

5-2018

Distance and Sympathy in Public Argumentation on HB 1523: Four Pastoral Letters Creating Value Frameworks

Jonathan Eugene Bridenbaker

Follow this and additional works at: https://aquila.usm.edu/honors_theses



Part of the [Arts and Humanities Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Bridenbaker, Jonathan Eugene, "Distance and Sympathy in Public Argumentation on HB 1523: Four Pastoral Letters Creating Value Frameworks" (2018). *Honors Theses*. 584.
https://aquila.usm.edu/honors_theses/584

This Honors College Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by the Honors College at The Aquila Digital Community. It has been accepted for inclusion in Honors Theses by an authorized administrator of The Aquila Digital Community. For more information, please contact Joshua.Cromwell@usm.edu.

HB 1523: Value Frameworks

The University of Southern Mississippi

Distance and Sympathy in Public Argumentation on HB 1523: Four Pastoral Letters Creating
Value Frameworks

by

Jonathan Bridenbaker

A Thesis
Submitted to the Honors College of
The University of Southern Mississippi
in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree of
Bachelor of Arts
in the Department of Communication Studies

May 2018

Approved by

Wendy Atkins-Sayre, Ph.D., Thesis Adviser,
Chair
Department of Communication Studies

Ellen Weinauer, Ph.D., Dean
Honors College

Abstract

HB 1523, otherwise known as the Religious Liberty Accommodations Act, is Mississippi's contribution to a larger national conversation surrounding the duty and obligation that states have to protecting individual liberty and freedom. Even further, though, lies a conversation about how rights and constitutional freedoms can be used to negatively harm and marginalize people on the basis of "freedom of speech" and, more specifically, "freedom of religion." By examining four pastoral letters published by different Mississippi churches and religious bodies, I aim to show how both sides of this public debate are advancing themselves as the victims of some sort of discrimination, with or without the legislation. Using a Derridean model of the Third Persona, I aim to show how supporters of the bill are actively erasing LGBTQ+ voices in the debate. Through constructing themselves as a counterpublic, I show how all sides of this debate, specifically, are narratively positioning themselves as a counterpublic. These aid in the establishment of the civic religious world views of the Language of Being or the Language of Becoming.

Keywords: Religious Freedom, HB 1523, Third Persona, Counterpublic, Public Sphere

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank, first and foremost, my thesis advisor, Dr. Atkins-Sayre. You have been incredibly helpful in guiding me through this journey of building my honors thesis and beyond. You have provided me with so many opportunities, both professionally and academically, like giving me the opportunity to work in the Speaking Center and keeping me in mind with internship and job opportunities. Your support has given me, both directly and indirectly, the tools that I have needed to flourish as a budding academic.

To my sister, Tiffany, you have given me the space and time to express my academic stress and personal issues. You are a confidant, a role model, and a friend. This thesis (my entire college career, in fact) would not had been possible without your unwavering support and indispensable wisdom.

Furthermore, thank you to my debate family, especially my coach, Dr. Strait. The inspiration for this thesis, examining public discourse and the shifting of meaning, came directly from my experiences competing in collegiate debate, the activity that brought me to my major, my friends, my passions, and my perspectives.

Table of Contents

1. Introduction.....	1
2. Historical Contextualization	3
a. The Legislation.....	3
b. The Issue	4
c. The Actors	9
3. Literature Review	12
a. Counterpublics	13
b. Third Persona	14
c. Religious Rhetoric	16
4. The Letters & Construction of Value Frameworks.....	17
a. Issue Prioritization	19
b. Nature of Christian Identity	20
c. Support	22
d. LGBTQ+ Discrimination	23
e. The Language of Being	25
f. The Language of Becoming	28
g. The Languages of Being & Becoming: A Continuum	29
5. Conclusion	
a. Implications	31
b. Future Study	32
6. References	34

Introduction

Mississippi is a state mired in both tradition and controversy. From the birth of the Civil Rights Movement to current debates on the state flag bearing the confederate battle jack to the battle for LGBTQ+ rights in marriage and beyond, Mississippi often finds itself at a crossroads where it has to negotiate its traditional identity with the fast-paced social development of the rest of the country. For many Mississippians, religion often serves as the primary axiological source for judging issues and implementing change. For example, one of the most successful environmental rights organizations in the state is called “Jesus People Against Pollution.” It used religion as a means of fighting pollution from a wood treatment plant in Columbia, Mississippi (Keys, 2014). Religion is tightly interwoven into the fabric of Mississippi. Churches are often the sites of community engagement and orientation, with Mississippians reporting the highest church attendance compared to any other state (Newport, 2010). Even the LGBTQ+ resource center located in Hattiesburg, Mississippi, The Spectrum Center, has a branch of the Metropolitan Community Church (MCC) attached to it.

Given the importance of religion to the state, it makes sense that HB 1523, the Religious Liberty Accommodations Act, has stirred a sizeable debate within Mississippi. This legislation aims to protect people’s “religious liberty,” their right to worship and practice their religion as they wish to, specifically in business transactions. If the owner of a business wishes to not serve someone based on conscientious objection, then this denial of service would fall under the protection of this law. With this kind of legislation and the backlash associated with it, states like Mississippi and North Carolina have become ground zero for the fight for religious freedom. From advocates of religious freedom protections to independent organization such as Lambda Legal and the ACLU, there is ferocious debates over the merits of these laws as protections or

blatant discrimination (Skinner 2017). Religious institutions, due to their influence on the daily lives of Mississippians and operating as one of the parties directly affected by this law, are influential voices in the debate on HB 1523. By examining four letters published by major religious institutions of different denominations (Baptist, Methodist, Episcopalian, and Catholic) in the state of Mississippi, I will examine how they construct Murphy's (2008) languages of "being" and "becoming" through relegating problematic elements of the discourse to third persona and/or representing themselves as a disempowered counterpublic.

First, the debate must be contextualized by looking at the issues of religious freedom and how the identities of the rhetors interact with the discourse. Second, rhetorical literature on counterpublics, audience, third persona, and Murphy's (2008) languages in the context of Edwards & Valenzano III's (2016) "civil religion" will be discussed. Third, I will provide a description of what the letters position on HB 1523 are and how they construct their arguments.

Historical Contextualization

The development of our current understanding of religious liberty is rooted in decades of new challenges and reactions to rising social movements. House Bill 1523 is not the first bill addressing religious liberty, nor was it the last. In order to understand how these pastoral letters address religious liberty and the effect this has toward building societal ideology, the social and political identities this issue has helped to culminate must first be understood.

The Legislation

Mississippi House Bill 1523, otherwise known as the Religious Liberty Accommodations Act, was signed into law on April 5, 2016 and set to go into effect on July 1, 2016 (Mississippi Legislature, 2016). The bill effectively states that religious organizations can decline service to people based on religious beliefs that man and woman are immutable biological designations that are determined at birth, marriage is the union between one man and one woman, and sex is only appropriate within the context of marriage. The controversy surrounding this bill led to it being challenged in the US Southern District Court in the lawsuit *Barber v. Bryant*, where judge Carlton Reeves issued an injunction against the bill on June 27, 2016 (Campbell, 2016). This injunction was ultimately lifted in a decision by the Fifth Circuit Court of Appeals on June 23, 2017 (Campbell, 2017).

