voting was mentioned frequently in the speech and is most directly related to the cluster's central act. Creech also highlighted the role of education as means of agency for the people of God. In his terministic screen, "educate" related directly to the authoritative terms of the "Bible" and the "facts." Educate also counteracted the "evil" cluster's agency term of "lies."

The third and final term in the agency satellite is financial donation. Creech briefly mentioned the need for financial donations to assist efforts to "educate" the public on the "facts" about Amendment One. In Creech's terministic screen, this means of action could offset the advertising spending acting as a means for the opposition to propagate their "lies." The satellite of terms of agency in Creech's "good" cluster provided the audience with a strong and unified agency in "Christian action to protect traditional marriage." It also provided clear and multifaceted means of response for the audience with various levels of commitment to take the cluster's central act.

The good primary act. The primary act that the "people of God," and the audience who is invited to embrace that persona, take in Creech's terministic screen is to "support the traditional 'marriage amendment.'" According to Creech's logical framework, supporting North Carolina's Amendment One was the focus of Christian action because it was the only way to defend traditional, and divinely-designed, marriage against relentless, and fundamentally evil, attempts to "redefine marriage" by removing the requirement it be between a man and a woman. As discussed above, the "good" cluster's primary act of supporting the traditional marriage amendment is the focus of the cluster's satellites for the agent's purpose, attitude, and agency.

The good end results. This is a particularly large satellite of terms because Creech spent a considerable amount of time discussing the good end results of the action he called his audience to take. The primary term in the end results satellite is "better world." The end of a "better world" directly fulfills one of the agents' two purposes in the cluster's purpose satellite, thus providing a logical motivation. The satellite also contains two secondary end results which, according to the speech's logical framework, contribute to a "better world." The secondary end results of supporting the traditional marriage amendment are "traditional marriage" and "religious freedom."

Rev. Creech argued extensively that marriage as exclusively one man and one woman contributed to a better world. He primarily relied upon the terministic screen's authoritative sources of God and the Bible, identified in the agon section above, to present traditional marriage as the basis for a stable society, family commitment, and gender bonding. First, Creech exclaimed that the Bible clearly revealed that traditional marriage was God's first institution and the institution God planned to serve as the cornerstone of society. Creech argued that God's plan of traditional marriage was rooted in God's goodness and

intended for the good of humanity by creating stable and flourishing societies. Second, Creech presented traditional marriage as producing stable societies in part because a marriage between a man and a woman produced a deep family commitment, a commitment Creech claimed was not possible in same-sex coupling. Creech supported this claim with traditional marriage as God's plan in the Bible and with "facts" about declining marriage rates in countries with same-sex marriage. Finally, Creech claimed that traditional marriage contributed to a better world because of the differences, attraction, and bonding that can take place between the two genders of man and woman. Creech supported this claim with appeals to both the audience's experience and the Bible's revelation that God's image is revealed in male and female, which Creech claimed meant God is most fully revealed in the union of a man and a woman. Within Creech's terministic screen, the goodness of supporting the traditional marriage amendment was supported by presenting the goodness of traditional marriage and the good that it brings to the world.

The final secondary end contributing to the better world created by God's people supporting the traditional marriage amendment is "religious freedom." The marriage amendment was positioned as the final protection against social, legal, and government-enforced persecution of citizens for acting on their religious and heartfelt beliefs in marriage as exclusively a man and a woman. Creech warned that the inevitable result of the "redefinition of marriage," repeatedly attempted by the opposition, was government forcing a new "legal orthodoxy" of marriage on unwilling citizens. The "religious freedom" end served as a sharp contrast to the "religious persecution" end of the redefinition of marriage cluster, presenting a clear choice for Creech's conservative religious audience. Creech's logic provided a motive of preserving the audience's ability to maintain their capacity to practice deeply held beliefs in the face of a rhetorically constructed assault on their religious freedoms by the evil agents of the terministic screen's negative cluster.

