

Broadcasting Scripture: Bush's authority in light of the 171st LDS General Conference

LaReina Hingson

*Assistant Professor of Linguistics, Visiting Faculty
Brigham Young University*

Suggested Citation:

Hingson, L. (2024). Broadcasting scripture: Bush's authority in light of the 171st General Conference of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. *Utah Journal of Communication*, 2(1), 20–30. <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.11165540>

Abstract

Presidents must attend to religious messages as part of their presidential rhetoric. This civic religion is conveyed through the mass medium of broadcast, via television and internet, as was George W. Bush's 2001 October 7th broadcast announcing war against the Taliban in retribution of 9/11. But broadcast media conveys its own message of emotion, entertainment, and moralization of religious messages. For LDS audiences, broadcast goes even further than moralization, by being the medium through which modern-day scripture can be received through General Conference sessions. Thus, when Bush broadcast his announcement of war during the Sunday morning General Conference session (as it aired on Utah's local KSL), his pre-emption of the session bore a continuity with religious leaders that reinforced his legitimacy as a civilly ordained 'prophet, priest, and king'.

Keywords: *Media ecology, Mormon, Presidential rhetoric, Isaiah*

When politico-religious extremists attacked United States airspace and soil on 2001, September 11, President George W. Bush defined his presidency in response. Following the rhetorical tradition of civil religion (Hart, 1977; Chapp, 2012), Bush established his authority as a civilly ordained 'prophet and priest' (Novak, 1974) early on in his presidency, and continued it throughout his time in office (Medhurst, 2014). For example, in Bush's 2001 speech to Congress, he painted those who opposed his actions as "blasphemers" opposed to his religious justice (Monbiot, 2003). Bush "skillfully equates God's and Bush's definitions of freedom and justice, and thus grants the U.S. the status of an instrument in the implementation of God's plans"; "suggests a divine sanction of the presidential powers" and calls the captives to

repentance (van Noppen, 2006, p. 62). While many of his speeches post-9/11 have received scholarly attention, his first announcement declaring war on Sunday, 2001, October 7, has not. As one of the first to the American public post-9/11, it is significant in its role as a foundational message coloring his presidential leadership as one of civil prophet. It has added significance, however, when the medium of broadcast is taken into account, because his broadcast pre-empted (i.e. took priority in the broadcast medium over) the religious messages of the General Conference session of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (hereafter "Church"). Here, Bush's political discourse, by virtue of its medium, was inadvertently placed for Utah KSL viewers in the religious setting of prophets speaking to their people. The potential

continuity of religious messages offered by an American President civilly 'ordained', and Church leaders religiously ordained, is housed in the continuity of the broadcast medium.

Media Ecology

"Little effort has been made to explore whether exposure to religious programming may influence" perception and interpretation of a political message (Hollander, 1998, p. 69). Yet media choices both produce and influence the reception of the message. Media produces an environment within which messages are not only viewed, but altered and shaped by the medium in a 'media ecology' (Pihlaja, B., 2021; Fuller, 2007; Postman, 1974; Edbauer-Rice, 2005). This ecology is 'an environment of relations' that are 'less a matter of communication between humans than a milieu of engagement or relationality for the objects, vectors, agencies, and processes that enter into its sphere' (Parikka, 2011). It indicates "the massive and dynamic interrelation of...patterns and matter" (Fuller, 2007, p.2). From this "medium is the message" approach (McLuhan, 1964, p. 7), it is less a matter of Bush or Church leaders communicating directly with audience members than it is with audiences engaging with the broadcast format.

Broadcast is one of the most pervasive forms of mass communication. According to Postman (2006), it is primarily entertainment-driven and irrevocably emotional in nature. The emotional aspect of broadcast media is accomplished largely through the audiovisual aspects it highlights as it conveys the message (van Eemeren & Henkema, 2016; Baxter, 2010). Emotion is perceived primarily in the predominantly paralinguistic and visual cues portrayed (e.g. Ekman, 1965), but can also show up in the style of the text itself. Emotion at 'different levels of [text] have at least some relevance to stylistic analysis' and the form in which material is presented can produce an 'artefact emotion' of the delivery itself (Hogan, 2014). Measuring the effect of the broadcast medium on Bush's message includes measuring the emotional conveyance his message visually and stylistically portrays.

Because broadcast television is designed toward consumerism and the most-inclusive audience, it seemingly interferes with the production of religious messages. As Zabell notes, "Whereas television shares a self-driven message, God's Word shares a gospel-driven message" (2022, p. 11). Pihlaja calls us to "explore not only how technological infrastructure transmit religious discourse but how it is setting the conditions for the ways we experience" it (2021, p.106; see Banks, 2011). Zabell argues that religious

groups must use television as 'rituals for orthodoxy' rather than 'rituals for escapism' but "since emotionalism bypasses reason, it also discourages careful study of Scripture in favor of raw emotional experience" (p. 33). Hence the emotional and entertaining visual nature of broadcast television has the power to overwhelm rhetorical substance of the message of a Church leader or an American President in favor of the presentation of each (Hatcher, 2018). Because emotionalism trumps message or source, religious groups that use broadcast-based messaging are subject to followers which attend to non-religious broadcasts in a religious way.