This bill has drawn sharp criticism from the LGBTQ+ community and the rest of the country, with several states and counties issuing travel bans for Mississippi, where their state employees conducting non-essential business trips cannot receive funding for travel from the state (Beitsch, 2017). Those opposing the bill have hosted demonstrations outside of the governor's mansion (Dreher, 2016), collected signatures for petitions with the ACLU, and are

currently suing the state (Pearson, 2016). This law forces us to ask complex questions that many people from many different facets of civic and political life must answer. This legislation, for Mississippi and the rest of the country, has brought forth the issue of protecting one's conscience versus guaranteeing freedom from discrimination. Are these issues even at odds to begin with? Even more interestingly, religious institutions that are directly affected by this legislation have an unspoken obligation to speak out on this kind of action. In responding to this controversy, we find that religious institutions do not respond so monolithically, offering a number of perspectives and opinions. The four letters from religious institutions in Mississippi that will be discussed are a testament to this obligation and are informed by a variety of historical, institutional, and discursive frameworks.

The Issue:

Religious freedom has evolved into a controversial phrase that has vastly different meanings for different people. While the right to believe and practice religion free from state intervention is a basic right enshrined in documents ranging from the Bill of Rights to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the extent to which religious belief must be protect is vastly contested. For instance, while we have the freedom to practice our religion as we see fit, Jim Jones leading a group of cult followers to drink cyanide-laced Flavor-Aid is unacceptable because other rights, such as the right to life, were being violated in the "expression" of religious belief. The same debate, to a less extreme extent, is occurring around religious freedom in the context of excluding people from accessing services based on religious belief, such as employment, housing, and fair pay (Meyer & Schnoor, 2015), with many contesting that these constitute violations of the rights to freedom from discrimination and equal protection under the law. Rob Hill, state director of Human Rights Campaign in Mississippi cites it as "the most

discriminatory, anti-LGBTQ state law in the country – was rooted in hate, it targets the LGBTQ community and is a deliberate attempt to undermine marriage equality and the dignity of LGBTQ Mississippians” (Miller 2017).

To understand how religious liberty became such a hot button political issue, recent court cases must be examined. There are two major cases in the history of religious freedom in the United States: *Employment Division v. Smith* (concerning a Native American Church drug counselor getting fired for using peyote) and *Hobby Lobby v. Burwell* (concerning Hobby Lobby being exempt from having to provide employees contraceptives in their health insurance plans) (Richardson, 2015). *Employment Division v. Smith*, a 1990 Supreme Court case, sided with the state rejecting the need to provide unemployment benefits to a counselor at a camp that was caught using peyote for his religious purposes and was subsequently fired for breaking the law (Richardson, 2015). This outraged the American people because of this denial of unemployment due to his practice of his sincerely held religious beliefs, and the backlash to the case ultimately led to the signing of the Religious Freedom and Accommodations by Bill Clinton (Richardson, 2015). This marked the first time in modern history that religious freedom became delineated and defined under such a comprehensive piece of legislation. This laid the foundation for further legislation and lawsuits based on religious liberty to blossom decades down the line.

The Hobby Lobby case brought religious freedom to the forefront of American discussion on civil liberties and freedoms. Previously, employers did not have to worry about providing their employees coverage for contraception and other family planning services, but the 2010 Affordable Care Act’s contraceptive mandate that required employers cover birth control in their insurance plans created this conversation around corporate and religious rights (Hamilton, 2014). This ruling’s implications go beyond the ability of corporations to opt out of providing

contraception to employees on the basis of religious belief. The broader implication is in how the court shaped its ruling when they stated that “corporations...can opt out of any law (saving only tax law) they judge to be incompatible with their sincerely held religious belief” (D’Amato, 2016). Due to this language, the use of religious liberty can be applied to many different contexts, from wedding cakes to employment, housing, and fair pay for LGBT individuals (Meyer & Schnoor, 2015).

Masterpiece Cakeshop, Ltd. v. Colorado Civil Rights Commission is a Supreme Court case currently being contested that arose after the owner of a cake shop refused to make a cake for a same-sex wedding on the grounds that doing so would violate his religious beliefs (Seagall, 2017). The ruling for this case could have implications for all sectors of conscientious objections to serving LGBT individuals on the basis of religious belief. David Cole, a law professor at Georgetown, states that “a decision against Charlie and Dave would allow businesses across the country to argue that they too can refuse service based on who the customer is” (Moreau, 2017). The plaintiff, Jack Philips, also alleges that the Colorado Civil Rights Commission has perpetrated religious discrimination by showing preference to those cake shops that refuse service to individuals wanting a cake with explicitly anti-same sex marriage messages but deriding him for refusing to bake a cake for a same-sex wedding (Seagall, 2017). Chain (2016) observes that once an individual decides to enter into the arena of public accommodations, the general applicability of anti-discrimination laws ultimately applies to them, much as it does in the Civil Rights Act of 1964. This case and what it represents has helped to craft the debate surrounding not only religious liberty but state intervention in the lives of individuals.

In this process of judicial and cultural conversation, religious liberty has undergone a resignification in public discourse from a generally agreed upon right to exercise religion as one

sees fit to the ability to deny someone service (Clarkson, 2017). The rhetoric surrounding this current interpretation of religious liberty treats it as a right that is being infringed upon, a debate about whether or not the state can impose its meaning of the world onto individuals (Dunn, 2016). This push for the reclamation of one's rights in the face of an oppressive power is relying on the power of anti-establishmentarianism. This transformation for current American politics saw a major boost after the 2012 presidential election when members of the Republican party that comprised the "Tea Party" wing derided Mitt Romney as representing inside interests of the establishment Republicans that were no longer in touch with the "American people" (Serazio, 2016). Since then, issues of cultural identity and how it interacts with the state have become prominent issues and framing tools of the religious right, from discussing the "abortion lobby" to advocating for stricter immigration law on the basis of protecting "Christian American" values.

Donald Trump has made it a major part of his presidency to cater to Christian organizations and movements in order to appease a large part of his voter base, perpetuating a perceived culture war between Christendom and "the establishment." This is exemplified through Trump designating January 16 as Religious Liberty Day, citing that the right to religious practice is being threatened by state government (Trump, 2018). As paradoxical as it may seem, the Trump administration gained much support from white evangelical Christians, who supported Trump by 81%, by representing "the swamp" of Washington D.C. and the Democratic establishment (the popular campaign phrase that Donald Trump used to establish himself as a political outsider to the "corrupt politicians") as antithetical to Judeo-Christian values. His campaign argued that once Trump becomes the establishment, then the establishment will be on the side of the "faithful" (Smith & Martinez, 2016). Trump's administration is working toward policies such as getting rid of the restriction of churches from donating to political candidates, withdrawing

funding from Planned Parenthood, and, most consequentially, siding with Christian organizations and businesses in disputes with the LGBTQ+ community (Biskupic, 2017). These actions are the culmination of efforts by the religious right to construct a culture war.

A culture war can be defined as “political and social hostility rooted in different systems of moral understanding” (Davis, 1996). Davis (1996) goes on to define the two sides of the culture war as being “the Orthodox” and “the Progressives.” The Orthodox are comprised of religious groups that believe that God uses government and the people to influence how society ought to operate, and they argue that secularization of society is a threat that must be resisted and counteracted if the will of God is to be achieved. The Progressives, in the culture war models, resist these ideas and value religion as a private matter that should not be implemented into public policy. This split in religious and civic paradigms results in a change of the discursive framework that public entities enter into the debate with, contributing to the construction of languages that help to frame the world for the rhetor.

