

Secular Prosperity Gospel:

A Rhetorical Analysis of Donald Trump's Presidential Announcement Speech

By Caleb Huffman

Thesis Supervisor: Dr. Matt McGarrity

Communication Departmental Honors

Abstract

On June 16th, 2015 business mogul Donald J. Trump delivered a presidential announcement speech, announcing his candidacy for president of the United States, launching his ascension to the White House. Through a rhetorical analysis, Trump's speech is compared to the United States Christian theological prosperity gospel movement and is found to contain the three markers of the prosperity gospel theology, with one exception: the replacement of God with himself. Thus, Trump creates a secular prosperity gospel with himself as an exemplary model, that is, a living example showing the success of the secular prosperity gospel. This acts as the argumentative justification for his claim to be a superior candidate in the 2016 United States election. The implications of Trump's rhetorical strategy utilized in his presidential announcement speech may inform Trump's continued rhetoric throughout his campaign and during his tenure as President.

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But if I get elected president I will bring it back bigger and better and stronger than ever before, and we will make America great again.

—Donald Trump, Presidential Announcement Speech

Donald J. Trump's unexpected ascension to the White House has brought about many questions. An area of intense interest is Trump's rhetoric. Trump's rhetorical style was an integral part of his campaign, drawing attention from the media and voters alike. His first speech as a candidate for president, his presidential announcement speech, occurred on June 16th, 2015. During the forty-five minute speech, Trump announced his candidacy for President and outlined his policy planks. This essay examines the foundational speech, arguing two surprising results that runs against the popular narrative surrounding the speech. First, the speech's content is not unique but typical, as determined by Trent and Friedenbergs (2008) four intentions of a presidential announcement speech. Second, the speech includes the three markers and three implications of the prosperity gospel theology with one major exception: no deference to God. Trump replaces God as the acting agent for wealth creation with himself, justifying his claim to be a successful and superior candidate¹.

This paper will begin by addressing the four goals of a presidential announcement speech, then discuss the markers and implications of the prosperity gospel. Next, it will analyze

¹ Trump is a controversial and divisive political figure. This essay is not meant to serve as a critique of the candidate Trump or President Trump, particularly his policies. There are far more qualified individuals addressing the failings and successes of Trump in-depth. Instead, this thesis will examine the content of Trump's presidential announcement speech, in an attempt to understand what Trump was trying to communicate to his audience – not how the audience interpreted it, nor how the media reported it. Likewise, examining factual inaccuracies and blatantly offensive statements, although important for study and civil society, are outside the scope of this project.

Trump and his presidential announcement speech, outlining the basic arguments of the speech and its similarities and differences with the prosperity gospel framework. Finally, the conclusion and implications of the findings are discussed.

Literature Review: Presidential Announcement Speeches

The official beginning of a presidential campaign is the presidential announcement speech. In this speech, candidates can declare their intent to run for President, the goals of their potential administration, and set the tone of their campaign. This phase is critical for any presidential candidate. The speech may be the candidate's first impression on millions of voters and, far more importantly, draw needed media attention for a chance to increase approval poll numbers and facilitate the achievement of fundraising goals.

Trent and Friedenber (2008) outline four goals of a presidential announcement speech using Bitzer's (1992) theory of rhetorical situation. First, presidential candidates announce their candidacy for president. Second, candidates attempt to discourage other potential candidates from running for president. Third, candidates wish to inform the audience (and the media) why they are running for president. Fourth, candidates outline the core stances of their campaign. The presidential announcement speech sets the tone for a candidate's campaign.

Presidential announcement speeches tend to follow a pattern. Two characteristics of presidential announcement speeches are acclaims and attacks (Benoit, Goode, Whalen, & Pier, 2008). Acclaims are positive comments about the candidate—self-praise—including references to strengths and accomplishments (Benoit et al, 2008). Attacks are negative comments about other candidates, with the intent of diminishing another's reputation or suitability for public office (Benoit et al, 2008). Acclaims have been found to be three times as common as attacks in presidential announcement speeches. As a result, announcement speeches are generally more

positive than negative, focusing on the announcing candidate's strengths instead of attacking opposing candidates (Benoit et al, 2008).

Eventual winners usually have more positive announcement speeches than eventual losers, incentivizing positivity (Benoit et al, 2008). Speeches are typically evenly split between policy and character, focusing more on the major issues of the constituents of the candidate's party (Arbour, 2014; Benoit et al, 2008). These rhetorical norms provide insight into Trump's announcement speech, particularly in combination with understanding of the prosperity gospel.

Overview: The Prosperity Gospel

Michael Souders (2011) defines the prosperity gospel² as a "type of Christian preaching which asserts that the right type of Christian faith and practice will deliver wealth and well-being to believers." Kate Bowler (2013) delineates the term further by distinguishing between "hard prosperity gospel" and "soft prosperity gospel". The former's apex occurred in the 1980s and claimed direct causality between an individual's behavior and his wealth, while the latter grew in popularity through the 1990s, replacing its more literal predecessor with a more modest connection between faith and material wealth, instead promoting self-help with positive thinking³. This essay examines the prosperity gospel as defined by Bowler's term "hard prosperity gospel" and Souders' definition of prosperity gospel.