Broadcast Presentation

When two authorities are in potential conflict with one another (such as two laws), one authority is said to pre-empt another when it supercedes the other in priority of application. In U.S. law, for example, federal law pre-empts local laws on commerce regulation. Here, the authority of a top political leader (Bush) with the authority of top religious leaders (General Authorities of the Church) were simultaneously broadcasting their messages. The media station made the decision (based on regulations) to pre-empt the religious authority with the political one. In doing so, the visual and stylistic continuity of Bush's pre-empting broadcast provokes audiences with the question of attending to the interpretation of the event. Governments maintain rights in control of media distribution as a function of their purpose in seeking to maintain social environments. In a national event, the United States' President has authority to pre-empt media to ensure that citizens get national information at the same time. While he pre-empted several local programs across the country, the pre-emption of a religion's broadcast necessitated affected audiences to interpret this new Presidential message of the same medium in relation to their religious program. Like being presented with sushi during a multi-course meal, audience members would have sought to find the meaning behind the presence of this unexpected dish. Bush's broadcast was a part either of or from the religious broadcast of life-altering messages. And while Church audiences have a variety of responses in relation to their religion and political leaders (Callahan, et al., 2019), that the question of interpretation is raised at all is the result of the similarities in the inherent nature of the audio-visual format of broadcast.

Format of General Conference

Within each two-hour session, an opening and closing prayer is given, and five to six sermons (called talks), ranging typically from twelve to twenty-five minutes, are alternated with musical

numbers. Talks are given by male and female general Church leadership as well as, at rare times, other approved speakers from the Church membership. Uniquely in the 1985 sessions, Olympic medalist Peter Vidmar and astronaut Don L. Lind were invited to speak even though neither was a general Church leader. Separate from press conferences, talks cover a range of religious topics on doctrines and practices, as well as serve as a platform for general Church business, announcements, changes, and musical worship. Speaking in the 1976 October Conference, N. Eldon Tanner described “the main purpose of general conferences, the main purpose of this conference, is to sound the voice of warning.” This speaks to the Church’s efforts to treat General Conference as a ‘ritual of orthodoxy’ over one of escapism, and yet the ‘sound of warning’ conveys a consistency with the emotional nature of broadcast television. Although primarily watched and oriented toward current members of the Church, General Conference is intended as a world-wide broadcast for all audiences. Audiences, especially Church members, are encouraged to watch and participate in sessions of Conference (Ideas to Prepare (churchofjesuschrist.org)).

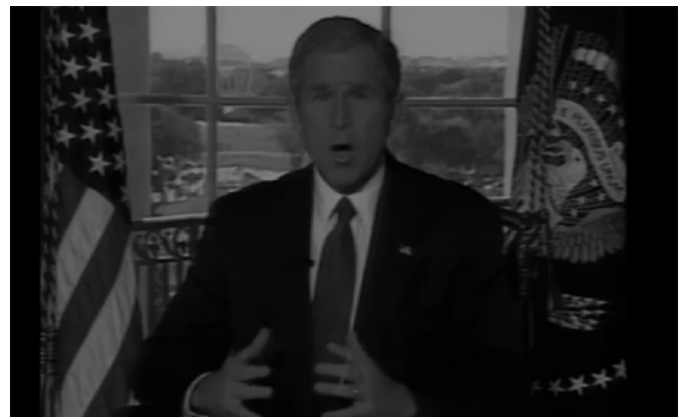
Recently, talks have included more multi-media presentations, with images and video as part of the live presentation, indicating that the Church is not immune from the reality that broadcast television is oriented toward entertainment as its primary outcome (Postman, 2006). However, in the early 2000s when Bush’s message pre-empted General Conference, multi-media talks were not part of the practice or expectation of talks in Conference.

The Visual Emotional Continuity of Bush’s Pre-Emption

Broadcast television is emotional in nature because of its focus on the audiovisual elements of conveyance. American religious audiences are directed, through broadcast, “away from doctrine ...and toward visible sources such as emotions and ...behavior” (Zabell, 2022, p. 33). The visuals of Bush’s emotional state and behaviors, then, are key to understanding the impact of his pre-emption on a media-sensitive religious audience used to a particular visual format in General Conference.

General Conference speakers are filmed from the torso up, standing at a podium which often has greenery decorating it or the area behind the speaker. Typically, the speaker is the only person who can be seen during the broadcast (see Image 1). Bush’s declaration was broadcast live from an office in the White House with his upper body in a seated position, sitting at a desk directly facing the camera, and portions of the window

behind him showing the view of the President’s Park behind him. Emblems of the United States were visible on either side of the President, the national flag of the United States on the left and the presidential flag on the right of the screen. Thus, the centralized image of President Bush from the torso up, without background persons, and with a view of the trees behind the White House would have visually recalled the background greenery, centralized speaker image, and minimal background cues of General Conference speakers.



In addition to the film angle, Bush reinforced this visual continuity with 2001 conference speakers with his dress. General Conference male speakers dress in dark business suits, and women in light-colored suit dresses. The three morning speakers prior to Bush’s broadcast, pictured here in Image 2, were all men wearing red ties in black suits and white shirts. Wearing a black suit, white shirt, and red tie not only visually matched the image of Church leaders that morning, but served to emotionally reinforce the ways in which these dress pieces indicated his authority, high social status, and official capacity in conveying his broadcast (Mupfumira, 2017; Rosenfield & Plax, 1977).