Religious freedom is one of the fundamental issues of this culture war, with organizations such as the Family Research Council and the US Conference of Catholic Bishops lobbying for bills focused on religious freedoms and exemptions (Ho, 2015; Robertson & Pérez-Peña, 2015). Not only is this an effort to create a policy to protect the ability of someone to deny service to another person, but it is framed as an effort to protect a right, which shifts the conversation in a notable way. Claiming that the ability to choose whether or not to serve someone is a right creates what Djupe, Lewis, and Jelen (2016) refer to as balkanization, or “reinforcing the resolve and identity of a group exerting their rights.” Groups making rights claims create or strengthen boundaries to push up against either the perceived oppressor or those that support the oppressive system (Gibson & Gouws, 2000). The usage of rights-based language is a strategy that has

become a norm of the religious right that is used in issues such as religious freedom, campaign finance, and abortion to make their positions seem more moderate (Djupe et al. 2016). This framing of the issue of religious freedom as a right not only makes the discourse seem more important, but it emboldens those hearing it to associate the positions of religious freedom advocates with their very identity as a citizen.

Ultimately, this shifting meaning for religious liberty in the context of a “skeptical” society has significant implications. First, it sets up religious liberty for the religious right as primarily an issue of government versus people, shifting the focus of the debate away from discrimination. On the other side, the left then focuses on the discrimination aspect of religious liberty legislation. Ultimately, they create different discursive arenas, where religious liberty becomes significantly about competing interpretations and prioritized issues. Second, religious liberty becomes partisan. This broad characterization of religious liberty strengthens its usage in identity politics, thus associating one’s position on religious freedom with a myriad of other identities. This leads to people claiming to be pro-religious freedom often associating with political conservatives and those opposing religious freedom legislation being viewed as politically liberal. These interpretations of religious freedom then are influenced by the characteristics of the rhetors themselves.

The Actors

Religious liberty, in the political and legal sphere, is a major controversy. For individual churches (not counting religious lobbying and special interest groups) that sit on the periphery of state action, have significant influence in shaping the narratives and value frameworks that individuals approach these issues with. The four entities that published these letters include the Episcopal Diocese of Jackson, Catholic Diocese of Jackson, the United Methodist Church, and a

collection of Baptist Ministers. Each of these denominations come from different perspectives and axiologies. For example, Fuist, Stoll, & Kniss (2012) developed a moral mapping system for religious denominations based on how much their messages exemplified individual versus group decision-making and individual versus group motivation. The denominations varied greatly on their orientation toward these values in relation to LGBTQ+ issues, just as there is great variation in axiological orientations between the four denominations in these letters.

The Episcopal Church's structure consists of four parts that include the parish, the diocese, the province, and the General Convention. The General Convention is made up of the House of Bishops and the House of Deputies that meet every three years to discuss the direction and policies of the Episcopal Church. This structure has increasingly pushed the Episcopal Church in the last half century to focus on social issues as a key platform for the church (Episcopal Church, 2017). In 1976, the General Convention voted to allow the ordination of women as bishops into the church with Barbara Harris from the Massachusetts diocese being elected the first woman bishop in 1989 (Episcopal Church, 2017). The Episcopal Church has always been a fairly progressive institution, advocating against more conservative forces in Christianity.

The Episcopal Church's stance on what constitutes religious liberty is the ability of the individual to voluntarily practice their religion in a secular state (Episcopal Church, 2017). This interpretation of religious liberty, for the Episcopal Church, is one that is more geared toward accepting people of different backgrounds, faiths, and beliefs in society without infringing on their ability to exist in society. For example, The Episcopal Church features a program called Religious Coalition for Reproductive Choice (RCRC), citing religious liberty and the ability to control one's reproductive destiny as synonymous (Episcopal Church, 2017). The implication of this interpretation is that the Episcopal Church sees religious liberty less as a license to

discriminate and more as a way for people to worship without being persecuted. This conceptualization of religious liberty characterizes the Episcopal Diocese of Jackson's response to HB 1523.

The Catholic Church establishment's position on religious liberty can be emblemized by the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops' 2012 statement on Religious Liberty entitled "Our First Most Cherished Liberty." In this statement, the USCCB argues that individuals should not be forced to violate their own religious beliefs to be a member of a society. Basically, Christian identity and the adherence to that faith supersede state authority when the two are in conflict. This has several implications for how conservative Catholic churches approach the question of religious freedom. First, there is a mandate that rights and Christian values must correlate. Because religious texts are (seemingly) intractable in what they say, the law is what ultimately what must be changed. This shapes the discourse and bolsters support for religious freedom. Second, there is a framing of the issue that conservative Catholics are the victim of state discrimination, and this shifts the narrative toward.

In Goldwig's (2013) analysis on Catholic rhetoric during the 2012 presidential election, the US Catholic Bishops (who the Catholic Diocese quote and model in their response) represent their opposition to the Affordable Care Act as an uphill battle in a secularized society to return America to Christendom. This analysis highlights that the conservative wing of the Catholic Church largely orients itself as the victim of a secularizing society. The US Catholic Bishops, other conservative Catholic organizations, and even the Catholic Church itself have opted to avoid talking about the LGBTQ+ community because of how controversial recognizing this community can be in maintaining their influence and fellowship. For example, in the Catholic Church's pastoral letter "Why Always Our Children" published in 1998, the author of the letter

was reprimanded by parents for calling LGBTQ+ children's desires unnatural, but they also elicited criticism from the majority of the Church for recognizing homosexuality as a natural phenomenon (Lynch 2005).

For Southern Baptists, religious liberty is both a rights issue and a political issue. The Southern Baptist Council, out of all Baptist organizations in the United States, positions itself and its values as correlating to civic and political engagement, with one of their resolutions stating that they will only vote for candidates dedicated to the preservation of religious liberty and who hold Judeo-Christian values (McDaniel 2008). This orientation calls into question the consistency held by Southern Baptist institutions in relation to religious liberty as a function of separating church and state. The implication of this logic is that political Baptist organizations both call for the government to not impress its own prerogatives onto religion, but religious individuals ought to be the ones that drive and craft policy. Freedom of religion, thus, becomes a mechanism for expanding religious influence, a mission to evangelize civic discourse.

Literature Review

With the context of these letters established, an understanding of fundamental principles that guide their arguments and world-building must be examined. Primarily, examining counterpublic, third persona, and religious rhetoric literature will provide a foundation upon which analysis can be built.

Public Sphere

Before we can understand how certain interpretations gain prominence and how rhetors manufacture their audiences and own discursive position, we must understand the broader public sphere to set the stage for coming theory. Jürgen Habermas (1989) defines the public sphere as

the space existing between the private realm of civil society (family environments, labor relations/exchange, friendships) and the sphere of state institutions. Within this public sphere, the general will of private citizens is debated in order to produce common understanding and beliefs that are then sent up to institutions of authority to actualize into policy or any other form of representational action. This dialectical tension produces a variety of sides and advocacies, many of which, though, are not reducible to a firm and concrete argument or side. Even in the letters produced by the Catholic Diocese and Baptist ministers in which agree that the law is a good thing, they go about justifying its passage in different ways. Thus, the groups make distinct and separate arguments, though operating to sway opinions in the public sphere in the same direction. Nonetheless, publics can be riddled with disagreement, but it is that characteristic of totality, encapsulating all of the voices within a given space, that defines a public (Warner 2002).