The prosperity gospel has three markers. First, the theological emphasis that identifies a religious teaching as part of the prosperity gospel is a causal connection between faith in God

² The prosperity gospel is also referred to by the terms prosperity theology, the health and wealth gospel, the gospel of success, or "name it and claim it".

³ Most church or organization's official theological doctrine breaks from a specific definition of prosperity gospel in some way. Furthermore, the term prosperity gospel is often applied as a critique by religious teachers of other religious teachers. Many proponents of the prosperity gospel do not claim to adherents, complicating matters further. This falls into personal religious identification, a tricky, subjective subject. It's best to avoid such self-identification issues, both of adherents opting in and out of a term, by focusing on a particular theological definition over the popular use of the term. For further discussion, see Kate Bowler's discussion in Appendix B of her book *Blessed: A History of the American Prosperity Gospel*.

and success through material wealth. Second, the prosperity gospel's theology is mainly promoted through televangelism⁴. Third, the presenter of the prosperity gospel utilizes an exemplary example, typically him/herself, to demonstrate the gospel's success.

Historically, in the United States, the prosperity gospel derives from Pentecostal and Charismatic Christian⁵ teachings during the Healing Movements of the 1950s. Previously, financial wealth was seen as a deterrent to spiritual development, particularly in the Pentecostal tradition. This began to change as influential figures, particularly E. W. Kenyon and Oral Roberts, started to challenge the necessity of poverty and the believed dangers of abundance. Roberts (2015, Section 1) writes in his book *If You Need Healing Do These Things* that “Jesus is a fountain of life, and whoever turns away from sin so that his soul is unfettered and his faith can be released can receive this *abundant* [emphasis added] life.” The rhetoric began shifting toward an abundance. During the Healing Movements, the emphasis was an abundance of physical healing. Thousands participated in the movement reporting claims of miraculous healings. The movement swept through American Christianity at the same time as Billy Graham's more well-known evangelism tour.

With advancement in communication technology, the prosperity gospel exploded in growth through the use of broadcasting, both radio and, at the time, cutting-edge television. Televangelism, as it is now termed, became a form of religious outreach specifically through television beginning in the 1950s. Oral Roberts was a pioneer in this field, defying traditional religious taboos against “moving pictures” to host the most watched religious show of the 1960s (Robins, 2010, p. 89). The prosperity gospel did not fully develop, with its causal relationship

⁴ At least, the type of prosperity gospel being examined in this thesis.

⁵ The prosperity gospel movement should not be, although commonly is, conflated with the Christian Right, evangelicals, black church theology, or Pentecostal movements. The prosperity gospel certainly overlaps with each of these groups, but is succinctly separate (Bowler, 2013, p. 4).

between faith and wealth until the 1980s.

The prosperity gospel has no central administration, instead being comprised of a large network of loosely connected organizations, churches, and high-profile religious media figures (Bowler, 2013). Thus, it is unfruitful at best and misleading at worst, to attempt to identify specific actors that formalized the theology. Instead, it is more accurate to view the prosperity gospel as developed through a series of loosely connected media figures and their networks, spread most visibly through televangelism, reaching its pinnacle in the late-1980s. Oral Roberts, Pat Robertson, and Kenneth Copeland were large figures in the movement, with hundreds of lesser-known proponents (Bowler, 2013, p. 79).

There are three underlying implications of the prosperity gospel. First, the prosperity gospel views financial wealth as a contract between humans and God. The more one invests in religiously worthy pursuits, such as charity, the more God gives (Bowler, 2013 p. 100). Second, a logical result of the first, wealth is determined by the individual's behavior, with God providing the appropriate award in accordance with the person's faith and effort. Thirdly, it follows from the second point, that wealth can be used as a measurement of success in the person's prior faith and effort.

One famous example is Preacher Mike Murdock, a well-known prosperity gospel televangelist who even attracted the attention of the British comedian John Oliver, who showed a clip of a Murdock sermon during a segment covering the prosperity gospel (Ohlheiser, 2015). In a typical sermon, Murdock shares a personal anecdote. In one story Murdock shared, he donated money by faith and received, causally he claims, a much larger amount of money a few days later. His faith to "sow seeds" by donating money resulted in "harvesting" more money in the future. Thus, he ends his sermon with a call to action for his listeners: have faith and donate

to receive far more wealth in the future.

Murdock illustrates an agreement between God and the individual to grow a financial donation like a planted seed that will sprout and multiply. The individual's wealth is a reflection of his past faith and current faith a prediction of his future wealth. Thus, the wealth one receives tomorrow is a positive reflection on the faith exercised today. Murdock hammers this point home by utilizing himself as an exemplary model: he is so rich, he purchased a plane. With cash. Then, a few weeks later, he bought a plane worth three times the first one. With cash. His life is a testimony to the success of the prosperity gospel.