General Conference speakers that morning were Caucasian, male figures with gray or white hair. In the United States, these racial, gender, and age identifiers traditionally convey authority and perceptions of dominance and competence (Knapp & Hall, 2013). They stood

tall with straight backs and stiff frames, further conveying dominance (Schwartz, Tesser, & Powell, 1982; Tiedens & Fragale, 2003). Bush himself is a Caucasian, male figure with a full head of gray and white hair sitting straight and stiff, reinforcing whatever authority and perceptions of dominance and competence the speakers already had. While Bush's broadcast lasted six minutes and twenty-eight seconds, noticeably shorter than the General Conference addresses, it was similar in nature to the invocation or benediction remarks made by the president of the Church prior to the end of a session. The timing of Bush's broadcast was not to one of the regular General Conference speakers, but to the dominance displayed by the most authoritative General Conference speaker, the head of the Church and divinely ordained prophet for the people.



As Bush delivered his message, the camera angle remained constantly focused on his face. This served to draw further attention to the emotional aspects of his message. Bush's demeanor reflected direct frontal facing, raised inner brows, and straight lips (Ekman & Friesen, 1978; Cohn, et al., 2007); elements Ekman & Friesen (1978) found to be perceived as displaying the emotion of sadness. Bush's manner of speaking portrayed low pitch with moderate variation and a slow speech rate, elements associated with the emotional displays of anger, disgust, and primarily resigned sadness (Pittam & Scherer, 1993; Scherer, et al., 1991; Knapp & Hall, 2013). Taken together, Bush's paralinguistic cues and facial expression displayed a sad, reluctant need to bear the responsibility of declaring war. This emotional conveyance by a visually similar authority figure was consistent with General Conference speakers who warn, choke up, and bear the responsibility of declaring repentance to the world. While the shift from General Conference to a commercial or cartoon would present enough discontinuity in visuals to suggest a different audience interpretation, Bush's visual continuity with religious programming encouraged an interpretation of his broadcast messaging in line with the previous talks. If an audience member had been

receiving the emotional responsibility of white, male speakers in suits for the last hour with an interpretation of the messages as ones with religious authority and weight, the inclusion of Bush's broadcast as a white, male speaker in a suit delivering a message of emotional responsibility presents the opportunity for his message to receive similar interpretation and weight.

Broadcasting Text

Because the emotional and entertaining nature of broadcast television is the most salient, it often causes audiences to think they listen to the verbal message more than they do. It is more accurate to say audiences listen for verbal cues consistent with what they expect emotionally and entertainingly. While the visual emotional continuity gives the LDS audience reason to interpret Bush's message through a religious lens, the textual choices by Bush serve to either reinforce or negate this interpretive tendency. An audience member expecting a religious message based on the visual continuity is, further, more likely to seek evidence of religious stylings in the message, whether they are intended or not. To study Bush's message for religious language, then, serves two purposes: to present the intentional as well as the inferred religious messaging that was present for General Conference audiences that day.

So, while Hart's *The Political Pulpit* has been critiqued for its focus on textual analysis and word choice over ideological religious narrative's impact on American politics (Lee, 2002; Reed, 2019), there is still a place for such analysis. Here, as in those of the Hart tradition (e.g. Friedenberg, 2002), the focus is not on how (Christian) religion interacts substantively with the American presidency, but rather how the president claims and contributes to a religious authority all his own—one of a prophet in a civic religion. American civic religion, having no Sunday worship services or organized membership, is only attended to by political discourse. It is the word choices which keep it alive and separate from the discourse of religion in politics.

The role of stylistic analysis is particularly apt in the study of the 'theolinguistics' of political speech, and in the language of Bush's presidency (van Noppen, 2006; Monbiot, 2003). Focusing on the shape of the audio as a behavior, more so than the underlying statements, is consistent with what gets attended to in the audiovisual medium of broadcast. Both political speeches and religious sermons are written with language designed to evoke emotion (Brooks & Warren, 1970) as the primary motivator of the message, and Bush, with his religiously-themed

presidency, was both. The choice of language is carefully laid out to present himself with the behavior of a religious president.

To stylistically review Bush's broadcast for its continuity with a Church audience watching General Conference is to linguistically orient one's self to the language of the text (Fowler, 1981; Leech & Short, 1981; Widdowson, 1996; Wodak, 2011; Hassan, 2018). Here, Bush's use of moralized religious themes, and scriptural structures of parallelism and chiasmus, are highlighted for their continuity with General Conference.