Counterpublics

The public is a phrase that is all encompassing, but if the public is representative of the discourse within society meant to represent all people, then how are the marginalized or dissenting voices that fundamentally resist a public accounted for in this discourse? When discourse is fundamentally oppositional to norms and practices of the cultural environment, then that discursive space is constitutive of a counterpublic, a public whose existence is crafted out of this opposition (Farmer, 2013; Warner, 2002). Examples of counterpublics include LGBTQ+ communities, racial and ethnic minorities, and any other group subject to systemic discrimination that do not fit into the mold of the societies they exist in. LGBTQ+ people in a deeply homophobic community, due to the incongruencies, would be a counterpublic.

This status of counterpublic, though, is not strictly/solely defined or outlined by actual measuring of discrimination against a particular group. Counterpublic status is manufactured by

the rhetor by representing themselves as marginalized within a particular culture, context, or issue as compared to the “intolerant” public (Cloud, 2014). Counterpublics can develop as alternative websites and groups online that are moved to form and act because of injustices committed against them (Dahlberg, 2011) or even as comment sections of popular new websites where the commenters challenge the hegemonic authority of the writer (Toepfl & Piwoni, 2015). Counterpublics can even exist within a fashion, style, or belief system that operates to upset hegemonic structures within society, not having to be tied down to any one argument or set of arguments (Farmer, 2013).

Third Persona

While discourse (in both the deliberative/ideological and aesthetic sense) occurring within and around counterpublics operates to construct the identity of the rhetor, audiences must still be wrapped into that counterpublic through the creation of identification. Just as discourse in the public sphere can be both immediately located in one space or spread out in a discursive network, so too can audiences. Perelman & Olbrechts-Tyteca (1969) describe audiences as categorized into three different types: Real Audiences, Particular Audiences, and Universal Audiences. Real Audiences are the immediate people that are consuming the message. Particular Audiences are the people that the rhetor is aiming the message directly toward. The Universal Audience, though, is an audience that is comprised of human beings that are capable of reason and critical thinking. This broad category of audience provides a useful framework for evaluating discourse because it creates a lens for examining strategies that rhetors implement and whether they are only appealing to their particular or real audience or the larger discourse.

What rhetors, such as the Catholic Church and Baptist ministers, can do to attract a wider audience is relegate any individual that is counterproductive to the rhetor’s message to a third

persona. The third persona is the party that is left out of the discourse (Wander, 1984). The third persona might be an unintentional utterance of social norms on part of the rhetor. The third persona can also be used to fight against an opposing force without directly mentioning them in your messages, just as George H.W. Bush did in the Anita Hill trial where he did not refer to Anita Hill during most of the press conferences about her trial (Turner & Ryden 2000). When Bush did mention her name, it was only five times, while he referred to Clarence Thomas sixteen times. In this way, he made Anita Hill seem less important for the trial (Turner & Ryden, 2000). Turner & Ryden (2000) go on to explain, using Derrida's model of differance, an intentional misspelling of difference that acknowledges that objects are defined not by what they but by their relationship to other signifiers. Thus, according to Derrida (1982), the existence of one thing implies the non-existence of another. Essentially, the more that another object is introduced into a situation, we associate that object with the situation more and more. Other objects within this situation do not disappear physically, but they disappear discursively, rendered less visible in the message. For example, if the issue of religious freedom becomes about an oppressive government, then in the message it becomes less about LGBTQ+ discrimination. In this process, a third persona is created. In this instance, the LGBTQ+ community becomes the third persona, the audience indirectly targeted by the rhetoric. The third persona is featured prominently in the letters that discuss religious freedom as a way of avoiding talking about the LGBTQ+ community. Not only is the object of discussion relegated as the third persona, a host of other associations can be made with the opposition that then become indirectly tied to the third persona by virtue of association.

Religious Rhetoric

Religion frequently operates as a unifying identifier between people. What gives religion this kind of connection is its ability to intertwine its deliberative argument for how the world should be with a maxim of belief based on faith (Spina, 2008). Religion operates primarily as a framework for one's worldview, and this subsequently results in less tolerance for belief-based disagreement (Heiphetz, Spelk, Harris, & Banajj, 2013).

Religion is interwoven into the dialogic framework of American society, serving to guide people's thought processes and ways that they understand what policies should and must be implemented in society (Dacey, 2008). For example, the Exodus Narrative of either migrating to the promised land or representing America as the promised land has been used all throughout American history across various contexts and positions, from supporting social change to upholding fundamentalism (Hill, 2016). Even Richard Weaver's (1953) "God" and "Devil" terms use religion as a foundation upon which to judge hierarchically valued themes, ideas, institutions, and individuals in society.

These positions culminate in what Edwards & Valenzano III (2016) recognize as a "civil religion," or an orientation of one's own citizenship and civility as a formal religious tradition that can co-exist or even exist without specific religious beliefs. This elucidates the importance of religion to American civic and rhetorical life. This framework then allows views on different issues to be divided into two primary types of language that Murphy (2008) refers to as the "language of being" and the "language of becoming" in the context of authority in both religion and politics. Authority, to Murphy, is more than just the power that any one person holds, but rather, it is a series of unthinking assumptions and processes that individuals adhere to. The systems of religion give rise to tradition that operates as "an unbroken chain through

generations” which then constructs authority. Murphy brings all of this together when he states that “religion, tradition, and authority come together in an organic view of an eternal national community.” As religion lays at the foundation of our societal superstructures, these two primary camps of language have come to characterize American civil religion. The language of “being” refers to a conservative view of both religion and civic life that designates maintaining tradition and fundamentalism as the primary goal. This is most often represented through invocations of scriptural or constitutional authority as unmovable principles. The language of “becoming” refers to a more progressive vision of civic life and religion that emphasizes inclusivity and recognizes the dynamism and evolution of understanding. The authority of these founding artifacts and documents are no longer intractable but rather interpretative and contextualized. These are ultimately the competing ideologies of both American religion and political life that inform our discourse (Edwards & Valenzano III, 2016). These perspectives are important framing devices for the meta-narratives supported through the letters.

The Letters & Construction of Value Frameworks

The four pastoral letters in response to HB 1523, or the Religious Liberty Accommodation Act, written by the United Methodist Church, the Episcopal Diocese of Jackson, The Catholic Diocese of Jackson, and a collection of Baptist ministers from around the state of Mississippi provide insight into the attitudes of religious organizations in the state even though all the letters approach the question from different positions and orientations. Despite the differences in the letters, all of them still seek to accomplish a few key goals: to represent the issue as fundamentally being about a larger particular issue, creating a homogenized vision of Christian identity, and emphasizing the respect that all people must be given (though three out of the four letters do not even mention the issue of LGBTQ+ discrimination under the law).

Bishop Kopacz from the Catholic Jackson Diocese wrote a letter the day after Judge Carlton W. Reeves issued an injunction to block the passage and implementation of HB 1523 (Kopacz, 2016). The letter states that the Jackson Diocese is sincerely disappointed by Judge Reeves' action. While disappointed by Reeves' action, Kopacz cites an optimistic future of discourse about the role of civil rights and religious freedom. The letter then focuses on abortion as the key issue relating to religious liberty.