Another example of the movement was its investment theology around tithing, a Christian-Judeo tradition derived from the Bible that urges adherents to donate a percentage of their wealth to the church, typically 10%. Prosperity gospel proponents believed that investment in the church would be returned 100-fold. Gloria Copeland, an evangelist and wife of Kenneth Copeland, once explained the theology based on Mark 10:29-30 which states,

Jesus said, "Truly, I say to you, there is no one who has left house or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or lands, for my sake and for the gospel, who will not receive a hundredfold now in this time, houses and brothers and sisters and mothers and children and lands, with persecutions, and in the age to come eternal life." (English Standard Version)

Copeland elaborates,

You give \$1 for the Gospel's sake and \$100 belongs to you; give \$10 and receive \$1000; give \$1000 and receive \$100,000 ... Give one airplane and receive one hundred times the value of the airplane. Give one car and the return would furnish you a lifetime of cars. In short, Mark 10:30 is a very good deal. (Bowler, 2013, p. 99)

Consequently, wealth can be determined by the believer's faith reflected through his behavior. To receive the blessings is a sign that your faith was genuine – a successful faith with material rewards to prove it.

The difficulties of this theological precision became apparent overtime. First, the promises of investment were commonly made during giant fundraising campaigns to maintain televangelist ministries. Well-known pastors would preach about the return on investment in God's kingdom, specifically referring donations to his ministry, as a phone-bank center answered calls from viewers to collect donations. Donation progress was shown on the stage with an upward-ticking dollar amount, displaying to viewers how much had been raised for the cause. It's easy to doubt the benevolent motivation behind the theology's presentation.

More troubling for the proponent's theology, what happens when the goal isn't met? Did God not keep his promise? Oral Roberts failed to reach an eight-million dollar fundraising goal for the City of Faith Hospital, which he founded, and retreated to fasting and prayer, claiming he would not eat until the amount was raised or he died. The action was labeled as emotional blackmail. The fundraising goal was eventually met, but the hospital closed anyway two years later in 1989 (Estus & Thornton, 2007).

The pressure on proponents of the prosperity gospel to maintain the image of an exemplary model by demonstrating ever growing prosperity became overwhelming on some. The most infamous scandal occurred between the televangelist couple Jim and Tammy Faye Bakke. Jim and Tammy hosted enormously popular television shows and operated a Christian resort that attracted six million people a year in 1986. In 1987, it was discovered that Jim engaged in an extramarital affair with his church secretary and paid her to remain quiet about it (Where Are They Now?: Jim Bakker, 2010). During this controversy, Jerry Falwell, a fellow

televangelist, took over Bakke's operations and discovered accounting fraud. Jim was convicted and sentenced to 45 years in prison, eventually reduced to eight years. Later, Tina Faye Bakke divorced Jim and revealed serious mental health struggles during their show's prime, including an addiction to pain medication (*Where Are They Now?: Jim Bakker*, 2010). The pressure to continue increasing wealth was severe on both hosts, resulting in reckless activities that damaged the entire televangelism brand.

Additional scandals rocked the reputation of the prosperity gospel theology through highly visible televangelism preachers. Robert Tilton asked listeners to send in prayer requests with cash for his blessing. An undercover investigative journal piece exposed Tilton of throwing away the prayer requests without a blessing while keeping the money (Bender, 2000). In a dramatic showdown, Jimmy Swaggart, a well-known televangelist, exposed fellow televangelist Marvin Gorman of an extramarital affair. Gorman retaliated by releasing information revealing Swaggart was engaging in extramarital affairs as well (King, 1988). Peter Popoff, a self-proclaimed healer, became famous for revealing personal details about audience members through, he claimed, divine revelation. However, an investigation, that included former magician James Randi, exposed the use of a wireless receiver Popoff used. His wife fed him information about attendees based off filled out prayer cards and planted aids in the audience who gathered information about attendees through conversation. His ministry declared bankruptcy the following year in 1987 (Peterson, 2017).

In addition to the movement's internal trouble, external free market forces were putting pressure on televangelism producers. The number of televangelists had increased beyond the capacity of interested viewers, saturating the market, increasing difficulty to raise funds and stand out among the crowd (Hadden, 1993).

The movement greatly slowed in the 1990s, being replaced by the “soft prosperity gospel” promoted by a set of media moguls that innovated beyond broadcasting, including Joel Osteen and Joyce Meyers (Bowler, 2013). The “soft prosperity gospel” dropped the causal connection between faith and material wealth, instead focusing on “therapeutic and down-to-earth Christian self-improvement” (Bowler, 2013, p. 78)⁶. During the prosperity gospel’s rise and fall, a young Manhattan real estate businessman was making a name for himself.