Moralized Themes

American civic religion requires the president to speak as a moral voice for the people. "This moral dimension," Ofulue (2002, p. 52) wrote, "grounds the role of the Presidency in the tradition of American civil religion." Without it, the president cannot lead his people. Public addresses, including broadcast, become an important medium through which presidents 'embody this religio-symbolic office' of 'prophet, priest, and king' (Ofulue, 2002) and invoke this moral dimension of the office (Medhurst, 2014, p. 5). Broadcast evangelism similarly directs audiences to the moral dimension of religious practice (Zabell, 2022). Although there has been no systematic study of what people identify as the style of a Church speaker, the talks during the 171st General Conference included messages of moralized themes and poetic content. For example, Burton's talk just prior to Bush's broadcast was oriented around 'standing tall' by doing 'right' behaviors in multiple circumstances. Thematically, the moralization explicitly included the recent 9/11 attacks as his opening example stated, "Out of the deep anguish and turmoil of September 11 have come many instances of men, women, and nations standing tall. Foes and friends have come together against a common enemy." Themes of victimization, aid, and unity and words like 'enemy' and 'determination' serve to rhetorically support the morality of taking a stand in response to 9/11. Bush followed this talk shortly after with a message about his ability to do 'the right thing' in response to 9/11. Themes of peace, destroying enemies, active pursuit, success, and victimization were packed into his short 969-word message. Words like 'fear', 'worry', 'sacrifice', and family labels of 'daughters' all invoked the victimization the audience as individuals of this nation felt first in the attacks of 9/11 and in the ongoing victimization of the sacrifice of family members to the war effort. At the same time, this continuing sacrifice is ensured in his message with the theme of success, summarized at the end of his speech:

We will not waver; we will not tire; we will not falter; and we will not fail. Peace and freedom will prevail.

Throughout his presidency Bush frequently called upon the moral dimension (illustrated by Van Dijk's (1995) ideological square) of an 'us' and 'them' paired with 'good' and 'evil', 'freedom' and 'fear', and the righteous call of the country as under God's protection and guidance. Bush went further than civil religion (e.g., Uslaner, 2002) at times, by also making use of specific Christian language and scriptural references that, as van Noppen argues, was "invested with new meanings or otherwise reconfigured to serve secular purposes. [And] the original meaning of the text was distorted and alienated from its original communicative intent" (2006, p. 62). Bush's moral themes of friend and enemy, peace and destruction of the wicked Taliban, and pro-religious presentation only colored his main message of war. "What is disturbing, indeed, is how this discourse with its religious resonances is made to tie in with, or put to the service of strategic, corporate and electoral interests" (van Noppen, 2006, p. 58).

Isaiah's Poetry

More nuanced than some presidential uses of the Bible (Medhurst, 2014, p. 4), it nonetheless cannot be missed that Bush's message is laden with biblical-sounding language. van Noppen (2006, p. 62) remarks that his speech is "invested with a divine mission to tell 'the captives 'come out' and to those in darkness 'be free' (cf. Isaiah 49:9)", specifically noting its evocation of Isaiah. Isaiah is the third-most quoted book in the bible among recent American presidents, after Psalms and Matthew (Medhurst, 2014, pp. 17-18). In the Church, Isaiah also plays a prominent scriptural role. It is the most quoted Old Testament book of scripture at General Conference, and one that, while LDS audiences may not always claim great familiarity with, is touted in the Book of Mormon as one of the commandments of Christ: "Yea, a commandment I give unto you that ye search these things diligently; for great are the words of Isaiah" (3 Nephi 23:1). The relationship between the Church's founding book, the Book of Mormon (Avance, 2018), and Isaiah reaches even deeper; 478 verses of Isaiah are quoted in the Book of Mormon, several as whole chapters near the beginning of the book. Of these, several are recorded with variations from the King James Version that have been the subject of religious inquiry (Tvedtnes, 1984; Parry, 2001) and at times, evidences of prophetic inspiration in the process of receiving the Book of Mormon text. A deeper analysis of Bush's message shows the similarity of the structure between his text and

Isaiah's go far beyond thematic use and extend to the very form of his message.

Parallel Poetry Structures

The chapters in Isaiah are written not simply thematically or poetically, but in poetic form. This poetry style, called parallelism, is a form of rhyming meanings rather than sounds, and therefore the poetic style survives translation (Watson, 1984; Kugel, 1981; Parry, Parry, & Peterson, 1998; Parry, 2001). Parry (2001) identifies sixteen different types of parallelism in the poetry of Isaiah, illustrating the complexity with which parallelism is used in poetic styles. Thus, the mere presence of a single parallelism or two within a text need not evoke scriptural resonance on its own; indubitably this is a device that endures beyond religious language and is quite widespread. This grammatical presence of parallelism must be co-present with additional parallelist types to be sufficient as a poem. The presence of intricate parallelisms with supported subtypes and brought together in a biblically poetic format would be required to make a strong claim of religious evocation in any analyzed text. In Isaiah, each chapter often consists of multiple poems, separated in the King James Version of the bible usually by paragraph markers. A poem need not be long or comprise the whole chapter or speech for it to mimic the Isaiah features.

For example, at the end of one of Burton's moralized examples, he offers the moralized theme in a resultative parallelism format:

- 1.0 Parallelism (from Burton's talk)
- 1.1 If you find yourself entrapped in the pursuit of material things, now is the time to courageously stand tall.
- 1.2 If you worship the items that money can buy more than you cherish the love of God, now is the time to stand tall.
- 1.3 If you have been blessed with abundance beyond your needs, now is the time to stand tall in sharing with those whose needs remain unfulfilled.