The Cluster of Evil

The key term and centerpiece of the negative cluster in Rev. Creech's "Marriage Amendment" speech's terministic screen is "evil" (See Appendix). The term "evil" is clearly in opposition to the term "good." The designation of what is "good" and what is "evil" in Rev. Creech's terministic screen is grounded in the terministic screen's sources of authority. In this logical framework, "evil" is a rejection of the goodness of God and God's plans that are revealed in the Bible. Furthermore, such a rejection of goodness leads to harm for humans. As with the "good" cluster, I grouped the various supporting terms around "evil" in satellites based on the roles that the terms play in the cluster. These roles include agent, purpose, attitude, agency, act, and end results. The "evil" cluster of terms and their logical relationships with each other, as well as their relationship to the oppositional terms in the "good" cluster, provide insights into the dynamic logic in Rev. Creech's "Marriage Amendment" speech.

The evil agents. Going beyond merely naming opponents on a specific public policy, Creech described these agents in extremely stark terms, such as, "those people who are robbing our nation of its soul." The "evil" agents satellite is in clear opposition to the agents - "God's people" - in the "good" cluster. The first and primary agent in the satellite are a broad assortment of liberal political activist groups that Creech referred to as the "left-wing cadre." The "left-wing cadre" included "abortionists," "evolutionists," "atheists," and "gay rights activists." While the causes identified were diverse, they were unified by their political action work for causes deemed "evil" in Creech's terministic screen. A second type of agent in the evil cluster are groups of "sexual deviants," who, Creech warns, are driven by "evil" desires to push the government to legalize various sexual behaviors and have any imaginable sexual pairing be called marriage. A third agent in the satellite are corrupt government leaders who willingly betray the will of the people to appease the "left-wing cadre" and "sexual deviants." More specifically, Creech mentioned "showboating politicians" and "activist judges." Finally, "the media" are included as an agent in the "evil" cluster as Rev. Creech fiercely condemned the media for its lack of objectivity and for intentionally misleading citizens with lies in order to advance the central act of the "evil" cluster. Having identified the agents in the "evil" cluster, I will now identify the purpose, attitude, and agency with which the four types of agents approach the cluster's central act.

The evil purpose. The purpose in the “evil” cluster is “serving personal preference.” Creech accused the opposition of arrogantly acting against the goodness of God and the good of humanity in order to serve their “personal preferences” on sexuality, relationships, and marriage. More specifically, Creech accused the agents of seeking their own “sexual convenience” and the advantage of “government benefits.” The self-serving purpose in the “evil” cluster is a sharp contrast to the purposes in the “good” cluster, which are focused on God and future generations. Within the speech’s terministic screen, the nature of the contrast between “good” and “evil” purposes contributed to the clear choice that Creech’s speech presented to the audience.

The evil attitude. The attitude in the “evil” cluster is “relentless.” While North Carolina had laws restricting marriage to one man and one woman at the time of the speech, Creech claimed the legal restriction was under relentless attacks by the “evil” cluster’s agents. He pointed out how the opposition had “redefined marriage” in other states, and he claimed that they were constantly looking for opportunities to “redefine marriage” in North Carolina. The “relentless” attitude of the “evil” agents increases the urgency of action in the “good” cluster, further warranting its call for “God’s people” to manifest a “passionate” attitude.

The evil agency. My analysis identified one primary agency and four secondary agencies through which the agents could act. The primary agency of the “evil” agents in the terministic screen was “political activism against traditional marriage.” Rev. Creech described the opposition as being relentlessly engaged in various types of political activism in their self-serving attacks against traditional marriage. The satellite’s four secondary terms are the agent’s specific means of political activism. The first secondary means in the agency satellite is the opposition’s lies and deceptive talking points. Creech directly made the accusation that the opposition would “argue something when you know it’s not right, but, yet, you’re doing it to scare folks out of voting for something.” The second secondary means of the opposition is the large amount of funding given and used to propagate their self-serving lies about marriage and Amendment One to the general public. Third, the opposition attempts to use legislation to establish and impose a new “legal orthodoxy” of marriage upon citizens without their consent. Finally, in the “evil” cluster of the terministic screen, the opposition would use government force to accomplish their primary act. Creech warned that once legislation was passed the government would “exercise its broad enforcement powers” to ensure compliance to the redefinition of marriage by all citizens regardless of their religious and moral convictions. The five means in the agency satellite revealed how the agents may logically attempt to accomplish the cluster’s central “evil” act.

The evil act. In Creech’s “Marriage Amendment” speech, the primary “evil” act is the “redefinition of traditional marriage.” As noted earlier, “redefinition of marriage” is how Creech references the legalization of same-sex marriage. Creech explained his opposition’s attempts at action as, “a concerted effort ... today to redefine the sacred institution of marriage to include same-sex coupling.” The analysis of the “evil” cluster has revealed the purpose, attitude, and agency that the “evil” agents bring to this primary action. Furthermore, and explained in further detail in the description of the end results satellite, in the logic of Creech’s speech, the legalization of same-sex marriage would not merely be an additional option for marriage. Instead, it would be a redefinition of a divinely-designed institution and the establishment and enforcement of a “new legal orthodoxy” upon unwilling citizens, to the detriment of the world.

The evil end results. The sixth satellite in my analysis of the negative cluster contains a primary and two secondary end results of the act. The primary end result in the satellite is a “worse world.” The two secondary end results contributing to the “worse world” are “same-sex marriage” and “religious persecution.” These end results directly conflict with the end results in the terministic screen’s positive cluster, “a better world,” “traditional marriage” and “religious freedom.” This sharp contrast provides a clear choice for the audience and, for those embracing Creech’s terministic screen, a powerful motivation for action toward the “good” and away from the “evil” end results.

Rev. Creech argued that the “redefinition of traditional marriage” would result in “same sex-marriage,” which was banned at the time in North Carolina, thus creating a “worse world.” While Creech spent a considerable amount of time discussing same-sex marriage, it was entirely from the perspective of

showing its inferiority to traditional marriage. Creech presented three outcomes of same sex marriage that he argued would make the world worse. First, Creech claimed that same-sex marriage would result in marriage becoming irrelevant. He cited the decline in marriage rates in nations where same sex marriage is legal as support to this claim. A second result of same-sex marriage in Creech's negative cluster is a lack of family commitment. Creech claimed that same sex marriage lacked the depth of traditional marriage and was based in "personal preference" and "sexual convenience" and therefore could not generate the depth of commitment required for healthy families. Third, Creech highlighted that same-sex marriage would remove the role of gender from marriage. In Creech's logical framework, the elimination of gender differences and roles would result in the elimination of attraction and bonding that can only happen between two distinct genders.

Finally, the next secondary end result of the "worse world" resulting from the redefinition of traditional marriage and contributing to the "worse world" is "religious persecution." Creech claimed that the redefinition of traditional marriage would establish a new "legal orthodoxy" to which the Government would force citizens to conform to. In the speech's logical framework, the legalization of same-sex marriage would legally exclude the traditional definition of marriage. As a result of this "radical change," citizens who held to the traditional definition of marriage due to religious convictions would become "the legal equivalents of bigots for acting on their religious or heartfelt beliefs." Creech warned that aggressive legal action would be taken against anyone holding to moral or religious convictions about marriage as the government would act to enforce the new definition of marriage. Creech supported these claims and increased the urgency of his call for action by citing lawsuits and fear of lawsuits in states where same-sex marriage is legal.

The Theological Logic of Creech's Marriage Battle

The cluster-agon analysis of Rev. Creech's (2012) Marriage Amendment Rally address revealed the speech's dramatic alignment in its terministic screen. The terministic screen provided dramatic conflict, personal and cosmic purposes, and a high-stakes decision for the audience. In the terministic screen, God's people, guided by God's revelation in the Bible, are God's agents of good in the world. God's people have God's plan for marriage, a plan that is crucial to the good of the world. However, in the terministic screen, God's plan and goodness in the world is under aggressive and relentless attack by agents of evil, and God's people must actively battle these agents. Specifically, in Creech's logical framework, evil agents are attacking goodness by attempting to redefine marriage. God's people have one chance to prevent the redefinition of marriage and save the state from great peril by acting to pass the "marriage amendment." In summary, the speaker has divine clarity and authority regarding a current issue on the ballot, a ruthless enemy was attempting to defy God and ruin humanity, and the audience had a clear role to play to avoid disaster.

One of the more striking elements of Creech's speech was the prominence of theological claims in the explicit tactics. The analysis of Creech's implied strategies revealed that theology also played prominent roles in the speech's terministic screen. In this section, I will identify and explore several points of theology in Creech's terministic screen in order to evaluate how specific theological logics constrain and animate the speech. The terministic screen reveals a number of particular claims about God and God's interactions with the world that are integral to the internally consistent logical framework that the speech reflects and generates, exposing the motivational dynamics at work with Creech and his audience. While the terministic screen reveals the logical appeal of Creech's rhetoric, the in-depth analysis of the text also reveals tensions or weaknesses in the logic of the terministic screen, including weaknesses related to certain theological logics.

God Works Primarily through the Political Action of Conservative Christians

One significant theological statement in Rev. Creech's terministic screen is that God works in the world primarily through the political action of God's people. While the Bible is the primary source of knowing God's will in the terministic screen, God's people are the primary way that God works in the

world. As noted in the textual analysis, Creech appears to use “God’s people” for conservative evangelical Christians like himself and the congregation where he delivered the marriage amendment rally keynote address. In the speech’s logical framework, the agents of “good,” as defined by God through the Bible, are God’s people.

This theology logic carries a second significant point; God works through God’s people specifically through political action, which Creech calls “Christian action.” Christian action was described in the agency satellite of the “good” cluster. Creech clearly expressed this theological logic in framing his speech with the motto of the Christian Action League, “The only lasting cure for evil and injustice is Christian action.” The specific agencies identified in the speech indicate that “Christian action” refers to political action taken by Christians (i.e. conservative evangelicals) rather than some type of action that is uniquely “Christian.”

God’s People are in a Holy War Against Liberals

A related theological inspiration in Creech’s terministic screen is that God’s people, whom Creech seems to equate with conservative evangelicals, are in a holy war against liberal activists including progressive interest groups, the media, and liberal judges and politicians. The conflict between God’s people and liberal activists is rooted in their identity as agents of opposing clusters in the terministic screen. The conflict of the agents is as large as the cosmic conflict between good and evil. God’s people promote God’s goodness and combat evil. Liberal activists attack God’s good plans and work evil in the world. Furthermore, within the speech’s logical framework, liberal activists are opposed to God and are condemned by God.

The fight between God’s people and liberals in this speech was focused on the issue of marriage; the two sides take different actions, motivated by conflicting purposes, and moving toward dramatically different end results. However, the speech and terministic screen reveal a deeper divide than the issue of marriage in at least three ways. First, Creech mentioned a variety of political and social differences that divide liberals and God’s people, expanding the violent term of a “fight” beyond the vote on Amendment One. Second, the contrast between “religious persecution” in the negative cluster and “religious freedom” in the positive cluster reveals a crucial underlying conflict in which the liberals attack the core identity of “God’s people” as a religious people and God’s people fight back in a desperate attempt at survival. Third, Creech offered no possibility of the opposition changing their ways and aligning with God’s people. There is no mention of a “Godly liberal” joining God’s people in this particular fight. Instead, the “liberal cadre” is a rhetorically created coalition relentlessly attacking God’s people and the ways of God. According to Creech’s terministic screen, God’s people must act to defeat liberals for the glory of God, the good of humanity, and their own survival as a religious people.

The theological logic that God’s people are at war against liberals provides several elements of motivation for action. First, the threat of a ruthless external enemy provides a clear point of contrast which can serve as a source of identification and cohesion for the audience. The strong sense of a unified group identity, heightened by the alignment with God and God’s good in the world, opens the audience to take unified action; in this case, supporting the traditional marriage amendment through Christian action. Second, as I argued above that the theology of being on God’s side and doing God’s work increased the depth and breadth of motivation for the audience, I propose that this alignment with the divine is all the more motivating when put in terms of group identity in the context of a war against opponents who are not aligned with the divine. This theology expands motivation beyond actions, end results, and even purposes, to a motivation of a dearly-held and cosmically-significant identity as God’s people. Third, the war between God’s people provides the audience with a motivation of a fight for survival. The stark contrast between God’s people and liberals, seen clearly in the oppositional clusters they inhabit in my rhetorical analysis, and the framing of the efforts of liberals as attacks on God’s ways and the religious freedoms of God’s people places the battle over state marriage law in the context of a larger war for survival.

This theological inspiration in Creech’s terministic screen, while problematic for civil democratic discourse, inflicts very little tension on the coherence of the speech’s logical framework. In fact, I propose

that the powerful motivation of this theology as identified in the previous paragraph is so rhetorically compelling that it compensates for many of the tensions in logic in other theological inspirations. However, this theological inspiration does create one tension in the internal logic. If, as indicated in Creech's terministic screen, God supports religious freedom and God supports God's people, defined as conservative evangelicals, and opposes liberals, then there seems to be a tension with what kinds of freedoms God would favor for people of religious faith who are politically liberal due to their religious faith. The logic of a war between conservative evangelicals and liberals suggests that religious freedom must be limited to freedom of those of a particular religion, a definition many would find problematic. While not an element of this speech, Creech has dealt with this tension when addressing Rev. Dr. William Barber and the liberal-leaning Moral Monday meeting by dismissing their religious beliefs (O'Neil, 2013).

God Supports Religious Freedom for Conservative Christians

Another piece of theological inspiration in Rev. Creech's terministic screen is the logic that God is on the side of religious freedom, at least for God's people. This theological logic emerged from Creech's framing of North Carolina's Amendment One as a fight to protect citizens' rights to hold their "heartfelt" religious convictions about marriage against the threat of religious persecution by liberals and the government. In this fight, God's people are on the side of God's purpose of marriage, and God is on the side of God's people to hold, practice, and promote God's position on marriage.

This theological logic places God on the side of the audience in the midst of rhetorically constructed threats to their religious freedom, specifically the freedom to hold religious convictions and practices of traditional marriage rather than a hypothetical liberal redefinition of marriage. The theological logic that God is on the audience's side complements the theological logic that the audience is on God's side. As the various theological emphases interacted in Creech's terministic screen, a theological logic developed in which God and God's people support each other against attacks of their liberal enemies.

This theological logic that places God on the side of religious freedom contributes to a tension in the terministic screen that also contains a logic that condemns questioning of one specific understanding of God's plan. It becomes unclear what type of religious freedom God could support if God is also against change or questioning of the status quo or dominant religious view. While Creech decried the scenario of the government interfering with a citizen's "heartfelt" religious belief that marriage was an exclusive union between a man and a woman, the logic of the terministic screen would firmly oppose different beliefs and practices about marriage beyond Creech's definition, even if those beliefs were "heartfelt" and religious. Amending the North Carolina Constitution so that there is no possibility of change in the definition of marriage appears to conflict with the claim that God supports the religious freedom of individual citizens given that citizens hold divergent understandings of marriage based, at least in part, on divergent religious beliefs and practices.

Culture War Theology's Logical Patterns of Motivation

My close textual analysis of Rev. Mark Creech's (2012) keynote revealed the terministic screen at work in the political action text. I have focused specifically on the activity of theology of conflict in the terministic screen. The analysis has identified a logic that appeals to many religious Conservatives who encounter Rev. Creech's rhetoric. In this logic: the speaker has divine clarity and authority on the current issue on the ballot; there is an enemy attempting to defy God, harm humanity, and eliminate the audience; and the audience has a clear role to play to avoid disaster. I have also identified points of weakness in the logic of the terministic screen, places where the theological inspirations appear to lead to conflicts and complications within the logical framework. Understanding the logic of the terministic screen, both the points of strength and weakness, allows the rhetorical scholar to make predictions of where the rhetoric will lead those who accept the invitation of the terministic screen. I will conclude this paper by

forecasting two key directions Rev. Creech's terministic screen may lead his audience if it were to remain consistent over time.

First, Creech's theologically-infused political rhetoric will likely contribute to further decay in democratic deliberation in politics. His rhetoric demonizes the social and political opposition, moving beyond attacks on specific differences of policy or political philosophy to attacks on identity. The logic of the rhetoric fosters a deep distrust and animosity toward outsiders because of the rhetorical construction of the outsider's identity as evil. Judgment of the political opposition, in this case a cosmic condemnation, is made on the basis of their identity prior to any political actions, purpose, or goals. The absolute division between the identity of two political opponents in the terministic screen eliminates the need for or appeal of dialogue, compromise, or collaboration. When adopted, the logic of war against a dangerous and fully-other enemy reduces political action to mobilizing one side to defeat, and perhaps, if the logic is taken far enough, even punish or eliminate the political opposition. The logic of this rhetoric does not allow the "fight" to end with one particular battle over a specific policy difference. Instead, because the conflict runs as deep as the very identity of the political adversaries, the fight must continue until the war is complete and the opposition is defeated. The tendency of this logic toward extremism is made all the more extreme through the theological logic that places the source of judgment, in this case the blessing of conservative evangelicals and condemnation of political liberals, in the highest imaginable authority, God. This theological logic does not necessitate but certainly can facilitate a win-at-any-cost ethic of political warfare.

Second, the logical framework of Mark Creech's theologically-infused political action rhetoric will likely leave no room for dissent within the conservative evangelical community he represents. This conclusion of the logical framework is not the result of any one particular theological inspiration examined in my analysis of the speech. In fact, some of the theological inspirations in the terministic screen, namely, the audience as God's people, the importance of religious freedom, and the Bible as the highest authority, should provide a logic against exclusion of dissenting voices in the religious community. However, I argue that some of the logical tensions identified in the previous section will likely lead to a logic that will not tolerate any descent on Creech's proclamations on what the Bible says and how it should be applied to the immediate social and political context. More specifically, this logic of exclusion will most likely be engaged on issues related to the rhetorically constructed war between God's people and liberals, as the logic of war rhetoric leads toward authoritarian leadership and the exclusion of dissenting opinions. A theological logic that recognizes the community as God's people, values religious freedom, and claims the Bible as the highest source of God's revelation could logically lead to a rhetoric of free and respectful dialogue and debate over the interpretation of the Biblical text and its appropriate application. However, the fear and urgency in the theological logic of the (culture) war rhetoric incited by Creech invited him to act as the authoritative voice of God's plan and purpose for the audience. This approach induced some of the points of tension in the logic discussed above in the analysis of Creech's theological rhetoric, particularly the large gaps in the logic between claims of the Bible's authority on marriage and sexuality followed by specific theological claims about Amendment One and other issues not addressed in the biblical text. In practice, Creech placed himself in the position of highest authority by declaring God's position on the marriage amendment. This logic leads to Creech, not God's people or even the Bible, acting as the voice for God in this (culture) wartime crisis, and likely leaves no room for dissenting opinions. It is likely this authoritative wartime rhetorical style would continue beyond the debates over marriage in North Carolina and on to other political battles in the culture war, once again placing Creech or another like-minded preacher in the position of authority to declare the will of God and making adherence of his decrees the litmus test of faithful membership as one of "God's people."

This analysis of Rev. Mark Creech's (2012) Marriage Amendment Rally keynote address has identified numerous theological emphases in Creech's terministic screen, identified motivations and tensions in the logic generated by certain theological logics, and anticipated outcomes of some of the logics in the theologically-animated rhetoric. My analysis has demonstrated the logical outcomes of specific theological emphases at work in the terministic screen. While the theological logics are not the

only element at work in Rev. Creech's political action rhetoric, I argue that the specific theological logics participate in the rhetoric's logical framework in ways other theologies would not participate.

In the course of this analysis I have mentioned that a few of Creech's theological statements reflect the specific segment of the conservative evangelical theological tradition to which he and his audience belong. If my claim that specific theological logics tend to animate and constrain political action rhetoric in certain ways, then the common theological logics found in Creech's terministic screen and in other conservative evangelical political action rhetoric should exhibit similarities. Recent rhetorical studies of American conservative evangelicalism (Crowley, 2006; Edwards, 2015) have revealed both theological emphases and rhetorical logics similar to what I have found in this analysis of Rev. Creech's political action text. More specifically, these studies of conservative evangelical rhetoric have identified that the logical outgrowth of theological rhetoric about the absolute authority of the "plain reading" of the Bible to current events combined with theological rhetoric of divinely-sanctioned culture war against the political opposition often leads to authoritative, divisive, and Machiavellian political discourse that threatens civil discourse. And while, as noted in the analysis of Creech's terministic screen, no specific element of conservative evangelical theology directly necessitates such toxic rhetoric, combinations of certain theological inspirations may act in ways that poison the fountain of public discourse.

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Appendix

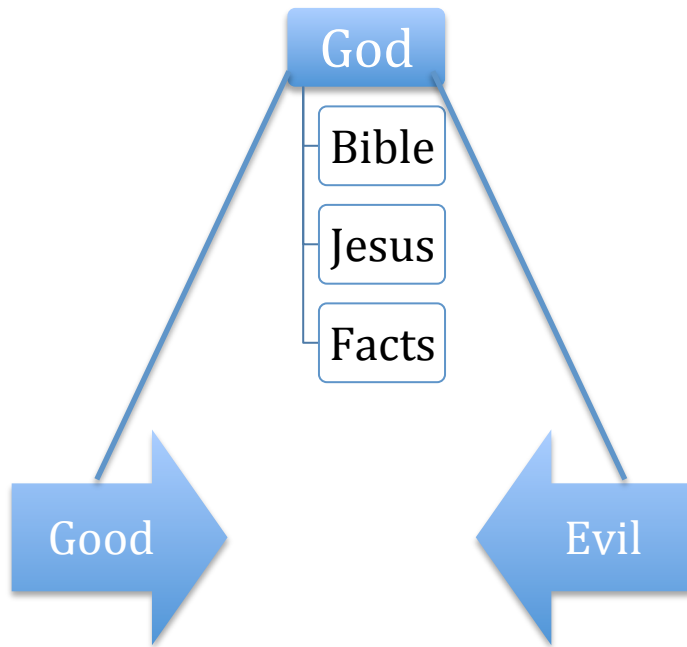


Figure 1. The Marriage Battle's Authority and Agon

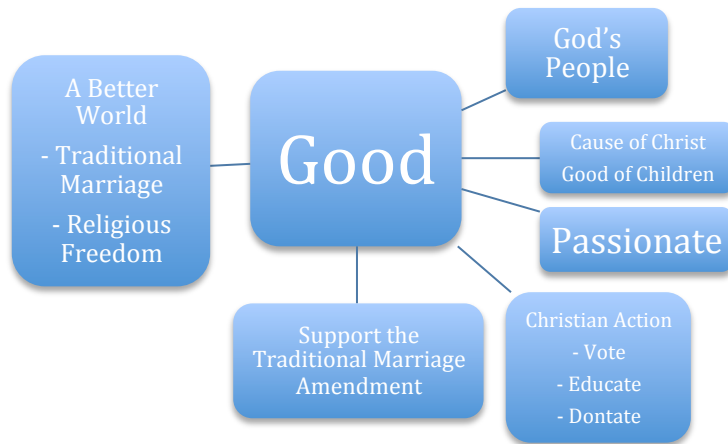


Figure 2. The Marriage Battle's Good Cluster

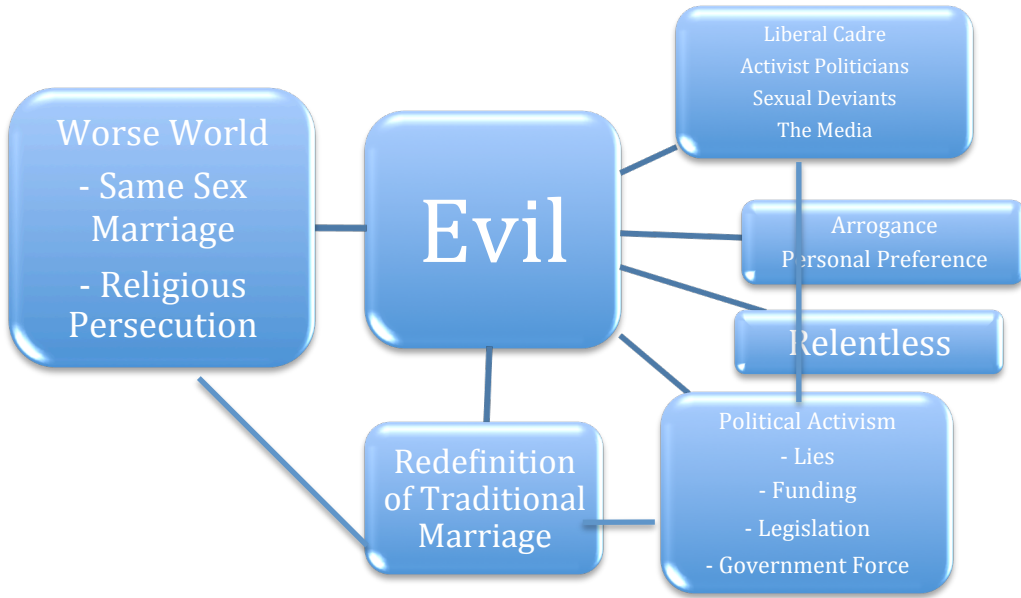


Figure 3. The Marriage Battle's Evil Cluster