Speech Deliverer: Donald Trump

Donald J. Trump was an established public figure well before his announcement speech. Starting as a real estate businessman, with a degree from Wharton Business School, known for brandishing his name on his real estate projects as he reshaped the New York skyline, Trump capitalized on his financial success to become a known figure in New York City media (Grynbaum, 2016). His rise as a public figure was a mutually beneficial relationship between Trump’s brand and tabloids’ profits. Some journalists even accredited Trump’s juicy stories with keeping the *The New York Post* and *The Daily News* afloat in the 1980s (Grynbaum, 2016). Married three times, involved in major city projects, and always available for an interview, Trump’s life certainly delivered for the New York City tabloid industry. Trump encouraged, even invited, publicity. A journalist was even present for the birth of Trump’s second daughter, Tiffany (Grynbaum, 2016).

In 2004, Trump began hosting *The Apprentice*, lifting his media presence to the next level. The show’s participants would compete on the unscripted show for a coveted job in Trump’s company. At the end of every episode, Trump would eliminate a candidate with the,

⁶ The prosperity gospel hasn’t vanished, however. Jim Bakke has a new show he hosts with his second wife, Peter Popoff and Robert Tilton are common speakers on Black Entertainment Television, and Jim Swaggart still works what’s left of the prosperity gospel televangelism circuit.

now famous, phrase “You’re fired.” The same year, the Public Relations Society of America (PRSA) labeled Donald Trump a public relations master. A keynote speaker at the PRSA’s 2004 National Conference, Trump’s blunt and informal tone offended some members of the audience, but, as Jack O’Dwyer (2004) writes, some “prefer[ed] [Trump’s speech] to the ambiguous business doubletalk which is standard fare at national trade conferences and meetings.” New York Times Architecture columnist Paul Goldberger prophetically wrote in 1988,

Mr. Trump's greatest talent, aside from self-promotion, is in conceptualizing certain projects, in seeing opportunities and moving quickly and unhesitatingly to take advantage of them. He knows bargains, and he knows how to exploit his own name to turn a questionable project into a financial asset. (Goldberger, 1988).

Trump’s abilities shined brightly throughout his announcement speech.

Trump’s Speech in Context

Prior to Trump’s announcement, a slew of fifteen Republicans had already announced their candidacy for the GOP nomination, the largest batch of candidates for a major political party in American history (Linshi, 2015). A legacy candidate was leading the polls, Jeb Bush, reoffering the only surname held by a Republican controlled White House for the past 25 years.

Prior to 2016, Trump had a celebrity relationship with the media, as discussed above, which warrants its own type of coverage that’s a far cry from a politician’s relationship with the media. Trump was a common discussion topic among tabloids, gossip columns, and celebrity news sections. Speculation about Trump entering the race was not taken seriously, even labeled “entertainment” instead of “political” news, by some media outlets (Huffington, 2015).

After all, this was not Trump’s first flirtation with a run. Speculating about running since the 1988 Presidential election, Trump entered the 2000 race on a third-party ticket, but quickly

pulled out after political turmoil grew within the third-party (Weinstein, 2015). For the 2012 presidential election cycle, Trump made media headlines by expressing interest, once again, in a presidential run, releasing a political book *Time to Get Tough*, and delivering a speech at the 2011 Conservative Political Action Conference (MacAskill, 2011; Weinstein, 2015; Hallow, 2011). Indeed, Trump caught the attention of President Barack Obama himself, who made Trump the target of a series of blistering jokes at the 2011 White House Correspondent Dinner, premised on the perceived ludicrously of a Trump presidency (Barbaro, 2011).

In November 2012, after Republican Mitt Romney's loss to incumbent President Obama, Trump filed paperwork to trademark the slogan "Make America Great Again", suggesting a serious interest in the 2016 election. In March of 2015, Trump's campaign began publishing press releases, announcing the hiring of staff in early primary/caucus states and notifying the press of a "huge announcement" planned for June, 16th 2015 (Timm, 2015). Yet, many in the media continued to venture Trump had no intention of running for President, but instead was attracting free media attention by stroking the public's curiosity – like he had done in 2012.

On June, 16th 2015 in New York City Donald J. Trump approached a podium plastered with "TRUMP" and in smaller letters below "Make America Great Again" – a slogan ripped straight out of Reagan's election playbook. Behind him were potently placed American flags, set against a blue backdrop, within a building carrying the keynote speaker's name, Trump Tower. Back in Trump Tower, Trump begins to speak to a cheering crowd, "Wow. Whoa. That is some group of people. Thousands." About fifteen minutes in, Trump announces to the crowd what they have been waiting for, "So ladies and gentlemen...I am officially running for president of the United States, and we are going to make our country great again."

Trump was for real this time. And media coverage exploded. Trump's announcement

speech was the most covered announcement speech in the 2016 Presidential election (Leetaru, 2015). Trump's references to immigration, where he first coined his unofficial slogan "build a wall" and referred to Mexican immigrants as "rapists", gained considerable media attention, mostly via 30-second sound bites that failed to capture the whole of Trump's speech.