In Bush's speech there are several examples of parallelism, some even stronger than Burton's. If Isaiah was being intentionally evoked, that parallel poetic structures should exist either throughout or in one of the three bodies of the speech. The three bodies of his speech were marked by two transitions: "At the same time", marking a transition to the moral dichotomy of the 'us' and 'them' worded as 'friend' and 'enemy'; and "I know many Americans feel fear today", marking a transition into the third part of the speech in which the audience becomes the main focus of the remarks. Applying the strict criteria that parallel poetry is characterized as

the presence of multiple types of parallelism in at least two separate sets that a) immediately accompany each other, and b) share a topic from which a title could be given, parallel poetry was found in several areas of his speech, exemplified here:

- 2.0 Parallelism (from the 'At the same time' middle topic of duality)
- 2.1 The United States of America is a friend to the Afghan people.
And we are the friends of almost a billion worldwide who practice the Islamic faith.
- 2.2 The United States of America is an enemy of those who aid terrorists,
And of the barbaric criminals who profane a great religion by committing murder in its name.

These stanzas, which are represented as their own paragraphs in the transcript of Bush's speech, are separated out here to discuss the parallelist structures. In 2.1 we see a synonymous and grammatical structure: the 'US of A' and 'we' both occupy the subject position of the sentence, the predicate is FRIEND, and the object in both is complementary in identifying a similar group of people: practitioners of Islam and the Afghan people, many of whom are a subset of worldwide Muslims. Compare with Isaiah 9:3;

*You have increased the rejoicing,
You have magnified the joy.*

In 2.2 the complementary parallelism groups together the enemy as a) 'those who aid terrorists' in the first line, and b) 'barbaric criminals....[who] murder' in the second. By placing it in a parallelist structure, similar to Isaiah 5:28, Bush completes his description of the enemy by implying that aiders and criminals go hand-in-hand.

Finally the presence of 2.1 and 2.2 together represent an additional layer of parallelism; the antithetical parallel. Whereas 2.1 classifies the scope of the U.S.'s friends, 2.2 defines its enemies. As relational antonyms, the predicates FRIEND and ENEMY share similar situational features and their main contrasting sense feature is that of the moral sidedness prevalent in the second section of Bush's speech.

In the third section of his speech, one paragraph (represented here as 2.3 and 2.4) also is constructed consistent with two sets of parallelism;

- 2.3 Your mission is defined
Your objectives are clear
Your goal is just.
- 2.4 You have my full confidence,

And you will have every tool you need to
carry out your duty

The complementary structure of 2.3 not only holds grammatical and identical wording of the 2p pronoun and matrix verb 'is', but unites the mission, objectives, and goal under clarity of justice. The next set in 2.4 is resultative (e.g. Isaiah 7:14); the confidence Bush has leads to the support he pledges to give.

Other lines of Bush's speech also use parallelism poetically, the final exemplar here being the synonymous and grammatical last lines before his closing, where we see the poetry extends into some rhyme as well:

- 2.5 We will not waver; we will not tire;
we will not falter; and we will not fail.
Peace and freedom will prevail.

Chiasmus Poetry Structures

Isaiah's poetry also includes a type of Hebraic poetry called a chiasmus (cf. Parry, 2001), a larger inverted parallelism that covers the prose of a text. In a chiasmus, the points of a message are listed out: A, B, C, and so on, until the main point of the message is reached (D), and then the message repeats in reverse order: C', B', A'. Not only is this found in Isaiah, but in other passages of the Book of Mormon (Welch, 1969). Thus, Church audiences more familiar with the Book of Mormon than the Old Testament would still recognize a similarity in Bush's language to other scriptural texts.

The first section of Bush's speech displays a clear chiastic structure. This is notable since, with his broadcast already visually cueing similarities with General Conference, starting off this message with a Hebraic poetry structure would cue familiar audience members to the verbal similarities inherent in his speech.

In the six paragraphs that start his message, Bush speaks of the following;

- Para. 1: salutation and 'strikes' against groups in Afghanistan
- Para. 2: these actions are 'designed' for a purpose against the Taliban
- Para. 3-4: we are 'joined' by many other countries
- Para. 5: the Taliban failed to meet demands and 'will pay'
- Para. 6: we 'destroy camps and disrupt communication'

Here, paragraphs 1 and 6 focus on the destruction of areas in Afghanistan as both an act and its effect. Chiasmi are merely topical poetry, so it is normal and acceptable to have

additional or slightly different information to say about the same subpoint between the A and A' as is done here. Paragraphs 2 and 6 also share the topic of the purpose explaining why this destruction is necessary. Finally, Paragraphs 3-4 highlight what is arguably Bush's main takeaway from this first section of his speech, that the United States (and Bush) are supported worldwide in this decision to commence operations against the Taliban. In a post-Vietnam War era, displaying the support of troops and solidarity of this decision as not rash or without awareness of the greater worldwide consideration, this support is necessary if it is to be effective in rallying the troops and social acceptance Bush needs in his broadcast and as a new President. The purpose of the war in this construction is less important than the mere announcement of it in 1 and 6 and the support for it in 3-4. That there is a clear transition marker after this chiasmus further supports the familiarity Church members might feel in a clear chiasmus construction, followed by several parallelisms in his later sections of the speech. That Bush's message sounds religious in nature is unsurprising when it is discovered that he makes use of parallelism and chiasmus both in his short speech. As Medhurst stated of Bush—"Scripture supports policy—his policy" (2014, p. 4).