A letter authored by a coalition of Baptist ministries and published in the *Clarion-Ledger* (a Jackson, Mississippi newspaper) presents the issue of religious freedom as one that is imperative to the rights of Christians (Rowland, 2016). They present Christians as subject to discrimination and oppression by the federal government and other social institutions, while also extending ideas of Christian love to those who do not share their faith.

Bishop James Swanson from the United Methodist Church takes a more middle of the road approach to the bill (Swanson, 2016). The actual effects and implications of the bill are never discussed in detail. Rather, the chief bishop advocates for the community to come together in spreading the word of Jesus Christ rather than be divided by HB 1523.

The most divergent of these pastoral letters is one published by Reverend Brian Seage of the Episcopal Diocese of Mississippi. This letter takes a firm stance against HB 1523, stating that the Episcopal Church will continue to support its allies in the LGBTQ+ community from discrimination (Seage, 2016). With a firm understanding of the different positions that each of these religious institutions are coming from, some issues are clearly prioritized over others in the letters.

Issue Prioritization

Depending on the message that the letter is trying to convince its reader of, certain issues receive greater emphasis than others. For the Baptist ministers, the biggest issue was the idea of conscience rights being infringed upon. This letter, signed by various Baptist ministers throughout the state, argues that the government has been trying “to force conformity to a new series of social agendas” that “mandate particular behaviors that directly violate certain individual’s own deeply held religious consciences” (para. 1). These phrases posit the passage of this bill as one that protects from encroachment of big government into the lives of individual people and sets up an adversarial “us versus them” framework for the issue, “us,” in this case, Christians and “them” or big government (and the implied opposition to this bill). The Catholic Diocese takes a similar stance but uses less pointed and anti-government language. Rather, they opt for arguing that we must push for minimizing the distance between American identity and religious identity so that people of all faiths may practice their religion freely (yet discuss how destructive and vile abortion is just a paragraph above).

The UMC circumvents discussing religious freedom at all, choosing rather to focus on the importance of building community in the face of division. The central question that is set up by Swanson in the letter is “So how can we, as neighbors, live in the midst of people with whom we strongly disagree?” (para. 3). What religious freedom means for the UMC and how the UMC in Jackson regards the rights of LGBTQ+ people are completely ignored in favor of this issue on unity that is argued from a biblical viewpoint.

Lastly, Reverend Brian Seage of the Episcopal Diocese explicitly focuses on the rights of LGBTQ+ Mississippians as being the key issue in this debate. The letter states that the protection

cited in the bill “addresses a conflict which does not exist,” minimizing the importance of religious liberty that has been echoed by other religious authorities. This minimizing of the need for religious liberty, representing it as an unnecessary protection that does more harm than good, is how Seage ends the letter. This leaves the reader with the mindset that the issue of LGBTQ+ discrimination is more valid than the freedom of speech claims made by religious freedom advocates.

Nature of Christian Identity

The way that Christian identity is discussed in the letters represents very different notions about what Christian identity means. In each case, they all end up relating it back to being inclusive, loving, and accepting. How Christianity is represented is meant to reduce the distance between the rhetor and the audience to create shared meaning, or as Burke (1969) calls consubstantiality. The Baptist ministers represent Christian identity as a united front of people that are under attack by big government. “It is our sincere desire to state our strong convictions concerning recent challenges to our religious freedom and voice our support for those who seek to protect that freedom.” In this case, “challenges to our religious freedom” come from LGBTQ+ rights activists (especially those with political influence) that view the bill as discriminatory and “those who seek to protect that freedom.” This implies Republican politicians that support religious freedom laws and businesses that wish to deny services to LGBTQ+ people. These oppositional forces are framed in a way that represents the government as an overbearing force dictating the lives of individual people.

Christian identity in the Catholic diocese letter takes a slightly different form. While the Baptist letter emphasizes a rural “depoliticized” Mississippian identity that is juxtaposed to big

government, Bishop Kopacz argues that “people of faith are called to be active in the political process – to protect the dignity of each human being and to make our communities stronger overall.” Kopacz essentially advocates that our government should reflect their constituency rather than representing the government as an oppressive force.

Swanson from the UMC, though, argues that Christian identity is one of working to build community, minimizing the extent that political differences divide. “I am a firm Bible-believing Christian, which pushes me to have standards and integrity just as Jesus had standards and integrity to still love me while I was yet an unredeemed sinner.” In this statement, Swanson is representing the Christian as one that sets aside political issues and loves people despite those differences. But what does this version of Christian identity really mean? Essentially, this version of Christianity is represented as the moral arbiter because if they are calling for Christians to act “maturely,” then that is predicated on the idea that others are not acting like “real Christians.” They imply that when they say that “the mistake we often make when we seek to protect ourselves is that we unintentionally set up adversarial relationships.”

Brian Seage from the Episcopalian Diocese represents Christian identity that is inclusive and accepting of all people, especially LGBTQ+ people. “Our baptismal covenant requires that each of us will respect the dignity of every human being. It does not provide an exception to that respect.” This duty of Christians, simply put in the few and short paragraphs of this letter, is to accept all people regardless of identity. This connotes Christian identity, then, as being one concerned about collectivist struggle and social justice, juxtaposed to that of radical individual liberty that comes at the expense of marginalized people.

Through representing Christian identity within their narrative in certain lights, the religious groups in these letters are controlling the framing device for their message that contributes to their overall construction of the value frameworks of Language of Being and Language of Becoming, as discussed earlier. Understanding how Christian identity is represented allows us to understand the civic religious orientation that these letters are contributing to.

Support

In terms of supporting material used by the letters, all appealed to figures of authority in some capacity. The Catholic Church begins their letter with a quote from the US Conference on Catholic Bishops, a conservative Catholic lobbying group. They utilize the mission statement, equating the words of this political organization to that of scripture. This usage of supporting material reveals the reverence to hierarchal authority that the Catholic Church emphasizes in their structure. The Baptist ministers inform their positions citing the First Amendment and a rights-based framework, making vague references to scripture without directly quoting it. This reveals an infusion of political identity present in the public identity of Baptist preachers in the state of Mississippi. The UMC utilizes specific scripture in their letter, boasting religious authority straight from text rather than appealing to hierarchal religious and political institutions. Interacting with their goal of non-polarization and representing themselves as common people in order to create greater identification with their audience. The Episcopal Church does not really utilize any other sources than making a vague reference to baptismal covenant.

LGBTQ+ discrimination

Finally, LGBTQ+ discrimination is absent from three of the four letters examined. This exclusion is noteworthy considering that one of the main issues that has catapulted the issue of religious freedom to the forefront of political discussion is the right to refuse service, employment, and housing to LGBTQ+ individuals. The only letter to mention the LGBTQ+ community is Brian Seage from the Episcopal Diocese, emphatically calling for their protection through denunciation of HB 1523. The other letters find ways to avoid discussing LGBTQ+ discrimination in their arguments.

Bishop Swanson from the UMC does not touch on religious liberty at all. By focusing on this vague message of unity and togetherness, the conflicting principles of HB 1523 do not have to be addressed. The UMC letter does not attempt to replace issues of LGBTQ+ discrimination with more malicious forces like in the Catholic and Baptist letters. If anything, this letter merely accepts the legal state of HB 1523 by stating that, “The passage of Mississippi House Bill 1523 (HB 1523) by both the House and Senate, and the subsequent signing of this bill into law in our state, is a done deal.” By framing the debate as determined, Swanson avoids having to address such a controversial issue that could upset his more conservative church members but remain detached enough not to lose any LGBTQ+ members.