Overview of Speech

Trump spends a majority of his speech identifying the negative status quo of the United States. The USA, he argues, is in dire shape. The problems America faces can be separated into the two broad categories of international and domestic issues. International issues mentioned were trade, America's reputation, immigration, lack of security, terrorism, and the war in Iraq. Domestic issues included poor negotiation skills by America's leaders, the lack of a cheerleader, stagnant economic growth, common core, and Obamacare. Toward the end, Trump presents the solution, his election to the presidency will bring success to America, as justified by his wealth.

The substance of the problems America faces is not the main point of Trump's address, despite dedicating a majority of his speech to addressing the problems. Any list of ills could have been discussed. What matters is that things are, as Trump's slogan "Make America Great *Again*" [emphasis mine] implies, not great. This provides flexibility in Trump's talking points, clearly separating him from any particular issue, refocusing his campaign on the ultimate sales pitch: himself.

A brief covering of the issues discussed is still revealing. The problems Trump discusses can be separated into two broad groups, international and domestic issues. International issues include problems that originate from outside the United States, requiring a domestic response. International issues mentioned were trade, America's reputation, immigration, lack of security, terrorism, and the war in Iraq. Domestic issues cover problems that originate within the United

States and included poor negotiation skills by America's leaders, the lack of a cheerleader, stagnant economic growth, and Obamacare.

Trump refers to America's trade deals with multiple countries, including China, Mexico, and Japan. The deals are poorly bargained, he claims, costing American jobs. Trump proposes one specific stance on a policy issue, promising to oppose the Transnational Pacific Partnership agreement being negotiated by the Obama administration due to its poor negotiation. Trump uses multiple analogies to shape his point. In one, he discusses a shipment of undervalued goods too cheap to resist purchasing, a negative expense to American manufacturers. The culprit? China's devaluing of its currency. In another, Trump's friend wants to sell products in China but is blocked by Chinese protectionist policies from entering the market. Trump sums up his view: The United States "has become a dumping ground for everybody else's problems".

On the United States' international reputation, America's "brand", as Trump refers to it, needs a cheerleader. That is, the United States needs someone to talk about how great it is and to promote it.

Trump's brief touch on immigration received a lot of media attention immediately after his speech. Yet, he only references immigration in three parts of the speech. First, Trump infamously refers to Mexican immigrants as "rapists", claiming Mexico was not sending their best people to the United States. He refers to immigration again while criticizing his Republican opponent Jeb Bush for being "weak" on the issue. Finally, Trump dedicates only two sentences to providing a solution to the issue toward the end of his speech: building a wall. Yet, these brief mentions dominated the news cycle.

Immediately after Trump's "rapist" remarks regarding Mexican immigrants, he transitions into discussing terrorism originating from the Middle East. In context, the issue of

immigration is part of a larger concern around security and is not a critical component of Trump's speech. Likewise, Trump's promise to build a wall on the southern border and have Mexico pay for it was a last-minute point in a list of resolutions that took on a life of its own, practically becoming the campaign's slogan.

The final international issue Trump took on was the war in Iraq, criticizing the event. This separated him from other Republican candidates in the field who were hesitant to criticize the actions of the previous Republican president, George W. Bush, the brother of Republican candidate Jeb Bush who was leading in the polls at the time of Trump's speech.

The domestic issues Trump addressed were primarily criticisms of the country's leadership for allowing external crises. The United States was not negotiating as effectively as it could be, allowing trade deals harmful to the United States' interests. Barack Obama, the incumbent president, failed to be a "cheerleader", that is, to build up the American brand.

Trump particularly addressed the economy which he described as stagnant. He expresses skepticism around the official unemployment rate, claiming the real unemployment rate to be significantly higher. The debt of the United States is growing to an unprecedented level and Trump claims economists, a profession he was quick to point out he rarely trusts, were warning of a point of no return. "That's when we become Greece," Trump darkly warns.

Trump touches on two purely domestic issues, Common Core and Obamacare. Common core, an educational initiative to standardize academic expectations across states, was discussed only briefly at the end of Trump's speech as he summarized the main points he sought to communicate to the audience and was primarily used to note a significant difference with fellow GOP candidate Jeb Bush, who supported Common Core.

Trump's discussion of Obamacare is critical, aimed at the incumbent administration.

Obamacare, a moniker for the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act, was signed into law by the Obama administration on March 23rd, 2010. Trump pointed out the high cost of launching a website for the program's operations, claiming he could negotiate a cheaper website and criticized high deductibles on insurance plans. "You have to get hit by a tractor, literally, a tractor, to use it, because the deductibles are so high".

All of the problems outlined in Trump's speech are the result of external forces that are allowed to affect the United States because of lousy public policy negotiating by America's leaders, with the exception of Obamacare – a rare admission of America's fallibility quickly tacked onto the regime Trump wished to succeed. America was a victim. If not from the world than from its incompetent leaders. It needed a rescuer.

The Solution

Well, you need somebody, because politicians are all talk, no action. Nothing's gonna get done. They will not bring us— believe me— to the promised land. They will not."

