# John F. Kennedy's Address to the Greater Houston Ministerial Association: A Speech of Apologia

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John F. Kennedy's Address to the Greater Houston Ministerial Association:

### A Speech of Apologia

Depending upon one's background, the word "Catholicism" will conjure different images in one's mind. To some, it may mean a foreign religion, one with elaborate rituals, hierarchy, and incense. To others, it may be a familiar religion, one whose principles guide moral behavior. The public opinion in 1960, however, was very different. During the presidential campaign, Catholicism was thought to signify a threat to religious freedom. For many Americans, it meant an attempt from the Vatican to influence politics. Some, like Gerald Smith, a Protestant minister, asserted that if a Catholic were to be elected President, Protestants would lose their property, become disenfranchised, and even slaughtered. And so, because of no other reason than his family was Catholic, and in spite of the fact that his Catholicism was not in line with the Church's bishops or officials, John Fitzgerald Kennedy entered the 1960 presidential election with the task of neutralizing the issue of his Catholicism in order to be seriously considered for the presidency. Kennedy encountered many obstacles along his campaign, but in choosing the right moment to address the religious issue—an invitation by the Greater Houston Ministerial Association to speak on September 12—and method in which to do so—a speech of self-defense, apologia, which would subtly put the public on the defensive—he not only neutralized the religious issue, but used it to his benefit, ultimately changing public opinion and achieving the presidency.

To better understand the impact of Kennedy's speech of self-defense, this paper will first examine the historical significance of Kennedy's address and why it is useful for communication scholars in particular. These reasons include the success of the address, the role the mass media played in Kennedy's candidacy, and the obstacle itself—public opinion pitted against Kennedy

and his Catholicism—that was overcome. Then the paper will further examine the historical context of Kennedy's address. The rhetorical situation will then be examined, analyzing Kennedy's address with particular themes in mind: exigence, rhetor, and audience. A discussion of the genre criticism of *apologia* will follow, with an analysis of Kennedy's address and its classification of a speech of *apologia*. And finally, a theory of image restoration will be used to gain insight into Kennedy's address and its response to attacks.

#### **Historical Significance**

When examining the address of John F. Kennedy, it is important to understand the rhetoric that the presidency produces. Kennedy was not yet president, but the rhetoric produced was guided by a team that worked together towards a singular purpose: Kennedy achieving the presidency. Although Theodore Sorenson was a prominent ghost-writer in Kennedy's campaign and presidency, the rhetoric produced was tied together by Kennedy determining it to become part of his campaign. Because of the significant number of individuals responsible for the presidency, Campbell and Jamieson state: "[W]e shall treat the presidency as an aggregate of people, as a corporate entity. From that perspective, an administration encompasses more than a single person, the president. In that sense, the presidency is a syndicate generating the actions associated with the head of state, including those deeds done in words. And whoever the author(s) may be, once the president takes authorial responsibility for them, the words become an integral part of that presidency" (11). This is important to keep in mind, because the words that would shape the Kennedy's campaign were the result of a group of people considering the best route to neutralize the Catholic issue and transform it into a tool used to bring about success.

As communication scholars, it is important to understand the success of an address or work to help determine its value. As Campbell and Jamieson state, "we often use generic

analysis to explain generally acknowledged successes or failures" (12). It is known that this was a pivotal moment in Kennedy's campaign because the address was brought forth by the abundant number of attacks against Kennedy. Considering all the tract information published against Kennedy leading up to his address and the election, Jamieson writes: "If judged by the quantity of printed material attacking Kennedy on the issue and the amount of television and radio time purchased to respond, Kennedy's religion was indeed the major issue of the 1960 campaign. The distributors of the anti-Catholic print material and the Fair Campaign practices Committee placed the number of pieces in the tens of millions at a cost of hundreds of thousands of dollars" (136). Kennedy used the address to effectively combat the attacks made; because his address was successful, it was recognized as one of the best tools at Kennedy's disposal. Jamieson writes: "Leonard Reinsch, Kennedy's TV and radio adviser, confirms that more total time was purchased to rebroadcast Kennedy's September 12 performance in Houston than any other single piece of campaign propaganda" (136).

For mass media scholars, this is an important address to examine because of what it had to offer. Kennedy knew that it was going to be worthwhile to televise and rebroadcast, and Halberstam writes that "it became a staple of the campaign, hundreds and hundreds of copies of the film were made and it was shown whole, used for spots, and played and played again, and most significantly, used as a means of advancing him – with Kennedy coming into a given area they could build interest in him this way" (326). Although the address was made during Kennedy's campaign, it had facets of drama that the mass media typically use to appeal to the masses. "The film had what television loved, real drama, real confrontation, and there he was, a real live war hero, walking into the pit and winning. With film like this (which you did not have to show if it had turned out poorly), and with money, you could pick your audience, and you

could show yourself as you wanted to be shown" (326). The address itself and the range of influence provided by the mass media would be the perfect combination for Kennedy to practice Aristotle's definition of rhetoric, the ability to identify the appropriate means of persuasion in a given situation.

A good reason to look at this address is the obstacle that was presented. Kennedy had a good chance of becoming the next president and the party had given him the nomination, but that did not mean that the road to the presidency would from then on be an easy one. In fact, it presented a major barrier that had not been faced in over 30 years since Al Smith dismally lost the presidential election in 1928 and a barrier that has not come up as dramatically as it did in the 1960 campaign. The issue of religion was one that would almost decide the presidential election and Kennedy had many hurdles to overcome. This is one reason why the speech should be explored by communication scholars. Through the power of his words, Kennedy shaped the future of the presidential race and of the nation. His speech visibly performs what Lloyd F. Bitzer described effective and powerful rhetoric could achieve: "In short, rhetoric is a mode of altering reality, not by the direct application of energy to objects, but by the creation of discourse which changes reality through the mediation of thought and action. The rhetor alters reality by bringing into existence a discourse of such a character that the audience, in thought and action, is so engaged that it becomes mediator of change" (60).