The Baptist ministers’ letter labels the issue of disallowing employment and housing discrimination against LGBTQ+ people as a “new series of social agendas” and “contemporary pressures applied to people of faith forcing many to violate their deeply held religious beliefs under threat of legal action against them.” By representing measures to prevent discrimination against queer people as being forced to violate personal religious belief, it reorients the position

of the Baptist Ministers from one of power to one of powerlessness. At the end of the letter, the ministers end with a clear mission statement: “It is imperative that this legislation exist in order to prevent the state government from violating consciences or the First Amendment to the United States Constitution,” (Clarion-Ledger, 2016, para. 7). Violation of conscience rights and the First Amendment are key issues brought forth.

Bishop Kopacz (2017, para. 4) is more open about fighting for the right to refuse service to the LGBTQ+ community based on conscience rights, but they still do not explicitly state this. “The Catholic Church in Mississippi will continue to seek exemption in the specific areas of marriage and employment in certain ministries while engaging in respectful dialogue with our neighbors” (para. 4). By using the term “specific areas of marriage and employment,” the letter is still engaging with the issue of conscientious objection to providing service without mentioning the LGBTQ+ community. Despite this, throughout both this letter and the Baptist letter, as discussed earlier, there is a constant discussion about being accepting of all people.

The relegation of the LGBTQ+ community to the status of third persona is prevalent in the three letters that never mention the community. The issue of religious freedom, these institutions argue, is one that supersedes the LGBTQ+ community, dealing with their fundamental rights. One, however, cannot separate the issue of discrimination against queer people and religious liberty, as they are contemporarily issues stitched into the same fabric of public discourse. Using code words to uphold their values to discriminate such as “set of social agendas” to cover up what they mean allows them to leave queer people out of the conversation without really leaving them completely out.

Through both Kopacz and the Baptist ministers' letters, there are constant reaffirmations of their churches' accepting natures. The Baptist ministers state, "we wish to declare our love for those who do not share our biblical values and convictions" (Clarion-Ledger, 2016, para. 2) and Kopacz (2016, para. 8) says that "The Catholic Church welcomes everyone in our parishes, schools and service centers. We have and will continue to help anyone in need through Catholic Charities, schools and parish ministries, regardless of your faith, beliefs or background." These mission statements both welcome all to their church, indicating a few key issues that they are aware of. By acknowledging that they are accepting of all people, they are responding to accusations of bigotry posited against them for supporting this law. They are also aware of how unpopular being anti-LGBTQ+ is, thus, not only do they reframe the conversation to be about the rights of people, but they also attempt to present themselves as open-minded. This strategy to avoid talking about the LGBTQ+ community or use their struggle to bolster their argument, allows the letters to emphasize and construct the civic discourse that serves their religious goals and values most.

The Language of Being

The letters by the Baptist ministers and Catholic Diocese invoke Murphy's (2008) language of "being" that is enveloped in the idea of tradition by appealing to both religious and political authority, representing the traditional as under attack, and using rights-based language as a means of erasing LGBTQ+ discrimination from the conversation instead of risking support from the audience. Essentially, these letters insert several signifiers into the conversation, such as government, rights, and tradition. In these instances, LGBTQ+ discrimination is paid less attention to and these rhetors simultaneously represent themselves as the victims of this struggle.

The disempowered parts of the opposition, LGBTQ+ people, are minimized and rebranded as the government forcing individuals to violate their beliefs.

The Baptist ministers' letter repeatedly emphasizes its traditional values, establishing in the second paragraph of the letter the basis upon which it defends its position on religious freedom:

It is our sincere desire to state our strong convictions concerning recent challenges to our religious freedom and voice our support for those who seek to protect that freedom. We believe these convictions are informed by and founded on the authority of Holy Scripture, which is our standard of faith and practice. (Clarion-Ledger, 2016, para. 2)

This reference to holy scripture as a means of authority is a utilization of Wander's (1984) appeal to religious conviction and belief as the highest measure of authority on the subject as a means of creating finality to the conversation. They also cite the First Amendment as another end-all to their argument, intertwining the political and religious in the framework of "civil religion" (Edwards & Valenzano III, 2016).

Bishop Kopacz (2016) utilizes this strategy as well. To open up his letter, he quotes the US Conference on Catholic Bishops where they cite "the teaching of our Catholic Faith" when discussing their position on religious freedom. By citing this political organization that uses Catholicism as proof in its argument, Kopacz is invoking this idea of "civil religion." Kopacz even makes this explicit by stating that "People of faith are called to be active in the political process," (Kopacz, 2016, para. 3). Repeatedly, the letter engages in virtue signaling by targeting the issue of abortion and tying it to their discussion on religious freedom. By tying these issues together and appealing to the pro-life God Term (Weaver, 1953), Kopacz is enacting language of

“being” through tying his position on this particular issue to fundamental belief systems.

Abortion is often seen as a bedrock issue, and by tying that pro-life position in with their position on religious freedom, it creates more signifiers that indicate what the rhetor and audience are (pro religious freedom bills and pro-life) and what they are not (anti-religious freedom and “anti-life”).

To make this language of being more persuasive, these letters use a call to protect rights as a way of constructing themselves as counterpublics. The Baptist ministers establish themselves as a counterpublic in their letter when they say, “we... believe that every individual has the right to believe and practice their faith regardless of the popularity of such belief,” (Clarion-Ledger 2016, para. 2). Consequentially, this statement implicitly represents Christianity as a faith that is under attack and discounted by society. Placing themselves in the margins, this letter orients its rhetorical place in the public sphere as a resistance to what they have constructed as the “status quo,” society attacking religion. Kopacz also represents Christianity as being restricted and opposed by the federal government. The USCCB, in their statement that Kopacz references, writes “To be Catholic and American should mean not having to choose one over the other. Our allegiances are distinct, but they need not be contradictory, and should instead be complementary” (Kopacz, 2016, para. 1). This message creates a situation where the United States government is forcing individuals to choose their allegiances (the hegemonic public), and the Catholic Diocese of Jackson is standing up to that tyrannical force (counterpublic).

By representing themselves as having their rights violated by federal authority, these letters shift the conversation away from the issue of LGBTQ+ discrimination that could occur under this law by rendering this facet of the debate to a third persona. The Baptist letter refers to this part of the conversation as “a new series of social agendas,” (Clarion-Ledger, 2016, para. 1).

Characterizing the opposition in this way effectively rebrands them from being seen as the victims to being seen as the oppressors. This invariably creates a “semantical distance” from the opposing narrative “bubbles.” The more that one side is reconstructed by one rhetor’s framing of the issue, the less the rhetor’s side and the opposition’s side can relate and share meaning. Less consubstantiality creates more antagonism between the stances and produces more dialectical tension between the rhetor’s position and the opposition’.

The Language of Becoming

The Episcopal Church utilizes a very different realm of language, and that is the “language of becoming.” It represents humanity as struggling to overcome the traditions that have worked to oppress and block us from achieving progress. The vision of Christianity in this framework is one that empowers people to take on and oppose the traditionalist view of Christianity. Seage (2016) states that:

The Episcopal Diocese of Mississippi stands as one with our brothers and sisters in the LGBT community and the Human Rights Campaign. We respect their painful journey as they have sought full inclusion in our society. Many of them share a Christian faith that is deep and profound. We should embrace their quest for equality and justice rather than placing obstacles in their pathway, (para. 4).

The victims in this narrative are represented as those who have endured this “painful journey” fighting against the traditional Christianity that is “placing obstacles in their pathway.” By tying this disempowered group with their Christian faith, the rhetor is painting being sympathetic to opposing religious freedom bills to being sympathetic for the queer Christian that is being unjustly discriminated against. Given that allying his voice with a historically discriminated

identity, Seage is building his counterpublic as the LGBTQ+ community. This elicits an underdog effect, by showing how unfairly a sect of people are being treated purely based on their identities.

Not only is religious identity tied to the rhetor's position, but religious ideology is also used to boost their message. "Our baptismal covenant requires that each of us will respect the dignity of every human being. It does not provide an exception to that respect," (Seage, 2016, para. 3). This indicates that their religious beliefs and practices inform their position, boosting their credibility by using Wander's (1984) discussion of the almighty authority of God's word to act as the measuring device upon which message has value. The regressive practices of the status quo are shown to conflict with the belief system that guides the rhetor and, subsequently, the audience, with which they have identified with.

Language of Being & Becoming: A Continuum

The United Methodist Church takes a middle of the road approach to the discussion and advocates something different. Their message of non-engagement and loving thy neighbor erases both the reasons to support and not support HB 1523 from the narrative. This letter posits the question, "So how can we, as neighbors, live in the midst of people with whom we strongly disagree" (Swanson, 2016, para. 3). This is meant to redirect the conflict over the bill from whether it is correct to the rift that it is creating between people, carving out its own space in this discussion about the merits of religious freedom legislation. This saves the United Methodist Church from engaging too much with the controversy and comfortably urging a message of unity that serves its purpose as a religious institution worried about losing members.

The ultimate result is a message that utilizes elements from both the language of being and the language of becoming. Swanson (2016) states that “I am a firm Bible-believing Christian, which pushes me to have standards and integrity just as Jesus had standards and integrity to still love me while I was yet an unredeemed sinner,” (para. 4). This section uses religion as evidence of established tradition while emphasizing progress as an important tenet in that “our disagreement over HB 1523, something good and wonderful will come forth that will be a blessing for the state of Mississippi.” These voices that mix elements of both languages create and alleviate dialectical tension at different points in the argument, while defending a different advocacy not independent of the central issue of religious freedom.

Conclusion

Implications

Through this analysis, there are a few implications for how this not only affects the debate surrounding HB 1523 but also all issues of public interest. First, by recognizing that our axiological orientations toward “civil religion” and its ecclesiastical nature affect how we engage with political, social, and cultural issues, we can create more meaningful deliberation by reducing the dialectical tension that exists between issues to bring about greater consubstantiality. Religion and politics are oftentimes seen as exclusive entities to one another or deleterious to each other’s function. In reality, the framework through which we understand religion (idols, texts, and values) is nearly the same framework that we judge political issues (idols, texts, and values). This “separation of church and state” mentality overshadows how critical religion is as a narrative framing device in American society.

Second, the third persona is used to erase or omit audiences in the discussion in order to recharacterize what the opposing side is “really about”. The vulnerable audiences within the discussion that are adversarial or problematic for the rhetor are further erased and their side mythologized as rhetors engage in designating themselves as a counterpublic in the status quo. This status quo, though, is designed and framed by the rhetor, who paints the adversarial point of view as supporting a myriad of terrible things. This is an underdog strategy that has found itself played out in political and social movements, from the Tea Party rallying against the “establishment” of the federal government to the Black Lives Matter movement raising awareness of the “establishment” of the criminal justice system.

The use of rights as a means to render a facet of discourse a third persona highlights a coded discourse. Messages are designed with an exigency in mind, a goal to accomplish. In order to accomplish this goal, narrative space must be occupied by something that will help to facilitate that goal. Human rights in rhetoric are signifiers of “western” democracy in that many of them are referred to as “freedom of speech” and “freedom from unwarranted search and seizure” (Hesford, 2011). This carries with it an association with “civil religious” belief and Wander’s (1984) idea of religious authority, creating identification with the audience as people who respect and wish to protect their rights as Americans. If rights are used to render LGBTQ+ discrimination or government overreach to a third persona, both church rhetoric and political rhetoric surrounding HB 1523 can avoid touching issues that cause too much controversy and avoid losing members of the church or voting constituents. The implication of this is that rhetoric is not just about what is said but also about what is not said and that there is an inextricable relationship between the two that are affected with the introduction of new signifiers.

Lastly, by understanding this debate as a representative continuum of macro-societal clashes of ideology, we are more easily able to articulate the values that all sides of this debate fall on, which can help in bridging the “semantic distance.” By understanding public debate as a long arc of meaning negotiation, tension between two competing interpretations laden with different signifiers, we can work to measure out and delineate the responses made by each party.

Future Study

This study provides a limited scope of understanding the discursive space that these letters occupy in creating meaning against the backdrop of a society imbued with signifiers of civic and religious importance. This study’s established theoretical framework has multiple directions it can go from different perspectives and focuses. First, considering how other political

noise and identity characteristics play a role in filtering the effectiveness of amplifying certain signifiers over others is crucial. People are not just blank slates to be filled with information and treating all audiences as containing and upholding the same value system would be a mistake. Consequentially, more nuance to this theoretical framework is welcome.

Another form of subjectivity that should be taken into account is how much different degrees of erasing work for different people. Some moderate religious institutions may not want to hear overt references to the LGBTQ+ community when deciding for religious freedom bills, but some more extreme sects may openly accept religious freedom bills as a “license to discriminate” and think about it as an overwhelmingly good thing. What are the major influences of these dispositions? How is erasing quantified and qualified?

HB 1523 is now the law of Mississippi. It will continue to be challenged. Other bills like it will continue to pop up in state legislatures. The issue of religious freedom, though, serves as an important crossroads where recognition that our society’s arguably strongest world framing device, religion, has unequivocal influence on our civic lexicon, and through recognizing this, entities of consequence in this debate and the public can be mindful of their language and how that affects our ideological world-building.

References

- Beitsch, R. (2017). Supposedly symbolic, state travel bans have real bite. *Pew Charitable Trusts*. Accessed February 26, 2018.
- Biskupic, J. (2017). Trump puts faith in religious right. *CNN*. Accessed January 14, 2018.
- Burke, K. (1969). *Rhetoric of motives*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 19.
- Campbell, L. (2016). Federal judge blocks HB 1523. *Mississippi Today*. Accessed February 26, 2018.
- Campbell, L. (2017). 'Religious freedom' law upheld by federal appeals court. *Mississippi Today*. Accessed February 26, 2018.
- Chain, R. P. (2016). The price of citizenship? How a cake baker and wedding photographer paid the price. *Southern Law Journal*, 26(2), 277-296.
- Clarkson, F. (2017). Religious freedom is a progressive value. *The Public Eye*, Winter 2017. Somerville, MA: Political Research Associates, 3, 20-21.
- Cloud, D. L. (2014). Rhetorical criticism for underdogs. In Jim A. Kuypers (Ed.) *Purpose, practice, and pedagogy in rhetorical criticism* (pp. 20-31). Lanham, MD: Lexington Books.
- D'Amato, R. J. (2016). A "very specific" holding: Analyzing the effect of Hobby Lobby on religious liberty challenges to housing discrimination laws. *Columbia Law Review*, 116(4), 1063-1103.
- Dacey, A. (2008). *The secular conscience: Why belief belongs in public life*. Amherst, NY: Prometheus Books.

- Dahlberg, L. (2011). Re-constructing digital democracy: An outline of four “positions.” *New Media & Society*, 13, 855–872.
- Davis, D. H. (1996). Christian faith and political involvement in today's culture war. *Journal of Church & State*, 38(3), 477.
- Derrida, H. (1982). *Margins of philosophy*. (A. Bass, Trans.). Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press.
- Djupe, P. A., Lewis, A. R., & Jelen, T. G. (2016). Rights, reflection, and reciprocity: Implications of the same-sex marriage debate for tolerance and the political process. *Politics & Religion*, 9(3), 630-648.
- Dreher, A. (2016). Mississippians rally against hate: HB 1523: ‘We cannot be silent.’ *Jackson Free Press*. Accessed March 5, 2018.
- Dunn, S. (2016). The end of religious liberty? Institutional sovereignty and the question of social justice. *Journal of Religion*, 96(4), 488-505.
- Edwards, J. A. & Valenzano III, J. M. (2016). *The rhetoric of American civil religion: Symbols, sinners, and saints*. Lanham, MD: Lexington Books.
- Episcopal Church. (2017). In P. Lagasse, & Columbia University, *The Columbia encyclopedia* (7th ed.). New York, NY: Columbia University Press.
- Episcopal Church (2017). Establishment of religion. *The Episcopal Church website*. Accessed December 7, 2017.
- Farmer, F. (2013). *After the public turn: Composition, counterpublics, and the citizen bricoleur*. Utah: Utah State University Press.

- Fuist, T. N., Stoll, L. C., Kniss, F. (2012). Beyond the liberal-conservative divide: Assessing the relationship between religious denominations and their associated LGBT organizations. *Qualitative Sociology*, 35(1), 65-87.
- Goldwig, S. R. (2013). The U.S. catholic bishops, “religious freedom,” and the 2012 presidential election campaign: A reflection. *Rhetoric & Public Affairs*, 16(2), 369-383.
- Habermas, J. (1989). *The structural transformation of the public sphere: An inquiry into a category of bourgeois society*. (Burger, T. & Lawrence, F., Trans.). Cambridge, Mass.: MIT. (Original work published in 1962).
- Heiphetz, L., Spelke, E. S., Harris, P. L., & Banaji, M. R. (2013). The development of reasoning about beliefs: Fact, preference, and ideology. *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology*, 49(3), 559–565.
- Hesford, W. S. (2011). Human rights rhetoric of recognition. *Rhetoric Society Quarterly*, 41(3), 282-289.
- Hill, T. E. (2016). The exodus: The textual heart of American civil religion, in Jason A. Edwards & Joseph M. Valenzano III (Eds.) *The Rhetoric of American Civil Religion* (pp. 1-15). Lanham, MD: Lexington Books.
- Ho, C. (2015). Catholic lobby flexes its muscle ahead of Pope Francis’s visit. *Washington Post*. Accessed March 16, 2018.
- Keys, C. L. (2014). Jesus people against pollution global ministries. *Jesus People Against Pollution*. Accessed March 6, 2018.

- Kopacz, J. (2016, July). Bishop Kopacz releases statement on court actions on HB 1523, abortion. Accessed March 5, 2017.
- Lynch, J. (2005). Institution and imprimatur: Institutional rhetoric and the failure of the Catholic Church's pastoral letter on homosexuality. *Rhetoric & Public Affairs*, 8(3), 383-403.
- Meyer, C., & Schnoor, K. (2015). From Dan to Danita: LGBT based discrimination and issues of religious freedom. *Journal of Diversity Management (JDM)*, 10(1), 13-22.
- McDaniel, C. (2008). The decline of the separation principle in the Baptist tradition of religious liberty. *Journal of Church & State*, 50(3), 413-430.
- Miller, H. (2017). Mississippi's H.B. 1523 cleared to become the worst anti-LGBTQ state law in the US. *Human Rights Campaign website*. Accessed April 13, 2018.
- Mississippi Legislature (2016). House Bill 1523. *2016 Regular Session*.
- Moreau, J (2017). Analysis: Masterpiece Cakeshop case could have 'tremendous implications.' *NBC News*. Accessed April 13, 2018.
- Newport, F. (2010). Mississippians go to church the most: Vermonters, least. *Gallup*. Accessed March 6, 2018.
- Pearson, M. (2016). ACLU sues over Mississippi religious freedom law. *CNN*. Accessed March 16, 2018.
- Perelman, C., & Olbrechts-Tyteca, L. (1969). *The new rhetoric: A treatise on argumentation*. Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press.

- Richardson, J. T. (2015). Managing religion and the judicialization of religious freedom. *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*, 54(1), 1-19.
- Robertson, C. & Pérez-Peña, R. (2015). Bills on ‘religious freedom’ upset capitols in Arkansas and Indiana. *New York Times*. Accessed March 16, 2018.
- Rowland, C. et al. (2016, May). Baptist pastors support HB 1523 in open letter. Retrieved March 5, 2017.
- Seagall, E. (2017). Symposium: Disentangling free speech and freedom of religion in Masterpiece Cakeshop. *SCOTUS Blog*. Accessed January 14, 2018.
- Seage, B. R. (2016, March). Statement by the Rt. Rev. Brian R. Seage, bishop of the Episcopal Diocese of Mississippi. Retrieved March 5, 2017.
- Scott, E. (2016). ACLU expecting more religious freedom bills in 2017 than ever. *CNN*. Retrieved April 29, 2017.
- Skinner, K. (2017). HB 1523: Reactions to the decision upholding the religious objections law. *Mississippi Today*. Accessed March 16, 2018.
- Smith, G. A. & Martinez, J. (2016). How the faithful voted: A preliminary 2016 analysis. *Pew Research Center*. Accessed January 14, 2018.
- Spina, L. (2008). “Fall and rise of religion and rhetoric.” *Rhetorica: A Journal of the History of Rhetoric*, 26(3), 209-220.
- Swanson, J. E. (2017). Pastoral Letter Concerning HB 1523. Retrieved March 5, 2017.
- Toepfl, F., Piwoni, E. (2015). “Public spheres in interaction: Comment sections of news websites as counterpublic spaces.” *Journal of Communication*, 65(3), 465–488.

Trump, D. J. (2018). President Donald J. Trump proclaims January 16, 2018, as religious freedom day. *White House website*. Accessed March 16, 2018.

Turner, P. K., & Ryden, P. (2000). How George Bush silenced Anita Hill: A Derridian view of the third persona in public argument. *Argumentation and Advocacy*, 37(2), 86–97.

Wander, P. (1984). The third persona: An ideological turn in rhetorical theory. *Central States Speech Journal*, 35(4). 197-216.

Warner, M. (2002). *Publics and counterpublics*. New York, NY: Zone Books.

Weaver, R. M. (1953). *The ethics of rhetoric*. Chicago, IL: H. Regnery Co.