—Donald Trump, Presidential Announcement Speech

Trump produces a solution: his election as President of the United States of America. He has been a success. He outlines his qualifications as being a good negotiator, a cheerleader and very successful.

"How stupid are our leaders? How stupid are these politicians to allow [trade deficits] to happen? How stupid are they?" Trump's references to his negotiating skills were a constant theme throughout his speech. Trump tied his negotiating ability to the solution of every problem the United States faced. Regarding trade, Trump used a hypothetical story about Ford building a car factory in Mexico instead of the United States. Trump would simply call the CEO of Ford and let him know if he moves the factory to Mexico, there will be a 35% import tax on the

constructed vehicles to enter the United States. The CEO would buckle under the pressure. Even Obamacare, legislation Trump derides, he claims he would have executed more efficiently. The multi-billion dollar site to launch Obamacare? Trump would have made it for a few dollars.

As a cheerleader and brand promoter, Trump promised to make America great again. Its international reputation would suffer no more. Domestically, pride would be restored. Why? Because a truly successful president was needed and Trump had the success.

A Typical Presidential Announcement Speech?

The collective commentary immediately proceeding Trump's speech illustrated his rhetoric as truly unique, that is, different from what is typically expected from a presidential announcement speech. This analysis, I propose, is incorrect. It is true that Trump's rhetoric is unique to his personality, but this is true of any public speaker. I argue Trump's presidential announcement speech contains all the main components the limited research on presidential announcement speeches suggests it should contain, specifically Trent and Friedenbergs' (2008) four intentions of a presidential announcement speech. Consequently, Trump's presidential speech is not an outlier in its content and purpose.

Trent and Friedenbergs (2008) outline four goals of a presidential announcement speech using Bitzer's (1992) theory of rhetorical situation. First, the speech is used as a platform to announce a candidate's presidential run. Indeed, Trump announced his candidacy for President. This was the intention of the speech. Prior to the event, his campaign delivered press releases indicating Trump had a major announcement. The media was speculating Trump would announce his candidacy for President and Trump had an event scheduled in Iowa just a few hours after the announcement (Hafner, 2015). About fifteen minutes into the speech, Trump announces his candidacy, elevating his voice proclaiming "we are going to make our country

great again” as the crowd’s cheers and upbeat background music begins to play. There is no doubt that the intent of Trump’s speech was to announce his candidacy for President of the United States.

Second, candidates attempt to discourage other potential candidates from running for president. Trump entered the race later than most of the other candidates, so he primarily focused on attacking other candidates who had already declared intention to run. He made multiple backhanded references to his colleagues, claiming other candidates had solicited his support prior to himself running, but doubted their abilities, presenting how poorly his opponent’s announcement speeches went as evidence. “They didn’t know the air-conditioner didn’t work. ... They didn’t know the room was too big ... How are they going to beat ISIS?” Trump took special attention to his most seasoned opponent, Jeb Bush. “I don’t see how [Jeb Bush] can possibly get the nomination,” Trump wondered, listing his faults as being weak on immigration and supporting Common Core. “How the hell can you vote for this guy?”

Third, Trump informed the audience – very clearly – why he was running for President. He was a successful person and wanted to prove it (see “Trump’s Argument Justification for his Success: Wealth” section for further discussion). Trump claimed he could make America great again.

The fourth and final trait of Trent and Friedenbergs’ test is Trump announcing the core planks of his platform. Trump promises to tackle the issue of immigration, proposing the construction of a wall on the U.S.’s southern border, a constant theme throughout his campaign, to fight terrorism (especially ISIS), negotiate favorable trading deals for the U.S., oppose the war in Iraq, create jobs, boost the military, and repeal Obamacare. These planks were repeated throughout Trump’s primary campaign.

In addition, Benoit et al (2008) mention acclaims and attacks as necessities in any announcement speech, and both were major components of Trump's speech. Specifically, acclaims are more common than attacks, resulting in positive speeches. Trump spent a majority of his speech outlining the negative status quo, yet, personal acclaims and labeling himself as the solution to the problems also filled the speech, providing a glim view of the present with a happy picture of the future with President Trump.

Trump's rhetoric does deviate from expected rhetorical norms in some ways. He has a unique structuring of his rhetorical points that fails to achieve a linear thought process at times. For example, Trump began outlining his opposition to the Trans Pacific Partnership (TPP) for "a number of reasons" and started by stating "number one", but then never followed up with any additional points. Following Trump's speech using a written transcript can be difficult. Yet the speech as presented, which can be watched online, does follow a structure that makes sense to the listener when watching Trump give the speech himself. This may be a product of Trump's desire to speak "off-the-cuff" instead of relying on heavily pre-transcribed speeches. Trump also deviates from rhetorical norms by choosing to not comply with a certain level of social etiquette and politeness, that is, a "nice norm" described by Lakoff (2005). Trump claims he is nice during the speech, but offers a response that seemingly admits his choice to take a different approach, stating "This is going to be an election that's based on competence, because people are tired of these nice people. And they're tired of being ripped off by everybody in the world." The choice to deviate from the "nice norm" helped establish his overall rhetorical structure, contributing more to his individual uniqueness than a speech that's broadly different from typical presidential announcement speeches. In essence, Trump may be a unique candidate but his speech was not.

Trump's Argument Justification for his Success: Wealth

A presidential candidate's argument that he/she is the answer to the country's problems is not unusual. In fact, it's expected by voters – why else would the candidate be running if he/she can't at least promise to make things better? However, Trump's motivation to run for President and his provided justification for his success are interestingly different, with a striking similarity to the prosperity gospel. Regarding Trump's motivation to run, Trump explains:

But they all said, a lot of the pundits on television, 'Well, Donald will never run, and one of the main reasons is he's private and he's probably not as successful as everybody thinks.' So I said to myself, you know, nobody's ever going to know unless I run, because I'm really proud of my success. I really am. (Donald Trump, Presidential Announcement Speech)

The statement is honest, to the point, and terribly overlooked. Trump's motivation to run for President was to show he is successful. Regarding success, right before Trump announced his candidacy, a critical point in the speech, Trump states,

You know, all of my life, I've heard that a truly successful person, a really, really successful person and even modestly successful cannot run for public office. Just can't happen. And yet that's the kind of mindset that you need to make this country great again. (Donald Trump, Presidential Announcement Speech)

The implication is twofold. One, all current individuals holding public office are not even "moderately successful". This is a swipe at Trump's most prominent GOP opponent Jeb Bush, an established policy maker from a family with two former presidents, and the incumbent Obama administration. Second, that Trump is successful and this fact is a liability to his candidacy.

Trump provides evidence of his success through his wealth. "I'm very rich", he bluntly states, keeping the audience in suspense as he explains the details of his assets and liabilities for

several minutes, while holding up a white piece of paper, his financial statement, the only visual aid of the speech. Finally, at the peak buildup of this portion of the speech, Trump culminates by revealing his calculated wealth of billions. He's quick to follow up, pointing out his intention is not to brag, but "to say that that's the kind of thinking our country needs". Billion-dollar thinking. The insinuation is such thinking is successful thinking. This is why Trump is arguing for his qualifications to be President: he's successful, and the proof is in his wealth.

Trump: Secular Prosperity Gospel

Trump's speech meets the three markers of the prosperity gospel (outlined in the section "Overview: The Prosperity Gospel"), with one important modification, the removal of attributing success to God. The first marker of the prosperity gospel is the theological emphasis between faith in God and success measured through material wealth. Trump follows this emphasis, except replacing God with himself as the acting agent within the marker's structure. Trump tells his story,

I started off in a small office with my father in Brooklyn and Queens, and my father said ... "Donald, don't go into Manhattan. That's the big leagues." ... I said, "I gotta go into Manhattan. I gotta build those big buildings. I gotta do it, Dad. I've gotta do it." (Donald Trump, Presidential Announcement Speech)

Indeed, Trump went on to make multiple successful real estate deals. He bucked his dad's advice, and personally made success. In another portion of the speech Trump makes his only reference to God, "I will be the greatest jobs president that God ever created. I tell you that." Trump's one deference to God is that God created him, the agent of success which is, in this example, jobs. Note, it's different from the prosperity gospel, which defers the increase in success as a contractual agreement between God and humans. Here, Trump is the creator of

success, jobs, despite his reference to God. Furthermore, Trump shares a hypothetical scenario of how he would act as president to bring back jobs to the United States. He describes himself as an intervening agent that brings success, by calling a CEO and telling him to move the company's manufacturing plants back to the United States.

The second marker of the prosperity gospel is its promotion through televangelism. As host of *The Apprentice* for over a decade, Trump has a long history with television and understands its power. Within *The Apprentice*, Trump's role is as a mediator between the individual and success, a job with a \$250,000 salary in one of Trump's companies, like the first marker of the prosperity gospel, except replacing God with Trump, as discussed above. In the show, Trump eliminates candidates and chooses the winner, whose reward is working for Trump. Trump began spreading his image as the bearer of success through material wealth the same way the prosperity gospel spread its message as God as the bearer of wealth, through television. In fact, just like between God and the individual, Trump is contractually bound to provide material benefits to the winning contestant. As Trump launched his campaign with his presidential announcement speech, he capitalized on his years of reality T.V. experience and personal brand development of a success bearer already in the public square. The speech's unique structure (discussed above) appears to be broken into snippets and one-liners perfect for prime-time showing. It worked. Portions of Trump's speech were heavily covered by the media immediately following his announcement. Trump, evangelized himself through T.V., just like the prosperity gospel.

The third marker of the prosperity gospel is the use of an exemplary example, typically the speaker, to demonstrate the gospel's success. This is the exact argument Trump uses to justify his success (see "Trump's Argument Justification for his Success: Wealth" section for

further reference). His life is a success. Everything he touches, his speech implies repeatedly, becomes a success. The location of Trump's speech, Trump Tower, even contributes to his point. The venue's symbolism is clear: Trump, a true New Yorker who has, literally, marked the city's skyline, is a great American. Before speaking a word, Trump is priming his audience with his ubiquitous slogan: unlike Trump, America is not great anymore. His campaign slogan literally states it, "Make America Great Again." How can the voter know Trump will deliver? Look at what Trump has already accomplished. Trump uses himself as the exemplary model, just like prosperity gospel proponents.

Trump's secular prosperity gospel has the same three implications as the prosperity gospel. First, the prosperity gospel views financial wealth as a contract between humans and God. The more one invests in religiously worthy pursuits, such as charity, the more God gives. In Trump's secular prosperity gospel, there is an agreement between him and success. His negotiation and cheerleading skills pave the way to success. The more opportunities Trump has, the more success he'll deliver. Second, wealth is determined by the individual's behavior, with God providing the appropriate award in accordance with the person's faith and effort. With Trump, it is up to the individual to allow success for America by voting for Trump. It's an individual behavior with an appropriate reward for the faith and effort. Third, wealth can be used as a measurement of success in the person's prior faith and effort. How can the voter trust Trump's claims? Look at the results in his own life.

Liability of Success and Dual-Identities

However, Trump is correct to point out how his success, as measured through material wealth, also served as a liability. A billionaire media mogul with a serious golfing hobby is an unlikely candidate to appeal to the average Republican primary voter. In addition, he was highly

connected among the political elite – even Hillary Clinton attended his wedding in 2005 (Daly, 2016). Was he really any different than the political elite who caused the problems America faced as described in Trump’s own narrative of the negative status quo?

To address this, Trump engaged in a brilliant game of dual-identities. He turned each criticism into a strength. Trump wasn’t relatable because he was what America should be – great. The very location of Trump’s speech was in a tower named after him. Trump wasn’t claiming to understand his constituents at their level, he was promising to be the deliverer of greatness himself. Consequently, Trump was relatable not as an equal, but as a superior savior.

Trump’s connections to the politically elite showed not only how broken the system was, but that Trump knew how to manipulate it. Who else better to close loopholes than the person who knows where all the loopholes are? He was an insider with special knowledge and an outsider with only the interests of America at heart.

Conclusion and Implications

Trump’s speech doesn’t break from the expected presidential announcement speech markers, as outlined by Trent and Friedenber (2008). Interestingly, Trump utilizes, what I call, a secular prosperity gospel, placing himself as the exemplary model and solution, a bearer of greatness for the voter. His wealth serves as evidence for his success and it’s up to the voter to let him bring success to the country.

The prosperity gospel reached its peak in the 1980s. The constant pressure on its proponents led to accounting fraud, brutal personal rivalries, and, ultimately, the demise of the gospel itself. Does Trump’s secular prosperity gospel face the same fate? Can Trump continue delivering win after win? After Trump’s announcement speech throughout his campaign, the answer appeared to be yes. Trump’s stump speeches made regular use of his past electoral

victories as justification for a win in the next state's election.

The argument's persuasive power took a hit, after winning the general election only by the electoral college, while losing the popular vote. Yet, Trump regularly brings up his electoral victory months after being elected President, with foreign leaders, at a military speech, and even with pastors (Cribb, 2017; Kheel, 2017; Lee, 2017). Rev. Patrick O'Connor and Rev. Scott Black Johnston, both mainline protestant ministers, met with Trump to pray with the newly inducted President Trump. At one point in the meeting, Johnston pointed out a cross viewable from Trump's office, to which Trump responded by commenting on the newly installed bullet-proof windows. "I did very, very well with evangelicals in the polls," Trump mentioned to the pastors (Lee, 2017). The ministers responded by informing Trump they were not evangelicals, but mainline protestants. They didn't care that Trump polled well with evangelicals. The secular prosperity gospel line of reasoning wasn't going to work with them.

Trump has two options: shift his rhetoric away from constant success as justification for his qualifications or continue pushing a narrative of success. The latter didn't hold for prosperity gospel proponents in the 1980s.

In addition, the media failed to present Trump's argument to the public in its entirety. By focusing on Trump's comments around immigration, a minor portion of Trump's speech, the public's view of Trump's rhetorical argument was distorted. Trump wasn't asking for people's vote because of his immigration policies, but because of his success as illustrated through his wealth, an argument he had been priming the public square with through television for over a decade.

Future research can examine whether Trump's primary and general campaign rhetoric followed the secular prosperity gospel argument utilized in Trump's presidential announcement

speech. Considering Trump's emphasis on poll numbers and electoral victories throughout the campaign, there are preliminary grounds to hypothesize Trump's entire campaign followed a secular prosperity gospel line of reasoning. Furthermore, examining how this viewpoint impacts Trump's actions as President would provide tremendous insight into the White House's actions.

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