Bush's use of religious language and style were unlikely to be identified so explicitly by Church audiences, and yet the evocation, direct or indirect, of Isaiah's style would be felt. In the 171st General Conference, Isaiah was explicitly mentioned by the second speaker of the Sunday morning session while he discussed the importance of the Book of Mormon. As such, his comment would have queued the immediate relevance of Isaiah to this General Conference broadcast. Audiences primed for religious interpretation would be looking for religious continuity in the text to support their visual and interpretive continuity of their Church service. Its presence in parallelistic structures, moralized themes, and other religious language is sufficient to support the emotional continuity of religious authority.

Media and the Church

Bush's pre-emption was not only consistent with General Conference, but significant due to its medium and timing. Christianity's relationship with media is characterized by Peters (2012) as inherent to the discipleship—Jesus' message was one of inclusive broadcast, rejecting the intimate necessity of communication that Cicero had championed. Whereas the Church of Jesus Christ has taken a conservative approach to many social trends, media technology has a history of being actively

embraced and utilized. From requests for printing presses in Nauvoo in September 1846, to the Latter-day Saints University in Salt Lake City becoming the first educational institution to receive a broadcast license in 1921, to the embraced use of social media in the 21st century (Baker, 2008; Cheong, 2014), the Church has had a consistent interest in media platform and the use of technology in religious messaging. The Church's active interest in family history promotes the recovery and concern with preserving old media (Allred, 2018). The Church is reported to be among the first of Christian groups to extensively utilize media technologies for religious purposes (Zabell, 2022, p. 33). The primacy of the print media of the Book of Mormon over any artifact, ritual, or oral tradition as the foundation of the Church's history and focus places the Church as a media institution. The Church's focus on continuing revelation belies a concern with the medium of that revelation. The Church's practice of an open scriptural canon (of which General Conference is a part) means there are multiple media formats from which God authoritatively speaks. The Church, "more than any other faith, is a media religion" (Avance, 2018, p. 1).

With only a worldwide membership of 0.2% of the world's population, it is nonetheless no surprise then that the Church's media outlets rival those of the largest religious groups (Avance, 2018). This is easily evident in the General Conferences of the Church in which the entire membership (and later, the entire world) are invited to listen to Church leaders and their messages. This long-standing tradition of General Conference extends back uninterrupted to the early years of the Church. Changes to the format and distribution of General Conference have necessarily occurred with the technological and media growth in the last nearly 200 years of the Church's existence.

Broadcasting General Conference

The first General Conference took place in June 1830 with twenty-seven members. In 1867, Temple Square in Salt Lake City was completed, and the fall semi-annual General Conference had begun (and is still) being held at that location. By April 1899 regular reports of the General Conference began for those not in attendance.

In 1916 motion pictures were taken of the Conference and speakers and shown in the American Theater. The first full General Conference radio broadcast occurred on NBC radio in 1924 and by 1936 portions of Conference were being broadcast in Europe. From 1946–1953 General Conference was filmed for record and viewing. During this time closed-circuit television made it possible to broadcast within the buildings on Temple Square for proximate

audiences.

In the Fall of 1949, KSL began broadcasting General Conference over television and between 1953–54 televised sessions expand out of Utah to most Western United States, and by 1957 videotape technology allowed the Church to rebroadcast sessions of Conference. Changes in the 20th century allowing mass communication would fundamentally alter the Church's identity as a religion (Grant, et al., 2019). Avance notes, "Mormonism as a nineteenth century alternative narrative developed into a bureaucratic institution that reorganized religious power, standardized the faith, and disseminated it broadly" (2018, p. 62).

By the 1960s General Conference was broadcast coast-to-coast, first heard live in Europe, and broadcast to Mexico and South America. By 1977 General Conference was broadcasting to parts of all six populated continents. In 1980 the first satellite broadcast of Conference was viewed by millions, and in 1997 the first internet-based broadcasting of Conference started. Simultaneously, in-person presence on Temple Square was maintained with the building of the then-largest conference center for religious purposes, and in 2000 the LDS Conference Center, seating over 20,000, was completed. (Baker, 2008). Even with COVID restrictions preventing in-person attendance in 2020 and 2021, the speakers broadcast their talks from Temple Square (April 2020 General Conference – Church News and Events (churchofjesuschrist.org). With a total virtual audience during the pandemic coupled with an increase in broadcast resources, "more people than ever before", indeed in the millions, are able and watching General Conference sessions live (April 2021 General Conference set to broadcast in 70+ countries (kslnewsradio.com). "The norms of the audiovisual era are key to understanding correlation... through a strict process of monitoring Church-related media for content cohesion," Avance (2018, p. 63) explained. Without taking into account the Church's media fixation as rooted in its identity as a religion, as well as broadcast as a medium of scripture, the interruption to Church media presentations loses its significance. In 2001, during the 171st General Conference, the Conference Center on Temple Square was being used for a small audience portion, and internet broadcasting of General Conference was only about three years old, making broadcast by stations such as KSL the predominant medium with which audiences interacted in receiving modern scripture from an open canon.

Conclusions

Pre-empting a religious broadcast is significant in part because the circumstances of any deviation create the need for a timely response (Pihlaja, 2021). Here, then—President of the Church Gordon B. Hinkley immediately responded to the United States' declaration of war in the opening of the Sunday afternoon session. There, he summarized Bush's announcement and announced that he had prayed and was certain it was not the 'end of times' prophesied in the scripture. Hinkley countered the emotional evocation of Bush's broadcast by saying we need not worry about the 'end of times' just yet.