With Kennedy's address, the campaign had reached a pivotal moment in the nation's history. Robert V. Friedenberg, examined Kennedy's address and writes that "the 1960 campaign was noteworthy for a host of reasons. Certainly one of them was the fact that a Roman Catholic, John F. Kennedy, won the presidency. Kennedy best addressed the issue of his Catholicism in his speech to the Greater Houston Ministerial Association. That speech was

widely utilized during the campaign. It likely helped Kennedy, more than any other single speech he gave, to overcome what some perceived to be his most formidable obstacle to election" (xiv).

The role of the mass media is especially important to note when analyzing the significance of Kennedy's address. As Alger points out, the mass media is a vital link in the political system. He writes that "for the vast majority of the general public, with their attention focused primarily on personal concerns, there is a great physical and psychological distance from political affairs. That distance between political actors and the public (during elections and between them) is bridged by the communications of the mass media" (6). With Kennedy's address, one realizes that the public had been influenced by other tract materials, and there was a need for a different public image that would stick in the minds of the public. In understanding this, scholars can appreciate the importance of the mass media and role it plays in changing the manner in which candidates approach their campaign. As Alger writes, "The mass media are, then, the vital connecting link in the political system today. Indeed, as one observer commented in a speech to the nation's broadcasters: 'The flow of ideas, the capacity to make informed choices, the ability to criticize, all of the assumptions on which political democracy rests, depend largely on communications. And you are the guardians of the most powerful and effective means of communication ever designed.' That observer was President John F. Kennedy" (6).

## **Historical Background**

Prior to 1960, it was unlikely that a Catholic would be nominated for the presidency. This was for a number of reasons, all of which had an effect on Kennedy's campaign. Kennedy was born in 1917 and was merely around the age of 11 when Al Smith, a Catholic, dramatically lost the presidential election. Until Kennedy's campaign, there had been a "Protestant monopoly on the presidency" and "anti-Catholicism had long permeated twentieth-century U.S. liberalism" (Carty 578). Catholics were claimed to have a loyalty not to the United States but to the Roman Catholic Church. In fact, in 1959 former President Harry S. Truman said, "Catholics have a loyalty to a church hierarchy that I don't believe in... You don't want to have anyone in control of the government of the United States who has another loyalty, religious or otherwise." His views were shared by many who were members of groups like Protestant and Other Americans United for Separation of Church and State (POAU). Paul Blanshard, a libertarian and lawyer for POAU, put forward much of the criticism that Kennedy had to combat. Blanshard argued that "Catholic power threatened American democracy and global religious liberty" and viewed the "Catholic Kennedy's presidential ambitions as potentially subversive to U.S. freedoms" (Carty 583). Pamphlets and tracts were produced across the nation, many directly referencing Blanshard's comments.

Because "these publications demanded absolute support for church-state separation, which libertarians believed no Catholic could honestly provide," (Carty 590) another highly contentious issue was the idea of the Vatican having a say in American politics through a Catholic president. The attacks against Kennedy's Catholicism also reached preposterous conclusions. Gerald Smith, a conservative Protestant minister, spent many resources to spread messages that argued that "a vote for a Catholic was a vote for the pope, that to circumvent oaths to which they could not in good conscience swear, Catholics appended secret reservations that invalidated the oaths, that Kennedy would institute Catholicism as a state religion, and—more extreme still—that, if Kennedy were elected, Protestants would be robbed of their property, disenfranchised, and slaughtered" (Jamieson 128).

Almost all accusations against Kennedy came from behind a filter that saw Catholic leaders as impossible to act without receiving pressure from the Vatican, and there were also those who believed that there was an alleged different Catholic perception of church-state separation. As Jamieson writes: "Ockenga argued that Kennedy's alleged insistence on the church-state separation was analogous to Nikita Khrushchev's advocacy of world peace during the Soviet premier's tour of the United states in 1959. Just as the Communist interpretation of world peace differed from that of the free world, so did the Catholic perception of church-state separation deviate from the Protestant view" (161).

While some of these attacks may seem ridiculous, the truth of the matter is that it is an audience's *perception* of the truth of the facts they believe that matters most. As Alger writes: "If we are to understand people's opinions and their ultimate behavior, and the related question of how they respond to political communications through the media, we must understand what people believe, factually correct or otherwise" (18). This determined the problems and obstacles along Kennedy's road to the presidency—there was always going to be the anti-Catholic voice that spoke of the unmitigated evils and unfounded accusations of problems associated with Catholicism. Public opinion was the Goliath that Kennedy was going to defeat, but instead of a sling and a stone, Kennedy used his understanding of the values of public opinion – he capitalized on the search for justice by framing himself as the candidate for which whose vote meant religious tolerance. And as Alger points out, "values are just as crucial to be aware of in an analysis of public opinion and political behavior. It is especially important to be aware of them when analyzing political communication through the mass media" (9).

In September, Kennedy decided to accept the invitation from the Greater Houston

Ministerial Association to speak to Protestant ministers. Although Kennedy had stated his views

on previous occasions, this event was noteworthy because of its proximity to the national election and the fact that Kennedy was able to speak for all those who had been oppressed by religious intolerance. This address significantly changed the way that many Americans viewed Kennedy, his policies, and his religion. Although the address was specifically to Protestant ministers, people across the nation were listening. "In a statement released the same day...several Protestant, Catholic, and Jewish leaders-including some who had earlier questioned Kennedy on religious grounds and had been highly critical of the Catholic Church-called for tolerance of religious differences" (Carty 596).

## **Kennedy and the Rhetorical Situation**

Genre criticism comes from the idea that human beings interact in similar ways to similar situations presented to them over the course of time. Certain types of speech have similar characteristics in accordance to the situation that calls for its existence. Lloyd F. Bitzer clearly helped produce ideas for generic criticism when he wrote, "From day to day, year to year, comparable situations occur, prompting comparable responses; hence rhetorical forms are born and a special vocabulary, grammar, and style are established" (13). The genre of apologia, a speech of self-defense, is unlike other types of speech in the sense that it has been part of human language for centuries, and not a type of rhetoric that has been brought to existence through contemporary movements.

Other scholars have expanded on Bitzer's ideas, and have explained that rhetorical studies emphasize "contingency and choice rather than predictability and control. According to this view, the rhetor (speaker or writer) makes choices, with an audience in mind, about the best way to achieve his or her goals in the context of a specific situation. Those choices—about such matter as argument selection, framing, phrasing, evidence, organization, and style, as well as

about staging, choreography, and other aspects of the presidential performance—are embodied in the text that the rhetor composes and the context in which it is delivered. An audience, also influenced by context, perceives this text, interprets it, participates thereby in determining what it means, and is affected by it' (Zarefsky 608-9). To better understand the implications of rhetorical studies, especially the rhetorical situation, when analyzing Kennedy's address, it is best to turn to Keith Grant-Davie.

While Bitzer was the first to develop the study of the rhetorical situation—of which the most important ideas include exigence, audience, and constraints—other scholars have expanded on his research to deepen the understanding of rhetorical situations. Bitzer explains that exigence is required for the rhetorical situation because "rhetorical discourse comes into existence as a response to a situation, in the same sense that an answer comes into existence in response to a question, or a solution in response to a problem" (5) and that "any exigence is an imperfection marked by urgency; it is a defect, an obstacle, something waiting to be done, a thing which is other than it should be," (6); but Keith Grant-Davie expands the idea of exigence to give scholars more insight into rhetorical situations. For a fuller understanding of exigence, Grant-Davie asks three questions: What is the discourse about? Why is the discourse needed? And what is the discourse trying to accomplish?

When asking what the discourse is about, one should look at the documents or the discourse that is calling forth the rhetor's response at a deeper, even abstract level. Grant-Davie writes that "what the discourse is about becomes a more interesting and important question, and a source of exigence, if asked at more abstract levels – in other words, if the question becomes 'What fundamental issues are represented by the topic of the discourse?' or 'What values are at stake?'" (267). This invites scholars to examine Kennedy's address in ways that plumb the

depths of its meanings and importance—instead of the address being the result of an invitation to speak, there are values of tolerance and religious freedom at stake. Grant-Davie touches on some of these themes as he explains that "political speeches often use specific topics to represent larger, more enduring issues such as questions of civil rights, public safety, free enterprise, constitutionality, separation of church and state, morality, family values, progress, equality, fairness, and so forth. These larger issues, values, or principles motivate people and can be invoked to lead audiences in certain direction on more specific topics" (267). This is evident in Kennedy's address, as the idea of separation of church and state was a major issue in the campaign and road to the presidency. More knowledge is gained when asking what the address is at a deeper and abstract level.

To better understand exigence, we must as why the discourse is needed, "what has prompted the discourse, and why *now* is the right time for it to be delivered" (Grant-Davie 268). The religious issue kept making its way into all aspects of Kennedy's campaign, and while Kennedy had addressed it before, the topic was too great of a concern in the eyes of the public to let it be dismissed or settle quickly and quietly. Exigence, Grant-Davie writes, "may have been created by events that precede the discourse and act as a catalyst for it; and the timing of the discourse may also have been triggered by an occasion, such as an invitation to speak." This was the case for Kennedy. His address was needed at that particular time in his campaign, and the Greater Houston Ministerial Association provided the very outlet Kennedy needed. Grant-Davie also writes that one must ask "why the issues are important and why the questions it raises really need to be resolved. The answer to this question may be that the issues are intrinsically important, perhaps for moral reasons. Alternatively, the answer may lie in the situation's implications. Exigence may result not from what has already happened but from something that

is about to happen, or from something that might happen if action is not taken," (268). When asking why the discourse was needed, it is important to consider how the public opinion was against Kennedy, in terms of his Catholicism, and that this had to be overcome. But Kennedy also pointed out that if this mindset that prompted discrimination were to dominate the American people, then the nation itself would be "the loser," not giving great leaders opportunities because of their religion. These were the implications and possible failures that the America would face.

The last question to consider in regards to exigence is what is the discourse trying to accomplish? Although he wrote in general terms, Grant-Davie's explanation provides insight that may seem specifically related to the Kennedy address. He asked, "What are the goals of the discourse? How is the audience supposed to react to the discourse? ... The rhetor's agenda may also include primary and secondary objectives, some of which might not be stated in the discourse. The immediate objective of a presidential campaign speech might be to rebut accusations made by a rival, while a secondary objective might be to clarify the candidate's stance on one of the issues or help shape his image, and the broader objective would be to persuade the audience to vote for the candidate when the time comes" (269). This was exactly the objective of Kennedy's address – while he was invited to speak to a specific audience and used it as a chance to refute the attacks made against him, Kennedy knew the reach and scope of the secondary audience, all who would hear or watch the address and its rebroadcasts. It was a pivotal moment in the campaign that would be used to his advantage if Kennedy succeeded in getting the public to view him favorably and as the candidate to vote for. In resolving these issues and understanding what the discourse was trying to accomplish, one can better understand the exigence prompting Kennedy's address.

Bitzer's idea of the role of the rhetor in the rhetorical situation is also expanded. Grant-Davie includes rhetors as part of the rhetorical situation before the discourse is produced (unlike Bitzer's understanding of the rhetor) because he states that "rhetors are as much constituents of their rhetorical situations as are their audiences. Their roles, like those of audiences, are partly predetermined but usually open to some definition or redefinition. Rhetors need to consider who they are in a particular situation and be aware that identity may vary from situation to situation" (269). In other words, Kennedy was fully aware of how the public viewed him and his Catholicism, and in that light he played a huge role in the rhetorical situation by considering what address would be best. When it came to envisioning Kennedy's presidency, many Americans had perceived threats against their freedom because of his religion. Although some of these threats were unfounded, their imagined consequence produced a great perceived threat. Grant-Davie writes that a rhetor's ethos "will depend on what [the audience] know and think of the rhetor's past actions, so the 'real' or 'historical' author is not a stable 'foundation' identity but depends partly on the audience in a particular rhetorical situation. Like exigence, then, audience can influence the identity of the rhetor" (270). The Catholicism that Kennedy had lived was part of the past that the audience saw, and their misinterpretation led to a faulty "foundation identity." Kennedy had this in mind when giving his address. This was also evidenced when Kennedy brought attention to the fact that he had fought in the Pacific, and that his brother had died in military service, and that "no one suggested then that we had a divided loyalty." He took part of the past that he knew the audience was aware of, and used it to add significance to that aspect of his character.

When understanding the rhetor's ethos, Kennedy was in a very peculiar situation. He had to deal with his Catholicism in a way that demonstrated integrity and unwavering values, and yet

could not completely abandon it when it might have proved useful to his campaign. Integrity helps a rhetor develop ethos because it is a "measure of consistency they take from situation to situation instead of putting on a completely new mask to suit the needs of every new audience and situation" (270). This was evident when Kennedy decided to stick with his Catholicism, and Jamieson writes that this integrity might not just have been for the purpose of ethos, but instead it was for politics and votes. "Of course, in tackling the issue of religion, Kennedy could have argued, with some justification, that his baptism as Catholic was an accident of birth and that he was well grounded neither in his church's history nor in its doctrine and hence unlikely to be shackled by either. But Kennedy would not make these arguments. Early on in the campaign, the staff had defined drawing back the Catholic democrats who had bolted to Ike in 1956 as a necessary part of winning. If he were to do so, Kennedy could not begin by spurning the Catholic religion he and they shared" (125).

Audience is very important to consider in the rhetorical situation. Douglas Park expands Bitzer's idea of audience by writing that its meaning goes in two distinct directions: "one toward actual people external to a text, the audience whom the writer must accommodate; the other towards the text itself and the audience implied there, a set of suggested or evoked attitudes, interests, reactions, conditions of knowledge which may or may not fit with the qualities of actual readers or listeners" (249). Kennedy was aware of this and was able to create an address that would be effective in producing a certain effect in the Greater Houston Ministerial Association, but also an address that would help achieve significant change in how all members of the audience who would eventually hear his address viewed Kennedy and his Catholicism. Although Kennedy would not abandon his Catholicism, he was sure to distinguish it from misconceptions of how it would affect his presidency, and this affected how he presented

himself, stating that "contrary to common newspaper usage, I am not the Catholic candidate for President. I am the Democratic party's candidate for President who happens also to be a Catholic." Grant-Davie writes that "rhetors' conceptions of audiences may lead them to create new roles for themselves—or adapt existing roles—to address those audiences. Rhetors may invite audiences to accept new identities for themselves, offering readers a vision not of who they are but of who they could be. Readers who begin the discourse in one role may find themselves persuaded to adopt a new role, or they may refuse the roles suggested by the discourse" (271). This was Kennedy's intent, and one that he accomplished.

Zarefsky has identified four ways in which a president can exercise their power of definition, and they important to consider while studying Kennedy's address. The first way a president can exercise their power of definition is by creating associations with other terms, expanding the meaning of a term to cover the new case at hand. The second is by dissociation, breaking a concept into parts in order to identify one's proposal with the more favored part. The third by identifying a situation with one or more *condensations symbols*—these are symbols which designate no clear referent but 'condense' a host of different meanings and connotations that otherwise might diverge. They are particularly useful in defining an ambiguous situation because people can highlight different aspects of the symbol yet reach the same conclusion. And the fourth way presidents exercise power of definition is by framing, shifting, postulating a different frame of reference from one in which the subject normally is viewed. The effect is that people see the things "in a different light" and their attitudes about it therefore change (612-3).

These ways of exercising power of definition can be seen in Kennedy's addresses.

Kennedy had to make the decision to raise the issue of religion and, White writes, during the primaries, Kennedy's decision was clear—attack the issue head on. "Whether out of conviction

or out of tactics, no sounder Kennedy decision could have been made. Two Democratic candidates were appealing to the commonalty of the Democratic Party; once the issue could be made one of tolerance or intolerance, Hubert Humphrey was hung. No one could prove to his own conscience that by voting for Humphrey he was displaying tolerance. Yet any man, indecisive in mind on the Presidency, could prove that he was at least tolerant by voting for Jack Kennedy" (107). This is clear in Kennedy's address in Houston as well. The condensation symbol of religious tolerance ("I believe in an America where religious intolerance will someday end"), separating himself from the misconceptions people associated with him and his Catholicism ("I do not speak for my church on public matters; and the church does not speak for me"), and portraying himself as the Democratic candidate, not the Catholic candidate, these were all embodied in Kennedy's address and show his use of exercising power over definition.

#### Genre Criticism—Apologia

The genre criticism of *apologia* is also an element that should be considered when understanding the value contained in Kennedy's address. When specifically looking at Kennedy's address, Halford Ross Ryan explored the criticism of other scholars regarding the aspect of self-defense given by Kennedy.

"David Henry holds that Senator John Kennedy's famous speech at Houston, Texas, in 1960 was built upon themes of *apologia* that were developed from earlier exchanges on the Catholic issue. In addition to detailing Kennedy's grace, wit, and intelligence, in surmounting powerful Protestant accusations against his Catholicism, Henry also demonstrates another major critical finding that follows. Second, Henry and several writers, working independently of one another, conclude that the time-worn military aphorism, the best defense is a good offense, makes manifest sense in apologetic

discourse...[A] substantial part of Kennedy's success at Houston, and in his earlier exchanges on the Catholic issue, was a function of his rhetorical strategy to merge accusation with *apologia*. JFK redefined the issue in terms of religious tolerance and separation of church and state, and then skillfully portrayed his accusers as violators of Article VI of the Constitution that forbade a religious test for officeholders" ("Oratorical Encounters" xxiv)

These are some of the important aspects of Kennedy's address that should be brought to mind by communication scholars. Not only will the examination of Kennedy's address be beneficial to those who study rhetoric and communication but to all those who hold a civic responsibility to fully understand the speeches that produce a significant change in the American public.

In recent decades faith and religion have played a greater role in politics, with occurrences such as President George W. Bush stating Jesus Christ as his favorite philosopher. By examining Kennedy's address closely, readers are able to understand what led the presidential hopeful to claim that he believed in an America where "the separation of church and state is absolute" and how this idea is still relevant today. This paper will examine Kennedy's address and determine if it successful in fulfilling the required characteristics of the genre of *apologia*, a speech of self-defense, and also look at a theory of image restoration. This will give insight into the responses political candidates make regarding their faith and its role in politics and whether responses are made due to self-defense or mere revelations of the speaker's faith. First I will give a description of the generic criticism of *apologia*, followed by a theory of image restoration. Then I will describe Kennedy's address and the context and follow with an analysis of the address using the aforementioned methods.

### **Four Factors of Apologia**

The generic criticism of *apologia* was created by B.L. Ware and Wil A. Linkugel who claim there are four factors of verbal self-defense: denial, bolstering, differentiation, and transcendence. The first two factors, denial and bolstering, are reformative while the second two, differentiation and transcendence, are transformative. *Denial* is easy enough to understand; it is when a speaker denies "alleged facts, sentiments, objects, or relationship" (419). The speaker is limited in what they can deny by what is known by the audience. Denial is not only limited to specific action but can expand to a denial of intent. *Bolstering* is somewhat like the opposite of denial in that the speaker seeks to identify himself with something good. The speaker does not necessarily remove the situation they are currently in. Rather, they try to bring to mind another situation they are in that the audience feels positive towards. These two factors, Ware and Linkugel claim, are *reformative*, they do not change the meaning of the situation and arguments.

Differentiation and transcendence, the other two factors, however, are *transformative* because they do seek to change meanings. *Differentiation* entails taking a component of the argument made against the speaker and taking it out of its broad context to view it in a different manner. If the new meaning is significantly different and positive, this helps the audience see the particular argument as favorable. The last factor Ware and Linkugel describe is *transcendence*. This factor uses strategies that help associate an argument against the speaker with a bigger issue that the audience may not see.

Ryan described *apologia* as a component of a certain speech set, one that included accusation and defense. The element that gives life to the rhetorical situation is the accuser and the accuser can create the situation based on two things: policy or character.

"The accuser is the affirmer or the rhetorical prime-mover in the speech set. The accuser perceives an evil or an exigence, he is motivated to expose it, and the rhetorical response to that motivation is a *kategoria*. An accusation always begins with, but is not necessarily limited to, the accusee's policy, a term I use to denote a wide range of actions or practices: vice, theft, sexual misconduct, libel, treason, illegal activities, etc....While the accuser may make an accusation based on policy or character, it is quite possible that the two ideas overlap one another. And even though the kategoria can deal specifically with policy, the *apologia* given in response may be of character ("Kategoria and Apologia" 256-7).

Also relevant to the analysis of Kennedy's address is how Ryan deals with the time frames in which accusations are made. "One should note that while most accusations against policy deal with past actions (like Senator Nixon's campaign fund and MacArthur's refusal to obey orders) or with continuing practice (like the media's unfavorable coverage of President Nixon's Viet Nam war policies), some accusations can deal with a future policy before it is actually practiced" ("Kategoria and Apologia" 256).

This analysis need not resemble others because while the similarities are important to consider, not all must taken into account. As Campbell and Jamieson write: "Although generic analysis emphasizes similarities, generic critics are not interested in any and every similarity. Rather, they are interested in those similarities that make works rhetorically absorbing and consequential... A critical use of genre operates pragmatically to consider ends, that is, the functions or purposes of discourse, and means, the strategies of language and argument through which such rhetorical ends can be achieved. In short, generic analysis studies the links between function and form" (8). This analysis will take into account the forms and

manners in which Kennedy's addressed achieved its end, changing the public's view on his Catholicism as a barrier to the presidency and leaving the audience with a significantly changed perception that Kennedy was the candidate for whom a vote meant religious tolerance.

There are also two types of evaluations from a generic perspective. Through this type of criticism, the scholar is equipped with a set of guidelines to analyze the artifact. As Campbell and Jamieson write: "[Generic criticism] empowers a critic to ask how well an individual work is adapted to achieve its ends, a concern analogous to considering the performance rules for kinds of linguistic acts, for example, issuing a command or asking a question" (12). This is where the genre criticism of *apologia* is useful—it helps the scholar to understand the ways in which Kennedy employed tools of self-defense, and how he was to change perceptions due to the nature of his address and the arguments he engaged. But the second type of evaluation is just as important to consider, because it asks the critic to find the deeper reasons why certain addresses and discourse are remembered for their greatness. "In addition, a generic perspective facilitates identification of outstanding examples of a given type, messages that not only fulfill generic functions, but do so in innovative and memorable ways, ways that render them unique rhetorical acts with the power to initiate generic change and to facilitate institutional flexibility" (Campbell and Jamieson 12).

As mentioned earlier, Kennedy's address was significant in the effects it produced, but it is notable to this day, not just for the effects of the past, but for how it embodies values that America will always identify itself with and long to promote. Because of the position Kennedy had been in, his campaign and the manner in which he handled the challenges gave him an advantage that would prove beneficial to the end. In an earlier exchange with Franklin Roosevelt junior where Kennedy addressed the religion issue, Kennedy "demonstrated that he did not need

to clear his statements with either Cardinal Cushing or the pope and also showed that he could withstand the pressure of scrutiny by skeptics and their stand-in FDR Jr. The tension of the encounters riveted attention and invited identification with Kennedy as the candidate under siege and as the champion of such American virtues as fairness, tolerance, equal opportunity, freedom of religion, and separation of church and state" (Jamieson 126). This was before Kennedy's address to the Greater Houston Ministerial Association, and yet there was already a sense of greatness surrounding Kennedy's responses. With this in mind, it is easy to see why Jamieson wrote that "Kennedy's masterful *apologia* before the Greater Houston Ministerial Association is, in my judgment, the most eloquent speech he made as either candidate or president" (130).

#### **Apologia Analysis**

The first factor described by Ware and Linkugel in the speech of self-defense is denial. Kennedy had many accusations to acknowledge, one of which included the idea of Catholicism and loyalty. While not explicitly claiming a denial, Kennedy does address the sort of behavior that his opponents were suggesting as well as how it would be wrong for people to place such labels and ideas upon him.

"...This is the kind of America I fought for in the South Pacific, and the kind my brother died for in Europe. No one suggested then that we might have a divided loyalty, that we did not believe in liberty, or that we belonged to a disloyal group that threatened – I quote

- 'the freedoms for which our forefathers died.'"

Kennedy specifically recognized the argument that was being made. This segment of his address attempts to deny the idea that a Catholic would be fragmented in his loyalties. It was an important accusation to confront and Kennedy used the military as the framework for the denial. Would anyone dare accuse a U.S. veteran of being disloyal to the nation, especially one whose

brother sacrificed himself in defending liberty and America? If the accusations would not hold up at the time that Kennedy was in the military, he asks the audience why the accusations should be supported at the time that Kennedy was running for president.

Another specific idea Kennedy had to address was that of the Vatican obtaining influence over American politics. Kennedy's response not only shows an example of denial but of transcendence as well.

I believe in an America that is officially neither Catholic, Protestant, nor Jewish; where no public official either requests or accept instructions on public policy from the Pope, the National Council of Churches or any other ecclesiastical source; where no religious body seeks to impose its will directly or indirectly upon the general populace or the public acts of its officials, and where religious liberty is so indivisible than an act against one church is treated as an act against all.

Although simple enough to understand, let us look at the factor of denial as created by Ware and Linkugel: "Denial consists of the simple disavowal by the speaker of any participation in, relationship to, or positive sentiment toward whatever it is that repels the audience" (419). In this passage, Kennedy specifically denies the claim that as a Catholic he would allow a religious leader like the Pope or any other official to direct his actions. This was one of the main fears in the minds of the Protestant ministers that received Kennedy's speech. Although not all would believe him, Kennedy made it clear that the fear of a Church-ran state was one that he shared. In this statement he conveyed an unambiguous separation between himself and any positive sentiment towards an America that was influenced by religion.

Kennedy concludes the statement with a reference to religious liberty and in doing so engages in the factor of transcendence. Kennedy does two things in that statement. The first is

that in recognizing religious liberty as fundamental to the ideal America, he makes those who criticize his religion not merely attackers of Catholicism but attackers of all those who participate in any organized expression of faith and spirituality, regardless of specific religion. At a gathering of Protestant ministers, Kennedy strikes a chord when he advances this idea.

Secondly, and perhaps more important to Kennedy, he is once again guiding the audience towards a new interpretation of the attacks made against him. In this case, the audience is led toward an interpretation that is less direct and more general. When religious liberty is at stake and the effects are much more broad and far-reaching, the audience is compelled to see Kennedy in a more positive light because he is transformed into the target of religious intolerants, not one who, as the religious intolerants would advocate, seeks to establish religious corruption in America.

Bolstering is another factor that Kennedy uses in his address. Ware and Linkugel mention that "a speaker attempts to identify himself with something viewed favorably by the audience" when he bolsters (420). There is something in Kennedy's character itself that seems to ask the make the audience want to identify him with something favorable, influenced mainly by his dress and persona. Halberstam writes that television "was creating a new role for [Kennedy] as a politician. He was becoming a star. He had, for television and particulary for that era before people became suspicious of glamour, stat quality. The excitement he created on television helped him enormously with print. He was dashing, he had an air of mystery...[The Kennedys] were star-crossed. They were handsome and had handsome wives. Actors and actresses and great athletes and astronauts wanted to be around them" (325). In this way, Kennedy's personality and air time and aspects of his persona that bolster for him.

In a different manner, Kennedy bolsters when he tries to invoke the memory of his past policies which exhibited a clear separation of church and state.

"I ask you tonight... to judge me on the basis of 14 years in the Congress, on my declared

stands against an Ambassador to the Vatican, against unconstitutional aid to parochial schools, and against any boycott of the public schools – which I myself attended."

In this statement, Kennedy is not trying to obliterate from memory any instance of attending a Catholic church. In bringing these previous situations to mind, Kennedy is ultimately leading the audience by the hand to a different frame of mind, to a different situation that must be considered. He should not be judged on the accusations made, but rather should be judged on these positive circumstances that he has been in and that the specific audience, a group of Protestant ministers, agrees with: separation of his politics from the Catholic Church.

Kennedy then generalizes some of the accusations made and a transformative defense, differentiation, is made. He does not dismiss the kategoria completely; instead, while he denies the accusations, he also, and more importantly, points out flaws of the kategoria and again forces the audience to perceive him in a different light.

"And instead of doing this, do not judge me on the basis of these pamphlets and publications we all have seen that carefully select quotations out of context from the statements of Catholic church leaders, usually in other countries, frequently in other centuries, and rarely relevant to any situation here. And always omitting, of course, the statement of the American Bishops in 1948 which strongly endorsed Church-State separation, and which more nearly reflects the views of almost every American Catholic. I do not consider these other quotations binding upon my public acts. Why should you?"

This segment, while appearing directly after an instance of bolstering, is an example of differentiation. In this instance, Kennedy is taking what the audience already knows and creating a new interpretation of the accusations. Because the accusations lack substantial claims against him, Kennedy points out the flaws in the accusation and in doing so differentiates the new interpretation of the events from the old. The audience and anyone listening is supposed to be led towards a new interpretation, one in which Kennedy comes out on top of the now-apparently ignorant and irrelevant accusations made against him.

Another segment of Kennedy's address that should be noted is the one that deals with the nature of the accusations and the factor of transcendence that Kennedy uses in explaining the underlying dangers in the kategoria.

"For while this year it may be a Catholic against whom the finger of suspicion is pointed, in other years it has been—and may someday be again—a Jew, or a Quaker, or a Unitarian, or a Baptist. It was Virginia's harassment of Baptist preachers, for example, that led to Jeffersons's statute of religious freedom. Today, I may be the victim, but tomorrow it may be you—until the whole fabric of our harmonious society is ripped apart at a time of great national peril."

Kennedy presents an unmistakable example of transcendence in this segment of his address. To better understand how he does so, it is important to look at transcendence as defined by Ware and Linkugel: "This factor [transcendence] takes in any strategy which cognitively joins some fact, sentiment, object, or relationship with some larger context within which the audience does not presently view the attribute" (422). Up to this point, the audience is clearly able to identify the accusations made against Kennedy and how they are harmful to his candidacy. However, Kennedy uses this sentiment and makes the case that ultimately it is not he who should be

worried but America. The people of the United States are unable to see the threat that is posed to their way of living that is embodied in the accusations made against Kennedy. Therefore, if Americans are unable to see the wrongs in accusing Kennedy, they will be misguided and eventually responsible for the destruction of "our harmonious society...at a time of great national peril." Kennedy explicitly takes the accusations made against him and unites them with the fate of the nation. The audience is then left with a conscious sense of responsibility for the nation and disgrace if they continue to believe and support the accusations made against Kennedy.

In one section of Kennedy's address he uses a mixture of *apologia* factors, those of denial and bolstering.

"But let me say, with respect to other countries, that I am wholly opposed to the State being used by any religious group, Catholic or Protestant, to compel, prohibit, or prosecute the free exercise of any other religion. And that goes for any persecution, at any time, by anyone, in any country. And I hope that you and I condemn with equal fervor those nations which deny their Presidency to Protestants, and those which deny it to Catholics. And rather than cite the misdeeds of those who differ, I would also cite the record of the Catholic Church in such nations as France and Ireland, and the independence of such statesman as De Gaulle and Adenauer."

In denying the idea that a government should be influenced by religion, the first segment prepares the way for the next factor, where Kennedy bolsters not on his own behalf but on behalf of the Catholic Church. He shows the audience examples of regions whose church and state relationship has been a positive one and is able to do so because his bolstering is on behalf of the Church but he is still able to reap the rewards, a favorable view by the audience.

Before Kennedy ends his speech, he makes use of Ware and Linkugel's first factor of *apologia*, denial. Again he separates himself from any positive attitude of the idea of a state being influenced by religious leaders and he distinctively denies the claim that he would use his office for such a purpose.

"I do not speak for my church on public matters; and the church does not speak for me. Whatever issue may come before me as President, if I should be elected, on birth control, divorce, censorship, gambling or any other subject, I will make my decision in accordance with these views – in accordance with what my conscience tells me to be in the national interest, and without regard to outside religious pressure or dictates. And no power or threat of punishment could cause me to decide otherwise."

Kennedy is no longer hinting towards a conclusion that the audience should try to come to on their own; he is leaving no room for interpretation when makes this statement. Denial, one that is believed by the audience, is one of the most useful defense strategies because the accusations are no longer valid. Kennedy wants to end on a clear and distinct note, the kategoria against his character and policy have no ground.

## **Four Postures of Apologia**

Ware and Linkugel described four postures that an apologist could fall into: absolution, vindication, explanation, and justification. In this case, however, it is hard to classify Kennedy's address as precisely one of these postures. Two of the factors of denial, bolstering, differentiation, and transcendence, usually make up one of the postures but it is clear to see that Kennedy did not necessarily stay within two factors. In fact, his *apologia* is one that exceeds boundaries set by Ware and Linkugel. As mentioned earlier, the address is not merely self-defense but has an element of kategoria under the guise of *apologia*; the accusers become the

accused. Henry writes: "Kennedy's performance at Houston revealed his rhetorical capacity to reshape his listeners' perceptions concerning the roles of accuser and accused" (163). For this reason critics should pay close attention to Kennedy's address. He clearly makes use of the factors of *apologia*, denial, bolstering, differentiation, and transcendence, and is able to convincingly use each factor as successfully as possible. The address effortlessly gets its point across and had an immense effect on the public at the time. His denial of the claims made against him was clear and succinct. His use of bolstering and differentiation are powerful, yet transcendence plays a major role in the address as he transforms the meanings of the claims made against him and develops them into national affairs to consider.

When most critics think of *apologia*, acts of misconduct or scandal usually come to mind. However, as Ryan alleged, kategoria can develop from a fear of future policies or problems that the accuser feels could happen down the road. It is not limited to specific acts that have taken place and a speaker clearing the air. Kennedy's speech shows that very influential *apologias* can be brought to life by the accusations of those who feel something should be said of the problems that will be brought in the future. For this reason scholars should look at artifacts such as Kennedy's address with a critical eye. The genre of *apologia* has been expanded upon by Ryan and others and areas of improvement are always available. The powerful and successful *apologia* made by Kennedy is one that the general public should examine as well. Kennedy's addressed shaped the nation at a crucial period in its history and while some citizens do not see it as their responsibility to critically examine the speeches made by past and present politicians, this criticism hopefully promotes a sense of activism in regards to the role people analyze American rhetoric that produces a significant change in public opinion.

### A Theory of Image Restoration

William Benoit is helpful in understanding the impact of Kennedy's address by looking at a theory of image restoration. The first two things to understand in image restoration are that 1) communication is goal-driven, and that 2) identity maintenance is a key goal of communication. To better understand how and why communication is goal-driven, Benoit writes that "people try to achieve the goals that seem most important to them at the time they act, or to achieve the best mix of the goals that appears possible" (65). Benoit also states that people engage in behavior that will help them achieve their goals and that in certain situations, people devote time and effort to produce goal-producing discourse (66). For identity maintenance, Benoit writes that four elements – limited resources, external events, human error, and conflicting goals – combine to insure that actual or perceived wrong-doing is a recurring feature of human behavior (68).

The vulnerability one experiences from accusations leads to a threat to self-image. Benoit argues that reputation is crucial to restore because "it contributes to a healthy self-image" and because it changes the "influence process" because it negatively affects ethos. Benoit writes that "When our reputation is threatened, we feel compelled to offer explanations, defenses, justifications, rationalizations, apologies, or excuses for our behavior" (70). In a way, this is what Kennedy experienced before giving his address in Houston. In his previous addresses, Kennedy articulated his position on church and state and "in so doing, he defended his character and the policies he advocated in accordance with the dictates of an *apologia*. He simultaneously moved to the offense, however, charging the press with unduly emphasizing religion in the primaries. The tactic foreshadowed the technique that would serve him well in Houston in five

months hence," (Henry 155-6). Kennedy had already had experience in attempting to save face – losing face was not something he could afford in his candidacy.

An attack is comprised of two components: 1) An act occurred which is undesirable, 2) You are responsible for that action (Benoit 71). Although Kennedy believed that his Catholicism would not interfere with his presidency, the audience believed that he would be responsible for the Vatican influencing American politics. Because these two elements of attack were present, and Kennedy recognized that people believed that he was at fault, it was expected of him to employ image restoration discourse.

Benoit writes that when it comes to attacks, the first line of defense is denial. Benoit describes a variant of denial, explaining how some suggest applying guilt to another person. "This strategy may well be more effective than simple denial, for two reasons: First, it provides a target for any ill will the audience may feel, and this ill feeling may be shifted away from the accused. Second, it answers the question that may make the audience hesitate to accept a simple denial: 'Who did it?'" (76). Kennedy employs this strategy when he asks the audience not to judge him "on the basis of these pamphlets and publications we all have seen that carefully select quotations out of context from the statements of Catholic church leaders, usually in other countries, frequently in other centuries, and rarely relevant to any situation here." Kennedy attempts to show the audience that their belief that he would be responsible for a Catholic influence on the presidency is not based on his actions, but instead the blame is placed on the anti-Kennedy voices that had been distributing the defaming pamphlets.

Another line of defense Benoit describes is to evade responsibility. There are four strategies a rhetor can use to evade responsibility, the fourth of which is most relevant to Kennedy's addressing. The first is by suggesting that something else provoked the wrongful

action. A second strategy is pleading lack of information about or control over important factors in the situation. A third strategy is to say accidents led to uncontrollable situations. But the fourth possibility is "for the actor to suggest that performance of the action in question may be justified on the basis of motives or intentions...Here the wrongful act is not denied, yet the audience is asked not to hold the actor fully responsible because it was done with good, rather than evil, intentions. People who do bad while trying to do good are usually not blamed as much as those intend to do bad," (76-7). Kennedy did not deny that he was Catholic and stated that "I do not intend to apologize for these views to my critics of either Catholic or Protestant faith; nor do I intend to disavow either my views or my church in order to win this election." What's more is that Kennedy repeatedly states that his position and policies stem from his conscience and the concern for the national interest – these are the motives behind his actions, and if his accusers are quick to denigrate Kennedy, it is based on nothing but his good intentions.

Reducing offensiveness is another aspect of image restoration that Benoit describes and it incorporates research from many other scholars. It is best to examine the six variants individually to appreciate how Kennedy's address to Houston succeeded in reducing offensiveness.

The first strategy or reducing offensiveness is bolstering, a feature or image restoration previously examined and it is simply strengthening the audience's positive affect for the rhetor, relating positive attributes they posses or positive actions they have performed in the past.

Kennedy does this in a number of ways, as already described. One of these instances is when Kennedy calls to mind how he fought in the South Pacific, and that no one had suggested then that he and his brother who died belonged to a disloyal group that did not respect the freedom that Americans had fought for.

Another strategy of reducing offensiveness is minimization where the rhetor attempts to convince the audience that the negative effects or the act itself are really not as bad as they are perceived to be. When describing the tracts and pamphlets that attempted to harm him, Kennedy addresses them but then dismisses them just as quickly when he says, "I do not consider these other quotations binding upon my public acts. Why should you?"

Differentiation is another way to reduce offensiveness and with this strategy the rhetor attempts to make the bad accusations seem less offensive by distinguishing them from worse actions. Kennedy's biggest fault is being baptized Catholic, and in this sense, he attempts to make others seem as though their religion could be worse by comparison because it leads to religious intolerance while Kennedy continues to reiterate that he condemns "those nations which deny their Presidency to Protestants, and those which deny it to Catholics."

Transcendence is simply placing the act in a different context. To reduce offensiveness, Kennedy states that his Catholicism should not be seen in light of the poor examples of religious tolerance from the Catholic Church. The right context to view his Catholicism, Kennedy argues, is found in "the statement of the American Bishops in 1948 which strongly endorsed Church-State separation and which more nearly reflects the views of almost every American Catholic."

Another way to reduce effectiveness is attacking one's accuser, because if the credibility of the accuser can be reduced, then the damage incurred is also diminished. Kennedy manages to argue that his attackers are the ones who continue to instigate religious intolerance and that if it continues, "then it is the whole nation that will be the loser, in the eyes of Catholics and non-Catholics around the world, in the eyes of history, and in the eyes of our own people." This is a deep attack on the Kennedy's accusers, and frames them in a much worse light than they have framed him.

Compensation is the last strategy to reduce offensiveness in which the accused offers to compensate the victim in a way that will make up for the negative effects. Kennedy does not believe that there are any negative effects of his Catholicism, especially since it would not negatively impact his Presidency. Because of this, all that he has to offer is much more substantial than the negative impacts that might occur. But he especially promises to always serve the country according to his conscience and with the national interest in mind.

Corrective action and mortification are two aspects of image restoration that, while useful to consider, are not applicable because Kennedy's address does not state how he would restore the state of affairs before the supposed misdeed occurred and does not admit wrongdoing and ask for forgiveness because he does not feel he has truly committed a bad deed. This is where it is important to recognize the speech as that of self-defense, but also one that has its own accusations. Henry writes: "Having dealt with both the issues that would likely arise and the tactics for establishing the strongest position, [Kennedy] was prepared to transform a heavily problematic situation into a position of strength. Kennedy converted a defense or *apologia* into accusatory discourse. The issue ultimately became not his Catholicism, but the place of religious tolerance, fairness, and charity in American society. Where the motive of purification might have under-girded pure *apologia*, it is evident that Kennedy's discourse as much aimed to affirm an image of his detractors as to dispel negative perceptions of himself. Both motives merged in a blending of *kategoria* and *apologia* in creating appropriate discourse for the rhetorical situation" (169).

#### Conclusion

Kennedy's success in the campaign demonstrates the success of the pivotal address which would shape the rest of his candidacy. The team surrounding Kennedy recognized the

significance of the address, making it was the single most rebroadcast address of the campaign, and the mass media played a vital role in Kennedy's success. In recognizing the extreme weight of public opinion against Kennedy and his Catholicism, one can appreciate the address in light the attacks. While some of the attacks may seem unfounded, Catholicism has never ceased to garner skepticism and criticism. And yet Kennedy found himself in the perfect position to address the religious issue. Recognizing the possibility to open the door to the presidency, Kennedy knew he would address his Catholicism openly. With votes in mind and the intimidating task of significantly affecting public opinion to achieve the presidency, Kennedy's address—exceptional in its factors of self-defense and the attacks it would produce—was a success and a brilliant example of presidential rhetoric finding the means of persuasion in daunting circumstances.

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