David Cameron's God Strategy: Religious Discourse as a Political Tactic

Abstract:

During his time as Prime Minister David Cameron made in speeches and articles a number of references to his own religious beliefs and their impact on policy, interventions which stood out in a largely secularised political culture. This paper examines Cameron's discourse for strategic intent following the *God Strategy* framework developed by David Domke and Kevin Coe (2008) in a US context. We will conclude that Cameron was using religion as a political tactic in a manner analogous to that of US presidents; however, we will also note key differences between Cameron's use of the strategy and that of his American counterparts which are the result of differences in context and culture.

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Introduction

In April 2014 then-British Prime Minister David Cameron penned an article for the *Church Times* in which he argued that 'we should be more confident about our status as a Christian country, more ambitious about expanding the role of faith-based organisations, and, frankly, more evangelical about a faith that compels us to get out there and make a difference to people's lives' (Cameron, 2014e). Cameron's comments – accompanied by an Easter message posted on YouTube and a speech given at the Downing Street Easter reception which covered similar themes – certainly stood out in a political culture in which such overt references to religion appear less common than in some other countries. This was not, however, the first time in which Cameron had made such references to Christianity in his political communication, nor would it be the last. 'Cameron's premiership', notes Spencer (2017a: 282), 'was notable precisely for its willingness to talk about Christianity, religion and faith'.

Cameron is not the only UK Prime Minister to seek, at times, to make much of Christianity in campaigns, speeches and policy decisions. Most notably in recent history, two of his predecessors, Margaret Thatcher and Tony Blair, have made such interventions (Spencer, 2017b: 3-5; Connell, 2017: 92-3). His successor Theresa May has, on occasion, done similarly (Spencer, 2017c: 317). If Prime Ministers, from time to time, make religious themes a part of their message, it may be there is some strategic reasoning behind it. Crines and Theakston (2015: 158), argue that politicians' religious rhetoric 'is used to justify policy, support their ideological positions, present a public persona, and underline their personal ethical appeal to highlight their individual moral suitability to be a national leader'. While then the use of religious rhetoric involves all three of the Aristotelian forms of appeal – ethos, pathos, and logos – it is perhaps primarily concerned with demonstrating a politicians' ethos or character. This suggest Finlayson and Martin (2014: 7), may involve

politicians seeking to demonstrate their own 'honesty and decency, but it might also involve resolution, intelligence or kindness. It can also, and importantly, involve the demonstration that a political figure understands and appreciates the life and experiences of those to whom they are speaking'.

This latter point – a politician seeking to demonstrate their understanding of, even participation in, the lives of a particular group – may account for Cameron's Christian rhetoric. His 'appeal to religious voters could in part be interpreted as an attempt to reassure traditional Conservatives and compensate for their negative views of his progressive policies (such as same-sex-marriage)' (Crines and Theakston, 2015: 172). 'Cameron's Christian-nation rhetoric', adds Spencer (2017a: 286), 'was understood by some to be an attempt to woo back a core constituency he had lost through his gay marriage proposals'. It may also be that this was part of a strategy to overcome criticism of the then-coalition government from the Christian left; Cameron's remarks came a week after 45 Anglican bishops and 600 other church leaders signed a letter calling upon political leaders to do more to tackle food poverty (Butler, 2014). As party leader and Prime Minister, Cameron, summarize Calfano, Djupe and Wilson (2013: 55), found it necessary 'to solidify the overall party base featuring fiscal libertarians and Christian conservatives without isolating the more moderate voter'.

A method of understanding Cameron's strategy may be provided by David Domke and Kevin Coe's *The God Strategy* (2008), a monograph examining the strategic ways in which Presidents of the United States have sought the votes and support of Christians. Domke and Coe (2008: 7) first identify what they call 'the God Strategy' – a 'calculated, deliberate, and partisan use of faith' – in the campaign and presidency of Ronald Reagan, and subsequently with George Bush Sr, Bill Clinton and George W. Bush. The strategy consists of 'a series of carefully crafted public communications employed by politicians to connect with religiously inclined voters' (Domke and Coe, 2008: 7). Similar strategy in an American context has been alluded to by others. Smidt *et al* (2010: 9) point to 'political activists and elites using religion to generate candidate support and shape voter turnout' in American politics. This includes candidates' religious 'posturing', 'signalling', 'framing' of issues and 'mobilising' of religious voters (Smidt *et al*, 2010: 12-14). Similarly, Djupe and Calfano (2014: 47) identify what they refer to as 'God Talk', a strategy employed by specifically Republican politicians which 'carries religious communication to a target group (e.g., white evangelicals) while going unnoticed or avoiding suspicion among others'.

Following the framework developed by Domke and Coe we will examine David Cameron's religious interventions for strategic intent. There are four aspects of the strategy:

1. Acting as political priests by speaking the language of the faithful.
2. Fusing God and country by linking America with divine will.
3. Embracing important religious symbols, practices and rituals.
4. Engaging in morality politics by trumpeting bellweather issues (Domke and Coe, 2008: 19).

We will consider the extent to which Cameron has followed each aspect of this strategy at a time. As well as the evidence from the work of Domke and Coe regarding the Reagan, Bush Sr, Clinton and Bush Jr presidencies, we will also draw comparisons between Cameron's strategy and that of Barack Obama. We will conclude that Cameron's Easter comments and comments from other occasions do seem to suggest that he followed something analogous to the God Strategy, albeit with key differences which reflect differences in context.

Acting as political priests by speaking the language of the faithful

The first aspect of the God Strategy involves politicians using Christian language in order to connect with Christian voters. At this most basic level such language is not necessarily linked to the nation, religious observances or morality politics; here politicians are simply trying to make religious voters think of them as one of their own. Domke and Coe give George W. Bush's 'Christ moment' in a 1999 Republican Party primary debate as a key example. In answer to the question of which political philosopher or thinker he most identified with Bush answered 'Christ, because he changed my heart'; asked to elaborate he continued: 'When you turn your heart and your life over to Christ, when you accept Christ as the savior [sic], it changes your heart. It changes your life. And that's what happened to me' (Domke and Coe, 2008: 29-30). Here Bush was not linking his faith to a policy issue, but simply using the kind of language that evangelical Christians would use.

Another example of Bush following this strategy is taken from the 2003 State of the Union address, in which he declared: 'there is power, wonder-working power, in the goodness and idealism and faith of the American people'. This was a coded reference to a well-known evangelical hymn, 'There is Power in the Blood', and was one of the code phrases investigated by Djupe and Calfano (2014: 46). This approach is also found in Bill Clinton's use of the phrase 'New Covenant' in his 1992 acceptance speech at the Democratic Convention. Clinton was not referring to the Biblical new covenant, instituted at the Last Supper (1 Cor. 11:25); rather, Clinton used the phrase to speak of 'a solemn agreement between the people and their government'

(Domke and Coe, 2008: 5). Clinton's aim here, like Bush, is to show Christian voters that he is one of them, simply by using the kind of language that they use.

A similar strategy was employed by Barack Obama, with perhaps the most obvious example being Obama's campaign theme of 'hope'. Announcing his candidacy in February 2007 Obama declared: 'In the face of war, you believe there can be peace. In the face of despair, you believe there can be hope' (Obama, 2007). Obama's reference to 'peace' also has Biblical resonance, with examples including the words of Christ in the Sermon on the Mount – 'Blessed are the peacemakers: for they shall be called the children of God' (Matt. 5:9) – or the words of Paul to the church in Rome – 'Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ' (Rom. 5:1). Faith is another word often used by Obama. In his candidacy speech he spoke of 'our unyielding faith – that in the face of impossible odds, people who love their country can change it' (Obama, 2007). In his January 2009 inaugural address Obama reminded his audience that 'it is ultimately the faith and determination of the American people upon which this nation relies' (Obama, 2009).

This is the same sort of language used by David Cameron; for example, Cameron's assertion in his *Church Times* article that the country should be 'more evangelical about a faith that compels us to get out there and make a difference to people's lives' (Cameron, 2014e). Cameron (2014e) made sure that he spoke of Christianity from a first-person perspective, arguing that 'as Christians we know how powerful faith can be' and calling for 'greater confidence in our Christianity'. It seems that Cameron is here signalling to Christian voters that he is one of them. The same signals were made at the Downing Street Easter Reception, with Cameron (2014b) referring to 'the place where our Saviour was both crucified and born'. Cameron makes a connection to his listeners by referring to Christ as '*our* Saviour', in a similar manner to George W. Bush speaking of 'accept[ing] Christ as the savior'.

Cameron has used these tactics on other occasions. Calfano, Djupe and Wilson (2013: 55) argue that the references by Cameron and Iain Duncan-Smith to 'broken Britain' were 'the most overt utilization of US evangelical language deposited successfully into the UK electoral consciousness in 30 years'. 'Within Christian theology, brokenness is a precondition to encountering the potential healing power of a personal relationship with Jesus Christ, as well as the need to be broken or humble before God (Calfano, Djupe and Wilson, 2013: 56). The use of this language was an 'attempt to cue a portion of the Tory base that, despite being "soft" in areas such as the environment and homosexuality, Cameron was singing from their hymn sheet' (Calfano, Djupe and Wilson, 2013: 56).

At the 2013 Easter reception Cameron's message was 'that we should have faith, we should have hope and we should have charity' (Cameron, 2013), this being a reference to Paul's first epistle to the Corinthians: 'And now abideth faith, hope, charity, these three' (1 Cor.13:13). In a 2012 Easter message Cameron (2012a) explained that Easter 'is the time when, as Christians, we remember the life, sacrifice and living legacy of Christ'. At the 2011 Conservative Party conference speech, Cameron (2011a) declared 'This is a party – ours is a country – that never walks on by', an allusion to the parable of the Good Samaritan, (Luke 10:31-2). The same allusion was made again in the 2014 conference speech: 'let's be clear: There is no "walk on by" option' (Cameron, 2014f). A year later Cameron (2015c) declared that '[h]ope is returning; we're moving into the light'. Here we have examples of Cameron employing religious language in the strategic manner identified by Dome and Coe.

Fusing God and country

The second element of the God Strategy involves politicians using language which suggests they recognize that their country is a Christian one, with a special place in God's plan, able to carry out divine will. As Domke and Coe (2008: 51) point out, a 'widely held sense of the United States as a divinely chosen place provides an especially fertile foundation for political leaders to employ religious rhetoric'. The classic example of this is Ronald Reagan, who in a 1979 speech declared 'that we will become that shining city on a hill' (Domke and Coe, 2008: 50). This is a reference to the words of Christ to His followers – 'Ye are the light of the world. A city that is set on an hill cannot be hid' (Matt. 5:14) – and shows Reagan indicating to Christians his understanding that America should be following Christ and fulfilling God's will on Earth.

Other examples cited by Domke and Coe (2008: 58-9) include Bill Clinton's reference to America as a 'blessed land of new promise', and George W. Bush's discussion of the 'Story' of American history: 'We are not this story's Author, who fills time and eternity with His purpose. Yet His purpose is achieved in our duty, and our duty is fulfilled in service to one another'. Domke (2004: 178) points to the extensive use of this theme in the aftermath of the 11th September attacks, to the extent that Bush's 'consistent rhetoric about "the war on terrorism" being a divinely ordained undertaking forced political opponents and the public into an undue position: they were either with the Bush administration or against God'. This is a reference to the words of Christ: 'He that is not with me is against me' (Matt. 12:13). The same theme can be identified in the rhetoric of Barack Obama. For example, in his 'More Perfect Union' speech Obama (2008) refers to 'a firm conviction – a

conviction rooted in my faith in God and my faith in the American people – that working together we can move beyond some of our old racial wounds'. The theme was repeated, drawing on the words of the Declaration of Independence, in his second inaugural address in January 2013: 'Today we continue a never-ending journey to bridge the meaning of those words with the realities of our tine. For history tells us that while these truths may be self-evident, they've never been self-executing; that while freedom is a gift from God, it must be secured by His people here on Earth' (Obama, 2013).

David Cameron uses a similar tactic, signalling to Christian voters that he also believes that Britain is a Christian country by 'inter-connecting religious values with a sense of moral, patriotic citizenship' (Crines and Theakston, 2015: 172). 'For Cameron, Christianity also plays a great role in defining cultural and national identity. This extends not only to the institutions of state but also to British culture, social welfare, and the English language' (Crines and Theakston, 2015: 170). For example, in the *Church Times* article Cameron (2014e) uses the phrase 'our status as a Christian country' twice in the first three paragraphs. '[W]e should be proud of the fact that we are a Christian country,' he declared at the 2014 Downing Street reception, 'and I am proud of the fact we're a Christian country and we shouldn't be ashamed to say so' (Cameron, 2014b).

Again, this is a theme Cameron has employed often, arguing in 2012 that 'the values that Jesus embraced [...] make our country what it is – a place which is tolerant, generous and caring', and again in 2016 that there should be 'the confidence to say yes, we are a Christian country and we are proud of it'. (Cameron, 2012a, 2016a). In a speech at Christ Church Cathedral in Oxford to celebrate the 400th anniversary of the King James Bible, Cameron (2011b) argued for the importance of the Bible to the country: 'we are a Christian country. And we should not be afraid to say so [...] the Bible has helped to give Britain a set of values and morals which make Britain what it is today'. The same theme was sounded in the run-up to the 2015 General Election, with Cameron (2015b) arguing in an article for Premier Christianity: 'As Prime Minister, I'm in no doubt about the matter: the values of the Christian faith are the values on which our nation was built'. Here Cameron is definitely 'fusing God and country' and linking Britain with Christian ideas and biblical values.

Many times Cameron associated his 'Big Society' vision for the country with religious faith. As Birdwell and Littler (2012: 24) observe, Cameron's government saw 'the role of faith groups and organisations as a deliverer of other services as integral to the realisation of the vision of a Big Society'. This was expressed most clearly at Downing Street in 2014: 'People sometimes say, you know, "You talk about the Big Society; don't you realise this is what the Church has been doing for decades?" And I say yes, absolutely. Jesus invented the Big Society 2000 years ago' (Cameron, 2014b). At the same event two years previously, on 'the issue of the

Big Society', Cameron (2012c) pointed to the 'enormous potential in churches and faith-based organisations to tackle some of the deepest problems we have in our society'. Here Cameron is linking his vision for the country with religious ideas and values, in a manner analogous to Bush claiming religious values for his 'war on terror', or Obama claiming the same for his vision of 'a more perfect union'.

Embracing important religious symbols, practices and rituals

This next aspect of the God Strategy goes beyond the first in that it requires the demonstration of religious observance rather than merely the use of religious language. Domke and Coe (2008: 74) describe politicians as exhibiting 'a commitment to foundational religious practices' and engaging in 'the celebration of important religious rituals'. A key example of this is Ronald Reagan's 1980 Republican Convention speech: '"Can we begin our crusade joined together in a moment of silent prayer?" The entire hall went silent, and heads bowed. Reagan then concluded: "God bless America".' (Domke and Coe, 2008: 3). Here Reagan goes beyond the use of Christian language in order to demonstrate the practice of Christianity: praying for God's assistance, and asking others to do the same. As Domke and Coe (2008: 97) conclude, 'for religious citizens, these communications and activities can be crucial signals that do much to establish the religious *bona fides* of the political leaders behind them'.

This aspect of the strategy includes presidents and presidential candidates being seen as those who attend church on Sunday, as well as undertaking 'symbolic pilgrimages to places of religious significance' (Domke and Coe, 2008: 73). Candidates, note Djupe and Calfano (2015: 13), 'often devote some effort to establishing their religious *bona fides* by visiting churches in as public a manner as possible'. Examples of this are Bill Clinton's campaign visit to Notre Dame, a Roman Catholic university, in order to appeal to Catholic voters, and George Bush Sr's speech to the Christian Coalition, in order to win support from conservative evangelicals; it also includes presidential proclamations calling for national days of prayer, in which the president – like Reagan – demonstrates a commitment to prayer (Domke and Coe, 2008: 82-4). Domke and Coe (2008: 95) also make mention that, since Reagan, presidents are more likely to elaborate on the 'true meaning' of Christian holidays such as Easter or Christmas; for example, George W. Bush's assertion: 'At Christmastime, Christians celebrate God's love revealed to the world through Christ. And the message of Jesus is one that all Americans can embrace this holiday season – to love one another'.

We can observe the same tactics being used by Barack Obama, most notably in his 'A More Perfect Union' speech following the controversy caused by remarks from his pastor Jeremiah Wright: 'God damn America — that's in the Bible — for killing innocent people' (CNN, 2008). This was hugely damaging to Obama in one sense, but it also provided an opening for him to talk about his church attendance and religious observance while disassociating himself from Pastor Wright's remarks. 'Did I ever hear him make remarks that could be considered controversial while I sat in church? Yes. Did I strongly disagree with many of his political views? Absolutely – just as I'm sure many of you have heard remarks from your pastors, priests, or rabbis with which you strongly disagreed […] As imperfect as he may be, he has been like family to me. He strengthened my faith, officiated my wedding, and baptized my children' (Obama, 2008).

Obama's campaign includes many examples of this, including what Domke and Coe (2008: 153) call 'pilgrimages': campaign stops and churches or other religious organisations. Perhaps the most notable one came as early as 2006, when Obama appeared at Saddleback Church – pastored by the well-known Rick Warren – for a 'Global Summit on AIDS and the Church' (Domke and Coe, 2008: 153). In 2008 Obama openly campaigned as a Christian, for example publishing a campaign poster describing him as a 'Committed Christian' and containing quotes about his faith and belief in 'the power of prayer' (Smidt *et al*, 2010: 91). At a second appearance at Saddleback for the Presidential Candidates Forum he explained his faith as the belief 'that Jesus dies for my sins, and that I am redeemed through him' (Smidt *et al*, 2010: 108-9). As Smidt *et al* (2010: 91) conclude, Obama 'was openly faithful, particularly in his rhetoric. He was not afraid to discuss the role of religion in his public and private life, and even mentioned a personal relationship with Jesus Christ, the trademark language of evangelical faith'.

Cameron exampled this tactic with a campaign visit to the Redeemed Christian Church of God's Festival of Life in 2015. Cameron spoke of the importance of family, alluding to the words of Christ: 'You're here with your own family – parents and children, siblings and cousins, aunts and uncles. And you're united with your spiritual family […] and together we're all part of one family. As Jesus said, his arms outstretched to his disciples, "Here are my mother, and my brothers, for whomever does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother, my sister and my mother" […] As God's children, we are all one family' (YouTube, 2015). He also praised his audience for the 'many ways you love your neighbour […] Like Jesus turning water into wine, you turn loneliness into companionship, you turn deprivation into comfort, you turn lost lives into lives with purpose' (YouTube, 2015). The fusing of God and country was also in evidence, for 'this is the Big Society in action [...] Now just think how great our country Britain could be if we built on that, if we had an even bigger

Big Society where even more people shared your family values – values of prudence, of hard work, of looking out for those who fall on hard times. With these values we can achieve the Britain we all want to live in […] And tonight, let us be proud that this is a Christian country' (YouTube, 2015).

Yet Cameron went beyond simply using Christian language, cleverly presenting himself as a practicing Christian by recounting his experience of attending church and of his prayers for the kidnapped schoolgirls in Nigeria (YouTube, 2015). At the end of the speech, Cameron bowed his head as Pastor E.A. Adeboye prayed for him and that 'Great Britain will be great again, that the entire glory of this nation will be fully restored, that there be revival in this land', signifying his assent with a nodding of the head and an 'amen' (YouTube, 2015). Here was the God Strategy in full force.

Cameron has previously made mention in his speeches and writings of his religious observances. For example, in his *Church Times* article he wrote of how 'I have felt at first hand the healing power of the Church's pastoral care, and my children benefit from the work of a superb team in an excellent Church of England school' (Cameron, 2014e). At the Downing Street reception he spoke of being 'proud to be a Christian myself and to have my children at a church school', and introduced 'the vicar who looks after me spiritually in the constituency' (Cameron, 2014b). Cameron (2016a) also spoke of prayer for the friends and families of those who did in the Brussels terrorist attacks, while we can also note that in June 2014 Cameron became the first Prime Minister since Margaret Thatcher to attend the annual National Parliamentary Prayer Breakfast (Bingham, 2014). In the 2014 Easter reception Cameron spoke of having 'completed a small pilgrimage, which is I have finally made it to the place where or Saviour was both crucified and born. And it's a very special moment the first time you go to the Church of the Holy Nativity; it's a remarkable, extraordinary place, and I think something that will stay with me' (Cameron, 2014b). Here then we have the evidence of Cameron embracing religious symbols, practices and rituals.

Engaging in morality politics

The final part of the God Strategy is the use of morality politics in order to win support from religious voters. Domke and Coe (2008: 102) show how the Republican Party 'engaged in what political scientists and sociologists call *morality politics*, a form of public debate characterized by claims about what is right, good, and normal. Through their public communications, Republicans turned these issues – including, for example, abortion, stem-cell research, same-sex marriage, prayer in schools and colleges – into national, religious, and

moral symbols. Their goal in doing so were to entice religious conservative voters and to bury the Democratic Party'. This then, despite Democratic efforts, is a particularly Republican tactic: 'Republicans continue to hold the dual aces of abortion and gay marriage in their appeals to conservative religious voters' (Calfano and Djupe, 2009: 330).

While this is clearly Republican, conservative territory, not replicated in full by either Democratic politicians in the United States or by British politicians, both Obama and Cameron have nevertheless pursued or presented policies with the aim of appealing to Christian voters, including those very much outside the moral agenda of the American right. An example of this is in Obama's use of 'creation care' language (Smidt *et al*, 2010:146) in which environmental goals are presented using religious language. In his second inaugural address Obama (2013) argued that the US must 'preserve our planet, commanded to our care by God'. In the same speech he likewise spoke of poverty: 'We are true to our creed when a little girl born into the bleakest poverty knows that she has the same chance to succeed as anybody else, because she is an American; she is free, and she is equal, not just in the eyes of God but also in our own' (Obama 2013). Here Obama has couched left-wing issues in religious language.

Abortion and homosexual rights are both tricky issues for Obama, but he has attempted to deal with both in a way that attracts – or at least, does not repel – religious voters. For abortion, Obama's campaign sought to bypass the debate over the legality of abortion by promising to seek other ways of reducing the number of abortions, such as reducing the number of unwanted pregnancies. According to Smidt *et al* (2010: 147) '[s]uch a stance could protect his base of pro-choice supporters as well as attract pro-life voters. More importantly, it spoke to those who needed to hear that the candidate understood abortion to be a moral issue even if he supported legal abortion'. For homosexual rights, Obama's theme – for example, in his second inaugural address – has been that the reference in the Declaration of Independence to a 'Creator' and that 'all men are created equal' extends to homosexuals: 'Our journey is not complete until our gay brothers and sisters are treated like anyone else under the law, for if we are truly created equal, then surely the love we commit to one another must be equal as well' (Obama, 2013).

David Cameron has also sought to appeal to Christian voters in this way, citing in the *Church Times* article the example of the government 'giving £8 million to the Near Neighbours programme, which brings faith communities together in supporting local projects […] For generations, much of this work has been done by Christians, and I am proud to support the continuation of this great philanthropic heritage in our society today' (Cameron, 2014e). Cameron (2014e) also argued that the 'fact that, at a time of great economic difficulty, the

UK has met the 0.7 per cent target of Gross National Income on aid should be a source of national pride [...] every few seconds a child is being vaccinated against a disease because of the decision we have taken in this country to keep our promises to the poorest people in the world'. He added that the 'same is true of our Bill to outlaw the despicable practice of modern slavery', before beginning a discussion of domestic poverty and welfare, arguing that thanks to government efforts 'unemployment is at its lowest level in half a decade' (Cameron, 2014e).

Cameron (2014b) covered these issues at the Downing Street reception, adding another close to the hearts of Christians, persecution: 'I hope we can do more to raise the profile of the persecution of Christians around the world', he said; 'It is the case today that our religion is now the most persecuted religion around the world. I think Britain can play a leading role in this [...] We should stand up against persecution of Christians and other religious groups wherever and whenever we can'. This was reiterated in 2016, when Cameron (2016a) declared that '[w]hen we see Christians today in 2016 being persecuted for their beliefs in other parts of the world – we must speak out and stand with those who bravely practice their faith'.

Cameron also projected his Christian values with a 2014 speech on the importance of family, in which he declared that 'nothing matters more than family; it's at the centre of my life and the heart of my politics', adding his commitment to the institution of marriage and noting the introduction of a 'family test' in order that 'every single domestic policy that government comes up with will be examined for its impact on family' (Cameron, 2014a). We can see then that Cameron is raising these issues – church-based initiatives, poverty, international aid, persecution and secularism – in order to appeal to Christian voters.

Differences

On the face of it therefore, David Cameron did seem to be engaging in the same God Strategy as his American counterparts. While, however, we have considered the similarities we have yet to fully consider the differences. We can identify three key ways in which Cameron's strategy differed from the strategy outlined by Domke and Coe. Firstly, there is an absence in Cameron's speeches and writings of the kind of issues trumpeted in the Republican Party; secondly, Cameron while certainly demonstrating his religious commitment appears more willing to disavow his ability to present clear and decisive Christian leadership; thirdly, Cameron's God Strategy appears to be limited to specifically religious occasions, and is absent from other rhetorical arenas. Together these demonstrate an approach similar to that identified by Domke and Coe, but nevertheless distinct.

Firstly, we have noted the moral agenda set forth in Republican platforms and by Republican politicians: support for prayer in schools, opposition to stem-cell research, same-sex marriage or abortion. By contrast, we have seen Cameron citing international aid, poverty and welfare as moral issues. Indeed, Cameron has often shown himself to be on the wrong side of moral issues as far as conservative Christians are concerned. For example, in the second 2010 prime ministerial TV debate, in answer to a question about the Pope Benedict's visit to Britain, Cameron said that 'I don't agree with him about contraception. I don't agree with him about homosexuality' (BBC, 2010). In 2012 Cameron announced at a Family Planning Summit that the government would spend £500 million increasing international access to contraceptives, giving a speech full of pro-choice ideas: 'We're here for a very simple reason: women should be able to decide freely, and for themselves, whether, when and how many children they have'; although Cameron pointed out that this did not mean 'forced abortion', he then added that '[w]e're giving women and girls the power to decide for themselves' (Cameron, 2012b). The starkest difference appears over homosexual rights, with Cameron's government having introduced same-sex marriage to the UK.

There is not, however, as much a difference in strategy as might be first supposed. Certain issues – stem-cell research, school prayers, flag burning; even abortion – are not mainstream issues in British politics, so it would not be strategic to give a great deal of weight to them. Trumpeting of these particular issues would doubtless prove less effective for Cameron, for, as Walton et al (2013: 43) observe, 'British Christians are not as fixated on a particular set of specific issues as the US Religious Right. While abortion and gay marriage may not be popular among Christians here, evolution, Israel and small government are not major battlegrounds. Moreover, even issues like abortion and gay rights do not appear to be defining the political terrain in the way they are in the USA'. Walton et al (2013: 83) also suggest a reason why Cameron could focus on, for example, poverty as a moral issue: 'while church-attending British Christians are indeed more socially conservative than the wider population, they are also more left-of-centre on economic issues'. This is borne out by a 2014 survey of evangelicals conducted by the Evangelical Alliance (2014: 12) indicating that when asked the question 'What is the single most important issue facing the UK today?' 32% of evangelicals surveyed – a higher percentage than for any other issue – cited 'Poverty / Inequality'. This demonstrates why poverty is so often among the issue trumpeted by Cameron. There is a sense then in which Cameron was still engaging in morality politics, with the caveat that he focused on a different set of moral issues, more likely to appeal to British Christians. This is therefore not a departure from, but an alteration to the strategy.

Part of the reason for differences in strategy is the different relationship between, on the one hand, the Republican Party and American evangelicals and, on the other, the Conservative Party and British evangelicals. In the US white evangelicals are a key Republican constituency, having supported the Republican candidate at every presidential election since 1980 (Williams 2010: 93). This pattern continued in the 2016 election, at which 81 per cent of those categorised as 'White, born-again / evangelical Christian' voted for Donald Trump, as, incidentally, did 58 per cent of 'Protestant / other Christian' (Pew, 2016). While Domke and Coe are open to the idea that the God strategy could be employed outside this Republican-evangelical relationship, Djupe and Calfano (2014: 46-7) cast doubt on the usefulness of such a strategy – which they term 'God Talk' – when used apart from the context of evangelicals and conservative Republicans, arguing that it is 'likely to be most effective when an established relationship exists between the group and a political stance, such as that between evangelicals and the Republican Party'.

Calfano, Djupe and Wilson (2016: 55) suggest that a similar relationship may exist between the Conservative Party and a 'core Christian conservative base'. While, however, there certainly is such a Christian conservative group within the party and its voters, it should not be assumed that British evangelicals line up behind the Conservative Party in quite the same way as the American co-religionists behind the Republican Party. The Evangelical Alliance (2014: 22) found among its own members prior to the 2015 General Election a range of voting intentions, with 21 per cent supporting the Conservatives compared to 23 per cent Labour and 8 per cent the Liberal Democrats. Even if we add the nine per cent intending to vote UKIP to give a 30 per cent total of 'conservative' voters, this is hardly the equivalent of the overall backing of the Republican Party evidenced in the United States. This further demonstrates then Cameron's need for a broader appeal, accounting for the differences in his approach from, particularly, the Republican presidents.

In addition, while Cameron took up a position opposed to many Christians on same-sex marriage, he has still attempted to convey messages about that policy in ways that might appeal to Christians, or at least disarm their opposition. At the 2012 Downing Street reception Cameron (2012b) argued: 'What the government is consulting over is a change to civil marriage, to what happens at the registry office. It's not consulting over what happens in the church'. In his 2011 party conference speech Cameron (2011a) pointed out: 'Conservatives believe in the ties that bind us; that society is stronger when we make vows to each other and support each other. So I don't support gay marriage despite being a Conservative. I support gay marriage because I'm a Conservative'. Here Cameron is taking a similar approach to Obama, couching progressive policies in language

which will appeal to Christians, or at the very least demonstrate that the concerns of Christians are being recognised and understood.

Secondly, while we have seen examples of Cameron acting as a 'political priest' in the sense of using Christian language to present himself as a Christian and appeal to Christian voters, he has not fully presented himself in the same clear and decisive way as American presidents as a leader of clear and unambiguous religious conviction. Rather than positioning himself as the holder of religious or spiritual authority, Cameron declared in his King James Bible speech that 'I claim no religious authority whatsoever. I am a committed – but I have to say vaguely practising – Church of England Christian, who will stand up for the values and principles of my faith but who is full of doubts and, like many, constantly grappling with the difficult questions when it comes to some of the big theological issues' (Cameron, 2011b). Byrne (2014: 125) suggests that this itself is strategic, as this approach 'has the advantage of maintaining Cameron's positioning as a Christian, without alienating those who prefer leaders to remain secular in focus'. Cameron is therefore signalling to Christians, but in such a way as to avoid losing the support of non-Christians.

It is worth here noting the findings of Jennings that religious rhetoric is not necessarily appealing even to all religious people. Jennings (2016: 297) draws on the division of religious participants into three types: 'extrinsic', 'intrinsic' and 'quest'. Those with 'extrinsic' motivation participate in religion for social or community ends; those with 'intrinsic' motivation see religion as an end in itself; and those with a 'quest' motivation are participating in religion to seek answers or information. Jennings (2016: 303) found that religious rhetoric meets with a positive response from those with 'intrinsic' motivation', but a negative one from those with 'quest' motivation, who may be more sceptical of politicians invoking religious ideas. The God Strategy as employed by American politicians may have a greater degree of certainty as it seeks to appeal to those – often evangelicals – with intrinsic motivation, but Cameron's strategy of demonstrating his uncertainty – 'full of doubts', 'constantly grappling' – may be his attempt to appeal to those with quest motivation. In addition, if those with extrinsic motivation see religion as good insofar as it is a force for good in society or community, this may explain why Cameron (2011b) also couches his arguments in terms which will appeal to this group, arguing for the importance of the Bible and Christianity in areas from 'human rights and equality to our constitutional monarchy and parliamentary democracy, from the role of the church in the first forms of welfare provision, to the many modern day faith-led social action projects'. Again, Cameron has not departed from the strategy, but modified it to suit his purposes.

Finally, we could point to the scarcity of any God Strategy in any of Cameron's speeches or writings other than those in a specific religious context: Easter messages, the King James Bible speech, the visit to the Festival of Life. Speeches and occasions which would demand religious language in the United States can go by without any attempt to appeal to religious voters. For example, Cameron gave a speech on 'The values that underpin our long-term economic plan' without any mention of the values that come from God, the church or Bible (Cameron, 2014d). The same is true of a discussion of values in a speech outlining Scotland's importance to the UK, or a discussion of Cameron's personal values in the 2009 Conservative Party conference speech (Cameron, 2014c, 2009). In his final year in office Cameron gave speeches to accompany the launch of the Conservative 2015 manifesto, a post-election victory speech, and several major speeches on the EU referendum with little if any evidence of a God Strategy at work (Cameron, 2015d, 2015a, 2016c, 2016b).

We could again, however, argue that this is simply an adaptation. Finlayson and Martin (2014: 9) point to 'historical experiences such as the Reformation and Civil War in the 17th century, which left a legacy of deep suspicion over symbols – particularly religious symbols – in public life'. Strangely it is the constitutionally Christian UK which is more sceptical of religious posturing than the constitutionally secular US. For this reason Cameron may have decided that to use religious rhetoric outside of specifically religious occasions may do him more harm than good. Obama also made similar decisions; for example, religious discourse is present throughout Obama's campaign speeches – including convention speeches and victory speeches – and his inaugural addresses, but in State of the Union addresses before joint sessions of Congress this discourse is very much toned down if not completely absent. Obama has made a judgement as to when this kind of language is appropriate, while for his four immediate predecessors, such language was appropriate to almost any occasion. The strategy therefore hasn't changed, only when various proponents think it appropriate; whether on any occasion, during campaigns but not in Congress, or only on specifically religious occasions. Domke and Coe (2008: 130) point to a 'Golden Rule', that politicians ought to 'exhibit faith, but don't be too strident or nakedly partisan in doing so'. It may be that for many British voters Cameron would have been seen as 'too strident' if he adopted religious language in speeches away from an obviously religious setting, and that his God Strategy would thereby reach a point of diminishing returns.

Conclusions

Using the framework developed by Domke and Coe as a guide, it does appear that there is a strategic intent behind David Cameron's use of religious discourse. Cameron used religious language and terminology in order to establish a connection with Christian voters, drew links between Christianity and Britishness especially in his references to the 'Big Society', spoke about his religious practice in order to establish the genuineness of his faith, and drew attention to his government's record in or priorities regarding issues key to Christians such as poverty and persecution while presenting his stance on issues such as same-sex marriage in such a way as would minimise opposition from conservative Christians.

Nevertheless, it is important to note some key differences in Cameron's approach to those of the US presidents investigated by Domke and Coe. These differences appear to reflect differences in the political-religious context in which Cameron and his US counterparts were operating. The UK is a more secular-minded country than the US; even among those with religious commitments there may be more of those with a 'quest' motivation whose faith leaves room for doubt and is sceptical of – especially political – certainty; and even among evangelicals there is not the same commitment to a small set of policy issues which motivates the God Strategy in the US. These differences do not undermine the suggestion that Cameron is engaging in a form of the God Strategy. Indeed, 'Cameron "did God" in his six years in No. 10 more consistently than any British Prime Minister since Margaret Thatcher, and arguably rather more than she did' (Spencer, 2017a: 290). This approach was not random or haphazard, but was a strategic one – not identical to the God Strategy as described by Domke and Coe, but certainly analogous to it.

It may have been assumed that such religious interventions appeared more frequently in the US due to its larger religious population, with the smaller religious population of the UK the reason for the lack of religious language in political discourse. These findings, however, indicate that religious language is used strategically in the UK despite the smaller religious population, and this in turn supports the conclusion of Gin (2012) in his study of Australia, Canada and the US, that the size of the religious population is not necessarily a factor in determining the use of religious language in political discourse. Gin (2012: 326) found, for example, an increased use of religious rhetoric within Australian politics despite the secular nature of the population. Instead, Gin (2012: 338) suggests increase in religious rhetoric is part of a politicians' response 'when there are coalition-building incentives to do so'. Insofar as this refers to governing coalitions, it does not seem to apply to Cameron; it is hard to imagine that an increase in Christian language would assist coalition with the Liberal Democrats. Insofar as it refers to the building of electoral coalitions, perhaps our finding that Cameron is

employing the God Strategy in such a way as to combine the support of those with differing religious views and motivations, while avoiding a loss of support from non-Christians, again supports Gin's conclusion.

These conclusions leave us with a number of potential future research questions or issues. The first is whether or not Cameron's strategy was effective or successful. Here we have not made any judgements as to the effectiveness or otherwise of Cameron's approach – whether he was able to appeal to a Christian audience, to gain, or at least mitigate the loss of, support from both conservative and left-leaning Christians, or avoid a negative impact on non-Christians – but simply observed that such a strategy was taking place. The second is to examine more fully the religious-political differences which shape the God Strategy in different political contexts. The third is whether and to what extent such a strategy has been continued by Cameron's successor Theresa May, and how it may have been shaped by her political circumstances. The fourth is, if the primary purpose of the God strategy is to establish a politicians' religious ethos, how has this strategy proved so effective for Donald Trump when so much of his rhetoric – and indeed his personal life – appears to be at odds with such an ethos? There is then, as ever, much more work to be done on this topic.

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