Bush did not just pre-empt a religious broadcast, but a media religion's scriptural broadcast. If 'scripture supports policy', in this case policy became scripture. After all, he commanded the medium of scripture that day. Whereas Bush's substance included themes of religious interest such as war, death, and freedom, it is the way in which his message was given, not just through television but through patterns of style consistent with LDS religious talk that encouraged an emotional interpretation over 'a careful study' of the source, motive, or even message. Bush's broadcast shows that the effects of having a media-based religion create opportunities for any message on a religiously-accepted medium to gain religious interpretation and significance. Where emotions are conjured and attended to in broadcast space, the greater the visual and stylistic continuity of that space, the greater the need to differentiate the source, as Hinkley did, or risk audiences treating the media itself as the source. And in a media religion such as the Church, where media is not only a technological happenstance of the times but an integral part of divine communication with the individual (Avance, 2018), mistaking the media as the source of scripture opens anyone with media access to hold themselves up as a prophet to be embraced. Without a reassertion of President Hinkley's authority in the broadcast space, Bush was more authoritative than a prophet. Hinkley's response to Bush's pre-emption reasserted the Church's authority in conveying scripture via broadcast by tying it to scripture in books (the 'end times') and revelation via prayer.

The need for the highest Church official to verbally recognize and respond to Bush's broadcast reflects the place media has in the Church. It evoked emotion-based questions of what prophets know and are entitled to receive, and what authority, religious or otherwise, they may justifiably assert. In a religion that preaches prophetic access to the ongoing mind of God (Crosby, 2011), prophet and President of the

Church Gordon B. Hinckley positioned himself, as do Ali Dawah and Musa in the Muslim community, and as did Bush, as a "leader in their community and the audience as needing guidance in how to respond" (Pihlaja, 2021, p. 155). In such a context, control of the medium becomes just as important as the people giving the message.

References

- Avance, R. (2018). The medium is the institution: Reflections on an ethnography of Mormonism and media. *Mormon Studies Review*, 5, 60–66. doi: <https://doi.org/10.18809/msr.2018.0107>
- Allred, M. K. (2018). Mormonism and the archeology of media. *Mormon Studies Review*, 5, 46–52. DOI: 10.18809/msr.2018.0105
- Baker, S. P. (2008). Mormon media history timeline, 1827–2007. *Brigham Young University Studies*, 47(4), 117–123.
- Banks, A. J. (2011). *Digital Griots: African American Rhetoric in a Multimedia Age*. Southern Illinois University Press.
- Baxter, L. A. (2010). *Voicing relationships: A dialogic perspective*. Sage Publications.
- Button, G. & Casey, N. (1984). Generating Topic: the use of topic initial elicitors. In Heritage, J., & Atkinson, J. M. *Structures of social action. Studies in Conversation Analysis*, 167–190.
- Brooks, C. & Warren, R.P. (1970). *Modern rhetoric*. Houghton Mifflin.
- Callahan, C., Chudleigh, H., & Robinson, T. (2019). Political media narratives and Mormon perspectives of Mitt Romney. *Journal of Communication & Religion*, 42(2).
- Chapp, C. B. (2012). *Religious rhetoric and American politics: The endurance of civil religion in electoral campaigns*. Cornell University Press.
- Cheong, P. H. (2014). Tweet the message? Religious authority and social media innovation. *Journal of Religion, Media and Digital Culture*, 3(3), 1–19.
- Cohn, J. F., Ambadar, Z., & Ekman, P. (2007). Observer-based measurement of facial expression with the Facial Action Coding System. *The Handbook of Emotion Elicitation and Assessment*, 1(3), 203–221.

- Crosby, R. B. (2011). Which is the wisest course?: Political power and prophetic agency in nineteenth-century Mormon rhetoric. *Journal of Communication & Religion*, 34(1).
- Edbauer-Rice, J. (2005). Unframing models of public distribution: From rhetorical situation to rhetorical ecologies. *Rhetoric Society Quarterly*, 35(4), 5-24.
- Ekman, P. (1965). Communication through nonverbal behavior: A source of information about an interpersonal relationship. *Affect, cognition and personality*.
- Ekman, P. (1978). Wallace, V. Friesen. *Facial Action Coding System*. ConsultingPsychologists PressInc.
- Frank, M. G., & Gilovich, T. (1988). The dark side of self-and social perception: Black uniforms and aggression in professional sports. *Journal of personality and social psychology*, 54(1), 74.
- Friedenberg, R. V. (2002). Rhetoric, Religion, and Government at the Turn of the 21st Century. *Journal of Communication and Religion*, 25, 34-48.
- Fowler, J.W. (1981). *Stages of faith: The psychology of human development and the quest for meaning*. Harper & Row.
- Fuller, M. (2007). *Media Ecologies: Materialist Energies in Art and Technoculture*. MIT Press.
- Grant, A. E., Sturgill, A. F., Chen, C. H., & Stout, D. A. (2019). Religion online: How digital technology is changing the way we worship and pray. *Homiletic*, 44(2).
- Hart, R. (1978). *The Political Pulpit*.
- Hatcher, A. (2018). *Religion and Media in America*. Lexington Books.
- Hassan, A. (2018). Language, media, and ideology: Critical discourse analysis of Pakistani news bulletin headlines and its impact on viewers. *SAGE Open*, 8(3).
- Hogan, P. C. (2023). Stylistics, emotion, and neuroscience. In *The Routledge handbook of stylistics* (pp. 577-594). Routledge.
- Hollander, B. A. (1998). The priming of religion in political attitudes: The role of religious programming. *Journal of Communication & Religion*, 21(1).
- Knapp, M. L., Hall, J. A., & Horgan, T. G. (2013). *Nonverbal communication in human interaction*. Cengage Learning.
- Kugel, J. L. (1981). *The Idea of Biblical Poetry*. Yale University Press.
- Lee, R. (2002). The force of religion in the public square. *Journal of Communication & Religion*, 25(1).
- Leech, G.N. & Short, M.H. (1981). *Style in fiction: A linguistic introduction to English fictional prose* (2nd edition). Routledge.
- McLuhan, M. (1964). *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man*. McGraw-Hill.
- Makoro, S. J. (2018). *Political rhetoric in public speaking: stylistic analysis of selected political speeches* (Doctoral dissertation). University of Limpopo.
- Medhurst, M. J. (2014). Rhetorical functions of the Bible in American presidential discourse, 1977-2013: A taxonomy. *Journal of Communication & Religion*, 37(2).
- Monbiot, G. (2003, July 29). *America is a Religion*. The Guardian.
- Mupfumira, I. M. (2017). *Perspectives of Dress*. Strategic Book Publishing & Rights Agency.
- Novak, M. (1974). *Choosing our King: Powerful Symbols in American Politics*. MacMillan.
- Ofulue, N. I. (2002). President Clinton and the White House prayer breakfast. *Journal of Communication & Religion*, 25(1).
- Parry, D. W., Parry, J. A., & Peterson, T. M. (1998). *Understanding Isaiah*. Deseret Book Co.
- Parry, D. W. (2001). *Harmonizing Isaiah: combining ancient sources*. FARMS.
- Parikka, J. (2011). Media ecologies and imaginary media: Transversal expansions, contractions, and foldings. *The Fibreculture Journal*, 17.
- Peters, J. D. (2012). *Speaking into the Air: A History of the Idea of Communication*. University of Chicago Press.
- Pihlaja, B. (2021). Rhetoric. In *Analysing Religious Discourse*. Cambridge Press.
- Pittam, J., & Scherer, K. R. (1993). Vocal expression and communication of emotion. In *Handbook of Emotions*.
- Postman, N. (2005). *Amusing ourselves to death: Public discourse in the age of show business*. Penguin.

- Postman, N. (1974). Media ecology: Communication as context.
- Ratcliffe, K. (2005). *Rhetorical Listening: Identification, Gender, Whiteness*. Southern Illinois University Press.
- Reed, J. L. (2019). Religion and politics in the Anglican rhetorical tradition: The rhetoric of John Danforth and the challenge of a political via media. *Journal of Communication & Religion*, 42(1).
- Rosenfeld, L. B., & Plax, T. G. (1977). Clothing as communication. *Journal of Communication*, 27(2), 24–31.
- Scherer, K. R., Banse, R., Wallbott, H. G., & Goldbeck, T. (1991). Vocal cues in emotion encoding and decoding. *Motivation and emotion*, 15(2), 123–148.
- Schwartz, B., Tesser, A., & Powell, E. (1982). Dominance cues in nonverbal behavior. *Social Psychology Quarterly*, 114–120.
- Tanner, N. E. (1976, October 2). *The purpose of conferences*. October 1976 Semi-annual General Conference of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. <https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/general-conference/1976/10/the-purpose-of-conferences?lang=eng>
- Tiedens, L. Z., & Fragale, A. R. (2003). Power moves: complementarity in dominant and submissive nonverbal behavior. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 84(3), 558.
- Tvedtnes, J. A. (1984). Isaiah Variants in the Book of Mormon. In *Isaiah and the Prophets: Inspired Voices from the Old Testament* (pp. 165–178). Brigham Young University Press.
- Uslaner, E. M. (2002). Religion and civic engagement in Canada and the United States. *Journal for the scientific study of religion*, 41(2), 239–254.
- van Dijk, T. A. (1995). Discourse semantics and ideology. *Discourse & Society*, 6(2), 243–289.
- vVan Noppen, J. P. (2006). From theolinguistics to critical theolinguistics: The case for communicative probity. *Arc: The Journal of the School of Religious Studies*, 34, 47–65.
- Watson, W. G. (1984). Classical Hebrew Poetry. *Classical Hebrew Poetry*, p. 114.
- Welch, J. W. (1969). Chiasmus in the Book of Mormon. *Brigham Young University Studies*, 10(1), 69–84.
- Weber, J. J. (1996). *The stylistics Reader from Roman Jakobson to the Present*. Arnold.
- Wodak, R. (2011). Critical linguistics and critical discourse analysis. *Discursive pragmatics*, 8, 50–70.
- Zabell, E. (2022). *Breaking the Spell: Investigating Screen-Based Media for Gospel-Driven Outreach* (Doctoral dissertation) Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary.