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ABSTRACT

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Religion & Media

The Effect of Age and Background of Religious Broadcasting Executives on Digital Television Implementation

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Abstract

This study sought to investigate whether the personal backgrounds of religious broadcasting executives would affect the timetable for digital implementation at Christian television stations. Results of the study showed a significant difference between religious and secular broadcasters in terms of background and digital implementation. A significant gulf between older and younger religious broadcasters was also discovered, which played an important role in this process.

Background

The move away from traditional analog and toward digital television continues full speed ahead in the United States. According to government timetables, each commercial station should have a digital signal on-air by 2002; the remaining stations should go digital by the following year (Thalheimer, 1998). The FCC has stuck to this schedule, despite serious questions of technical standards, the ability of stations to meet the deadline and most significantly, cost. By almost any estimate, it will cost each individual station between two and seven million dollars to covert to digital technology (Dickson, 1998).

Many of these questions will directly affect Christian television stations, which have traditionally operated with lower budgets and fewer resources than their secular counterparts. There are certainly financial considerations, which would slow or impede these stations in the digital conversion. Kevin Culbertson, formerly with Christian station WCFC-TV in Chicago, said, "It would take many times our revenue just to upgrade the technology. We would have to increase revenue significantly just to tread water" (personal communication, February 9, 1998). But are there other more important factors, which will affect digital implementation for Christian stations? This study sought to investigate those possible factors, focusing on the background, management style and personalities of religious broadcasting executives.

Despite its early involvement with mass communication, organized religion has always had an uneasy relationship with the technology. Religious broadcasters have recognized the importance of the media to reach a bigger audience, but they also worry about what effect the media will have on the message. Religious media scholar Clifford Christians writes, "Over the longer term, the success of evangelical mass communication may destroy the cultural fabric of the local church" (as cited in Schultze, 1990, p. 353). This concern has not abated with the improvements in technology. Discussing the Internet, religious media writer Douglas Groothuis commented, "...(it) lacks the presence at the heart of biblical fellowship, discipleship and worship. It may well be the way of madness" (Kellner, 1997, p. 55). Many Christian broadcasting executives and decision-makers share this mistrust. According to Jerry Rose (1998, p. 44), former owner of WCFC-TV, " ... emphasis on technology is unscriptural and dangerous. Technology is simply a delivery system. It cannot possess sacred attributes."

Men and women like Rose, and other decision-makers in religious broadcasting, are thought to share these beliefs because of similarities in background and attitude. Christian media scholar Quentin Schultze writes, "The Christian broadcasting ministry has been the slowest to get involved in digital forms. The people running Christian stations are generally older people who did not grow up with computers" (Calian 1995, p. 101). If this is true, it could have serious repercussions on the digital conversion at Christian stations. Everett Rogers (1962, p. 171) writes that similar types of groups, "... tend to be suspicious of innovations, innovators and change agents. Their advanced age and tradition slows the adoption process to a crawl."

Thus, this study sought to investigate how the age, background and personality of religious broadcasters affects their view of technology, and specifically how this will affect digital implementation.

Methodology

A mail survey was sent to religious and secular broadcasting executives across the country. Secular broadcasters were chosen so a comparison could be made between the two groups. Because of the increasing wave of consolidation in the industry, surveys were sent to group ownerships along with individual stations. It was believed that this would help target the most influential decision-makers in the industry. After an initial slow response from the religious

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group, follow-ups were conducted by mail and phone. The majority of responses came from company presidents, vice presidents, CEOs and general managers.

The main section of the survey included multiple-choice questions designed to assess personal feelings and management attitudes about digital technology and technology in general. The questions were designed to discover whether religious broadcasters 'mistrust' technology more than their secular counterparts and what possible impact that might have on digital implementation. The second part of the survey collected demographic data about the broadcasting executives, including age, title, experience and political views. This information was used not only for a direct comparison, but to assess personal characteristics that could apply to the study.

Response to the survey was about even. Executives representing 161 secular stations responded. This represented 105 of the 211 television markets (49.8%) and almost 47 million television households (48.6% of the national total). Religious broadcasters representing 116 stations responded, which is 46.4% of the total religious broadcasting population. This represents 66 television markets (31.3%) and 37.7 million television households (39.1% of the national total).

It was decided to analyze the data based on number of survey responses, rather than the number of stations represented. One religious group owner represented 50 stations, and weighting the responses this way would have unfairly skewed the results.

Results

Going strictly by percentages, the surveys support the idea that religious broadcasters are older, more traditional and more conservative as a group than secular decision-makers. Their responses to some of the survey questions can be seen in table 1:

Table 1

Percentage comparison of secular and religious broadcasting executives

Variable	Secular	Religious
'Ahead or on' technology curve	93.4%	72.4%
Personally enthusiastic about technology	65.5%	46.7%
Politically and socially conservative	53.3%	70.3%
Converting to digital in a year or less	41.4%	5.9%

This last figure is the most startling difference between religious and secular stations. When measured in a chi square:

$$\chi^2 = 11.4 \text{ (df} = 1, p < .01)$$

This indicates a strong statistical difference between religious and secular broadcasters concerning the timetable for digital implementation.

There are some statistical differences in the demographic information for the two groups. The mean age for secular broadcasting executives was 48.53 years and the group had an average of 16.43 years in broadcasting management. For the religious group, the mean age was 49.39 years, with an average of 13.83 years in broadcasting management. Such differences were not considered statistically significant.

But what variables could account for the statistical differences noted in table one? The most obvious possibilities are the financial and regulatory restraints placed upon religious stations. Certainly, as Armstrong (1979, p. 138) notes, "Christian programs and stations operate on budgets that seem impossibly low to other communication professionals." Many religious stations are non-commercial or non-profit, and depend mainly on viewer contributions for funding.

Many religious stations also face a regulatory burden because of their status as low-power stations (LPTV). Nearly 75% of all Christian stations operate as LPTV and such stations must give precedence to full-power operations for coveted digital spectrum space. Wiley (1998, p. 36) notes that "... (current) digital rules do not change the secondary status of LPTV. (Many stations) must go off the air in the near future." Legislation to even the playing field between low-and full-power stations for digital conversion remains stuck in Congress. Several survey respondents said their biggest obstacle is 'confusion at the FCC,' or 'the government.'

Group ownership might also play a significant role. Large organizations can more easily weather the financial and technological difficulties associated with the digital transfer. Fortune Brayfield works as a general manager for Tri-State Christian Television, which owns 13 stations in seven states. "We're bigger and stronger," she said, "and we'll make (the digital conversion) with corporate help" (personal communication, October 20, 1997).

Certainly, each of these considerations will have an impact. But consider what happens when each one is measured against the timetable for digital conversion in a chi square:

Table 2

Chi square results of variables compared to digital transfer timetable

Variable	χ^2
Strong v. weak financial position	0.22
LPTV v. HPTV	1.15
Consolidated v. individually owned	2.04

Note. df = 1, p > .01.

That is, none of the variables had a significant impact on the digital conversion timetable, when considered by themselves. Consolidation appeared to have the strongest effect, but still not statistically significant.

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Having acknowledged the impact of financial, regulatory and corporate considerations, what other variables could affect digital implementation among religious broadcasters? Interesting observations were made when the respondents were broken down into two distinct groups, based on age. These groups included those broadcasters 49 years old or younger, and those 50 years or older. When compared with similar breakdowns for secular broadcasters, the following observations were noted in table 3:

Table 3

Comparison of secular and religious broadcasters by age

Variable	Secular/49 or younger	Secular/50 or older
Average age	42.3	55.7
Average management experience	12.5	20.7
Average number of technology products in home	6.19	6.17
Variable	Religious/49 or younger	Religious/50 or older
Average age	39.1	63.1
Average management experience	8.9	20.0
Average number of technology products in home	6.5	5.2

Note. Age and experience measured in years. Technology products measured in seven categories: VCRs, cell phones, personal computers, stereos, video games, Internet, and e-mail.

For the secular broadcasters, the differences between the groups were not that large; only 13 years in age and eight years in experience. The two groups had virtually the same amount of technological products in their home. In addition, there are no statistically significant differences between these age groups in terms of social/political views, enthusiasm for technology or the timetable for digital implementation.

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The differences among religious groups are much more pronounced. The age difference is almost 25 years and the difference in experience more than double. The younger religious group is much more likely to use technological products at home. And perhaps most important, there is a significant statistical difference between the two religious groups in terms of the timetable for digital implementation:

$$\chi^2 = 5.13 \quad (df = 1, p < .025)$$

That is, the younger religious broadcasting group will implement digital technology at a significantly faster rate than the older group. When the same comparison was made for the secular broadcasting groups, breaking down the timetable for digital conversion into the same two groups, there was almost no statistical difference:

$$\chi^2 = 0.32 \quad (df = 1, p > .05)$$

There was not much difference between the two religious groups in terms of social/political views and enthusiasm for technology. But much of this discrepancy could be attributed to respondent's self-perception, rather than actual behavior. One 71-year old respondent rated himself 'enthusiastic' about his use of personal technology, but also indicated he had only one technology item (a personal computer) in his home, out of the seven possible choices. It is also noteworthy that religious broadcasters are very politically and socially conservative as a group, regardless of age. Within the group, one does not necessarily become 'more conservative' over time.

Discussion

What became apparent from the study is a widening gulf between older and younger religious broadcasting executives; a gulf not found when looking at secular broadcasters. Groothuis (Kellner, 1997) believes there are actually three religious categories: the group oblivious to technology, a 'digitopian' temptation, seeing only the good in technology, and the Christian

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Luddite. It would be foolish for religious broadcasters to fall into the oblivious group, but the younger group could fit the pattern of the 'digitopian' temptation.'

This newer, younger generation feels more comfortable with technology, and believes its audience does as well. Jorge Reina Schement writes, "Americans increasingly worship in electronic churches, particularly in mega-congregations" (as cited in Buddenbaum & Stout, 1996, p. 262). Christian churches and organizations have made significant strides in using new technologies, especially the Internet. The Southern Baptist Convention, one of the largest such organizations, recently listed more than 3,600 local churches with its Internet site, while 'Christianity Online' gets about 325,000 visits per month (Lee & Morgan, 1997).

Such efforts primarily attract a younger audience; mainly families with young children and other people in their 30s. And they help explain the recent boom in 'mega-churches': congregations with more than 2,000 members. Robert Eiber runs a company that installs video and other hi-tech equipment for such churches. He says, "These churches are willing to take risks. The like their energy levels high. To get young people into church you don't show them video games, but you come close" ("Wired religion," 1997). This stands in stark contrast to traditional methods, which cater to a much older audience. Buddenbaum (1981) notes that after the novelty of Christian television wore off, it became negatively associated with socio-economic factors like age, income and education.

Seminary professor and Christian media analyst Timothy Boomershime says churches must start catering to this new audience and get involved with electronic communication, or they won't survive ("Wired religion," 1997). The same could be said for religious broadcasters. Schultze says that religious broadcasting "must appeal to Generation-Xers and baby boomers or

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it won't be around. It's clear a younger audience will decide the fate of Christian television" (personal communication, October 21, 1997).

On the other hand, the older religious group seems to fit Rogers' (1962) definition of laggards as semi-isolates, tied to tradition, oriented to the past, belonging to the smallest operations and having the smallest incomes. Results of the survey indicated this group would face a significant delay in digital implementation. While some of the delay can be attributed to financial and regulatory constraints, much of it apparently results from an inherent mistrust and misunderstanding of new technology, associated with more age and experience. Former FCC Chairman Richard Wiley writes, "If I have any disappointment, it's that a lot of people knew what was coming for nine years, certainly for three or four, and haven't taken the steps to get there, to get ready" (West, 1998, p. S7).

The consequences for religious broadcasters could be far more serious. As part of his definition, Rogers (1962) argues that laggards are the most likely group to drop out of the social system; their lack of resources and position may either prevent adoption or cause discontinuances. In terms of new communication technologies, Grant (1998) says that half or more of the services launched are certain to fail, in part because of poor planning and a lack of resources. There is also historical precedent for such a shakeout among religious broadcasters. Ward (1994) writes that the pattern of government and industry is to "plunge ahead, then set standards 'as you go.' As a result, only the strong, professional operators survive. Many early evangelical users of the technology won't be able to keep up."

Many of those who can't keep up usually must decide between selling, consolidating or simply getting out of the business. Mark Driestadt, former general manager at WFHL-TV in Decatur, Illinois, said, "You'll see less and less Christian ownership in broadcasting. It's harder

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to keep the boat floating (personal communication, February 11, 1998). Van Mylar, general manager of a Chrisitan station in Hawaii says, "In five years, there won't be any more Christian stations as we know them today. The old model is passing away as we speak" (personal communication, February 1, 1998). And according to David Clark, Chairman of the National Religious Broadcasters, "Many Christian organizations have simply given up on television" ("Television's real issue," 1998).

The main consequence could be a failure to reach the growing younger audience. Barna Research of Ventura, California reports that 39% of people under the age of 35 have little or nothing to do with Christian churches and have shown strong resistance to traditional marketing efforts. The Rev. Rock Shuler of Lansdale, Pennsylvania said his church sent 10,000 postcards last fall inviting Generation Xers to his new multimedia service. According to Shuler, "We got hundreds of phone calls and e-mails saying, 'Get us off your mailing list. We don't want anything to do with the church' " (Ostling, 2000). Further research indicated that the emerging generation has little knowledge of Christianity and a strong distrust of traditional churches. Such an audience is hardly conducive to the methods of traditional Christian broadcasters, which include things such as direct money appeals and programming that focuses on serious theological debate.

There is no evidence to suggest that by itself, the age of religious broadcasters will determine the future of the industry. Financial and regulatory considerations will continue to play a major role. But apparently a great struggle now exists between the older, entrenched religious broadcasters and an emerging group of new, young thinkers. One survey respondent said that the biggest obstacle facing his organization, was "the body of Christ not working together." And according to Rose (1998, p. 44), "We are in the midst of a revolution. The future is going to be much different than the past." The winner of this struggle for the heart and soul of religious broadcasting could eventually chart the industry's course for the 21st century.

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Environmental Reporting, Religion Reporting, and the Question of Advocacy

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Abstract

Though both religion reporting and environmental reporting have been the subject of serious academic research, the connections between the two have received little attention. This study proposes to examine the similarities and differences between the two beats. Historically, environmental journalists appear to be more willing to practice advocacy reporting than are religion journalists. Yet, current challenges to the dominant modes of practice in journalism could alter the foundations on which these distinctions rest.

Though numerous books and articles have been written on both the environmental news beat (Friedman, 1990; Prato, 1991; Frome, 1998; Valenti, 1998) and the religion news beat (Silk, 1995; Buddenbaum, 1998; Hynds, 1999), no scholar has seen fit to blend analysis of these two forms of communication. In this essay, I will attempt to demonstrate that studying the two in conjunction can be very insightful. Though there have been significant differences in the two forms of reporting, there have also been notable similarities, perhaps more similarities than would exist between any two other beats. Even so, potential changes in journalism as a whole might greatly alter the relationship between the two. The argument presented in this paper is that both civic journalism and postmodern approaches to journalism—both showing some growth in popularity among journalism scholars—could shift journalistic standards in significant ways in the near future. Should this happen, both environmental and religion reporting could end up losing, or strengthening, their commonalities.

In the process of discussion, I propose to demonstrate some of the characteristics environmental and religion reporting share. After doing such, I will explain how these similarities largely go unnoticed, perhaps because of perceived overriding differences. Key among those differences is perception of the possibility of advocacy. These differences mostly relate to the epistemological approaches reporters have traditionally taken to the different genres. Yet these epistemological approaches are experiencing serious criticism within academic circles and the resolution of current debates in the field is far from certain. Given this uncertainty, the future relationship between environmental and religion reporting is far from predictable. Hence, discussion of the nature of advocacy is worthy of our time, especially as it applies to religion coverage.

COMMON PATTERNS

At least four key areas exist in which environmental reporting and religion reporting share similarities. To be discussed here are: the strong growth in both forms of reporting in recent decades; conflict as a key news value that has allowed for this growth; the similarities in the types of criticism they have received as they have grown; and finally, the shortcomings of those who are asked to do the type of reporting each field requires.

On the first count, numerous scholars have made claims that both environmental coverage and religion coverage have increased significantly in the last decades. Much of environmental coverage grew out of reaction to Rachel Carson's startling book *Silent Spring* (1962) and the growth of grassroots environmental action around ideas such as Earth Day. News organizations jumped on the environmental bandwagon quickly, often placing staff in the position of seeking out environmental stories full time. Large news organizations had several such staffers. As Chepesiuk (1993) quoted one environmental reporter, "For many newspapers, especially the big ones, it's no longer just a case of just one person on the staff covering the environment...We have at least a half dozen reporters covering environmental topics for *The Philadelphia Inquirer*" (p. 18). As Keating (1997) substantiates, the mid-1990s, "virtually all large and medium-sized newspapers, and a number of radio and television stations had either a full-time or part-time environment reporter" (1997, p. 12).

And this interest was not only an interest in the bottom line promulgated by management. Reporters themselves developed a keen interest in their evolving environmental beat duties. Professional interest in the field grew so strong that a number of individuals joined to form an organization with specific interests in reporting about ecological issues. That group eventually grew to become the Society of Environmental Journalists. Today it has a membership over 1,100 and an annual budget of $400,000 (Palen, 1999). Young people entering journalism thus have a support group if they decide they wish to do environmental journalism as an area of specialization. In addition, they have established role models to whom they can look up. Little wonder that Lyman (1994) quotes Phil Shabecoff, former environment reporter for *The New York Times* as saying the field is "the fastest growing segment of journalism today."

Yet Shabecoff may be too quick in his assessment, given similar growth in religion news coverage. Hynds' (1999) survey of editors concluded that almost two-thirds of the respondents reported that the space devoted to religion news in their newspapers had increased in the late 1990s. Only 6 percent reported a decrease. As Gormly (1999) summarizes the trend in religion coverage, on the whole researchers believe "that stories are generally improving in quality, growing in number, and fair" (p. 26). Buddenbaum's (1998, p. 123) data support this, as she claims that by 1995 nine out of every ten newspapers had space set aside for religion news. As with the growing respectability of the environmental reporting beat, religion reporters have developed a professional organization for their benefit. This organization has seen growth too. Since 1994, membership in the Religion Newswriters Association has jumped from 150 members to 240 (Strupp, 1999).

What appears to be occurring then, is that a large number of people are feeling a "calling" to serve in these two fields. The wording here may seem slanted toward religion news reporters, but many environmental news reporters have been known to use it. Yet if this calling is to report a specific kind of news (differing for the two groups), both tend to feel pressures that keep them from following their true calling as much as they would like. One of the most constant pressures is the tendency of editors to pressure these reporters to cover their beat as any other beat. A very good example of that is the tendency to seek out stories that have conflict as the chief news value.

On the environmental side, Michael Keating (1997), who has practiced environmental journalism for many years, explains that most of his writing has been "about the threat from toxic chemicals, disputes over natural resources, and legal and political battles over environmental protection". He elaborates to say:

> Conflict and drama are equally appealing to the news media. A story involving people barricading a logging road, or toxic sludge gushing from a pipe is seen as "news." All of this means that environmental coverage has been largely driven by those who have been the most effective communicators. It also means that environmental journalism has been largely trapped in the "polluter of the day" syndrome. (Keating, 1997, p. 12)

Religion reporters are also funneled into this area. Buddenbaum (1998, p. 121) points out that many stories on religion get motivated by "hard news" values of political conflict. Unfortunately, such stories get bogged down in the early Ws (who, what, when, where) and ignore more important issues (why and how) because answers to why and how questions require more theological understanding. Willey (1996) supports this claim, suggesting that the traditional news value of conflict is always an easy fallback when the story is not easily understood in secular terms. Strupp (1999) similarly explains how one veteran reporter "says the beat saw one of its heydays in the late 1960s and early 1970s because of the turmoil surrounding social issues like abortion, women's rights, birth control, and divorce—which remain sensitive in religious circles." Consistent conflict in a particular news genre is a certain way to expand its coverage.

Of course, any time the media cover conflict there is the potential to be accused of bias in that coverage. Quite possibly, environmental coverage and religion coverage are even more prone to such charges than are other areas of reporting. In the case of environmental reporting the charges are often based on an assumption that reporters favor environmental activists' perspectives over those of business people. Chepesiuk is one observer of environmental journalism who has heard these criticisms many times and cites a perception of a leftwing bias. He admits that this perception might not be completely unjustified, quoting one environmental reporter who claims "Reporters sometimes view the environmental beat as a mission in which the fate of the world and its people are at stake?" (Chepesiuk, 1993, p. 18). Even so, most who cover the environment beat make some effort to appear objective. As Palen (1993) points out the professional organization described earlier—the Society of Environmental Journalists—does not accept funding from any non-media organizations for this very reason. Should the donor list appear padded with people or groups who clearly lack objectivity, SEJ is presumed to lose credibility.

Religion reporters face the same difficulty. Though some might disagree with the boldness of his appraisal, Gormly (1999) states that "Religion is one of the few topical areas in which the reporter has a fear of showing bias" (p. 27). Perhaps this fear comes from recurring claim of bias on the part of readers and religious leaders. Dart and Allen (1993) found that about two thirds of all clergy surveyed felt that news coverage was biased against religion. Even so, the same study found that most reporters themselves don't harbor strong anti-religious sentiment. Buddenbaum (1998) affirms this assessment, and Hynds' (1999) numbers do indicate that most religion reporters are themselves active members of religious groups. This in itself might not assuage those who make charges of bias, because such charges are often based on disagreements over particular religious interpretations. Having a member of a religious group write articles on matters of faith does not assure that every reader's religion will be presented fairly. Thus editors find advantages to both religious and irreligious individuals writing about religion. Of special concern is the former who might have their own beliefs "creep into their work" (p. 129).

If such breeches of trust can be considered a sin of commission—as the reporters are engaging in an activity they and their readers presume to be wrong—there is another problem common to both environmental reporting and religion reporting. This could be considered a sin of omission. That is, there are shortcomings which reporters cannot overcome for which they are often criticized. Most significant among these might be a lack of formal training in their stated field. Many writers who cover the environment beat have little formal training in the sciences, which are key factors in understanding the stories they write. This shortcoming can be detrimental to public assessment of the profession. As one commentator on the field explains it "The credibility of environmental journalism is quite low...There is a feeling in the profession that journalists lack training and experience to cover the environment?" (Chepesiuk, 1993, p. 19). As Backes (1995) suggests, the essence of environmental reporting is making connections between the human social system and the "biophysical system" of the natural world. That biophysical system is beyond the comprehension—at a certain level—of many journalists. Ergo Keating (1997) looks back on his career as an environmental journalist and states that "Instead of prowling the wilderness for nature stories, I had spent most of my time in meetings or on the phone, trying to understand atmospheric physics, organic chemistry, environmental law and the links between economic development and the state of the environment." High levels of knowledge in such areas allow for solid reporting that is directed by the journalist him/herself. Lack of knowledge leads to dependence and confusion, as Keating explains in more detail.

> One of the most difficult aspects of environmental journalism is that it involves science reporting, foreign territory for most journalists. Too often, reporters get the science wrong, for example confusing the natural stratospheric ozone layer that protects us with ground-level ozone caused by industry and cars. Most journalists fail to understand the limits of science, and demand immediate and definitive answers. When none are possible, reporters fall back on the old journalistic tradition of quoting two conflicting opinions. In complex and slowly evolving stories such as the risk from climate change or low levels

of toxic chemicals in the environment, much of the coverage has been confusing. (Keating, 1997, p. 12)

Reporting about religion bears similar requirements for specialized knowledge. In this instance, the knowledge is not of the biophysical world, but the faith world. The traditional charge is that those who work in the news media have a low understanding of that faith world. Dart and Allen (1993) claim "a chasm of misunderstanding and ignorance separates those who pursue careers in the secular news-media field and those whose careers are in the field of religion." This assessment might be a bit unfair. The situation might be more a reflection of general lack of formal education in religion in our culture. In his study of religion reporters, Hynds (1999) found only a few of the respondents reported having seminary training, ten percent said that they have master's degrees in religion. About a quarter of respondents said they had taken courses in religion, although only two percent had a major and two percent a minor in the field. In addition, Gormly's (1999) responses from heads of seventy-two different college journalism programs showed that only six of those programs offered a course in religion reporting. Nearly seventy percent of the heads of those programs felt that their graduates were not informed enough on religion to do their jobs competently. Given the diversity of religious belief in our pluralistic society, Strupp (1999) sets a lofty goal when he says that religion reporters should have a "true knowledge of all faiths."

DISTINGUISHING CHARACTERISTICS

An irony is involved in the fact that as formal education has become a professional requirement for journalists, the two areas in which journalists have great difficulty writing good stories are the environment and religion. The source of the irony is that such reporting is dependent on some education in science and theology, disciplines that at one time were key elements in the curriculum of any western university. Postman (1992) suggests that at a particular juncture in history natural science removed theology from its position of "Queen of Sciences" (p. 34). As he describes this historical incident, he also suggests that its aftermath was a fundamental shift in the way western people thought about knowledge and truth.

Perhaps this is where environmental reporting and religion reporting have parted ways in our culture. Backes' earlier comment about environmental reporting suggests that it is largely founded on an assumption of a biophysical system. In recent history, Americans have grown accustomed to studying that system in a detached, objective manner that allows for and strongly encourages the search for facts. While there may be disagreements about the facts, nobody questions that such facts are possible and are legitimate means of settling disputes.

Religion has moved in a very different direction, and religion reporting has followed suit. Gormly (1999) describes it from a reporter's perspective, stating "Reporters are taught to deal skeptically with verifiable, empirical facts. Religion generally deals with matters of faith, which are, by definition, unverifiable" (p. 27). Hoover (1996) puts it nicely by saying that, "religion does not fit into accepted journalistic categories of evidence. Religion makes claims that often are not verifiable in the conventional sense, and this makes journalists, and particularly editors, nervous." As is the case in many social aspects of life (as opposed to biological and chemical) one person's opinion is considered just as good as another. Matters of faith are thought of as matters of taste, and the old Latin adage *"De gustibus non disputandum est"* is thought to apply.

In many ways this is simply a reflection of a societal drive for "diversity." Such might be seen as an overarching theme for many western cultures at the beginning of the 21st Century. Most major American institutions today give the idea some respect. Hynds appropriately summarizes how it relates to newspapers in their coverage of religion with the following reflection on a conversation with an editor.

Perhaps the strongest argument for diversity came from an editor who said fewer and

> fewer people today believe there is such a thing as absolute truth, so more and more people are treating religion as a buffet instead of art entree. "With this kind of mindset prevailing," the editor said," we will see a rise in interest in eastern religions (Buddhism, Hinduism). We will also continue to see people attracted to religions that provide personal attention and personal experience. In general I expect to see more and more diversity." (Hynds, 1999, p. 51)

Such an acceptance on the part of editors does not always endear a media outlet to its community. If a community is less diverse than its newspaper religion page, for example, there may be a backlash. Strupp (1999) tells one story of an editor who eventually had to kill the religion section because public reaction to its diverse perspectives eventually became too negative.

But in most communities the diversity approach is the safe approach. It simulates news coverage of other issues on which there is presumably no objective answer to controversy. Thus Louis Cassels, religion editor for UPI is quoted as saying "newspapers should cover religion issues as fairly, dispassionately and fearlessly as they do other controversies" (Hynds, 1999, p. 43). This also explains why in spite of the many similarities listed earlier, environmental news and religion news are treated differently in how they are segmented (or not) in print media. Statistics from Buddenbaum (1998) cited earlier suggest that numerous newspapers have a special page or section set aside for religion news. Though no scholar has provided data on the number of newspapers that have a page set aside for environmental issues, anecdotal evidence suggests it is quite small. Frome (1998), for example, notes the segmentation that is common in newspapers and the fact that environmental stories have no set place to call home. This appears to be the case in spite of the fact that some newspapers have multiple staff members who write about environmental issues on a full time basis. Clearly environmental stories are assumed to be closer to other hard news stories in which facts are marshaled forth and readers are left to judge for themselves the objective answers to pressing issues. Such stories can be inserted anywhere in the sections devoted to local of national news. On the religion page, readers are expected to pick what they like, ignore what they do not, and not question the relationship between various statements made on the page.

Oddly, the putatively objective nature of science is what makes for the other key distinction between environmental and religion reporting. The former is seen to be an area where "advocacy" reporting is seriously debated, and the latter is one in which such an approach is rarely discussed. Whether the reasons for this distinction are valid or not will be discussed later. For the moment the situation itself is worth noting.

On the environmental front, advocacy journalism springs from what many observers feel are threatening changes in the world's environment since the industrial revolution. Teya Ryan (1990) who covers the environment for CNN, states her own perception of these changes and her response to it by writing, "as the destruction of the world's rain forests became widely known; and as everyone wondered where to put the trash—particularly the plutonium—I wondered if 'balanced' reporting was still appropriate." Traditionally, journalists approach balance with a libertarian perspective, believing that if they simply provide facts, citizens will gain knowledge and make proper decisions in the long run (Siebert, Peterson, & Schramm, 1956). But many environmentalists (and environmental reporters) do not have great faith in such a lengthy process. The threats to the environment are just seen as too great and too immediate. Moreover, some threats have equally devastating consequences but are different in time factor. That is, they come on slowly, incrementally, but in a way that may not be reversible if public reaction is too far delayed. As Rensberger (1994) explains it, environmental journalists cannot trust so much in the system "because so many of the things that you want to warn the world about don't happen rapidly—they're not things that are going to show up in a noticeable way on a short time scale" (Rensberger, 1994).

Hence, many environmental journalists and journalism educators who are training the next generation thereof approach their work with an almost missionary zeal. The word "advocacy" is used frequently and forcefully. Frome (1998) has served both as an environmental reporter and as a journalism educator and is a key proponent of the advocacy approach. In spite of his recognition that "advocacy is a word we have been taught to avoid," he asserts that environmental journalists must be "advocates for the health and safety of the planet" (p. ix).

In addition, he finds numerous professional newspeople and academics who share his interpretation that advocacy is proper in environmental reporting. For example, he quotes John Oakes, formerly of the *New York Times* who says, "It's a difficult distinction I am trying to make, but one cannot write an environmental story in the news columns without expressing a basic point of view of sympathy with the environmental viewpoint" (Frome, 1998, p. 27). Frome (1998) also quotes T.H. Watkins of Montana State University's journalism program who warns those students interested in environmental reporting that the endeavor is different from many other. In his own words, "It is more like a crusade, a commitment" (p. 33). Chepesiuk (1993) interviewed one journalist who stated "Reporters sometimes view the environmental beat as a mission."

Little wonder that in her summary of the criticism launched against environmental journalists, Valenti (1998) lists their advocacy as a chief charge, and elaborates that they have been labeled as more environmentalist than journalist. Many of those who report about the environment are not at all uncomfortable with either of these charges. Ryan (1990) writes that as her journalism career evolved, she saw the need to practice more of what is commonly called "advocacy journalism."

This is not to say that there are not roadblocks to advocacy or that all environmental journalists are fully in support of the idea. Frome cites a handful of environmental journalists who lost their jobs because of crossing a line and being perceived as too biased. Though many of these had been given a high degree of leeway in writing about the environment from an environmental perspective, they eventually offended too many people. Many reporters press the brakes themselves, without any pressure from outside sources. Lyman (1994) cites Sharon Begley from *Newsweek* as an example, quoting her to say, "The peril is that if readers perceive journalists as having become advocates rather than reporters, then they won't trust anything they read or say."

Here, then, is a clear distinction between the two forms of reporting. All that has been mentioned thus far suggests that religion news is not taken as seriously as is environmental news. The former is considered to be personal, subjective, beyond any means of proof. The latter is considered to be based on hard, empirical science (even if the layman does not comprehend such) and is therefore with the realm of serious debate. Not only does this mean that the environmental news reporter feels more urgency in his/her work, but also that he/she senses a need to develop trust in the audience. The sense of urgency leads to a trend towards advocacy journalism; the trust development aspect leads to a paradoxical mantle of objectivity. The literature available on religion news reporters does not seem to indicate as much of a push for advocacy reporting, neither does it show as much attachment to traditional notions of objectivity.

This is not to say that religion reporters do not care about such issues. Very possibly they have simply found themselves in a position where these are of less concern. This is an interesting possibility since it appears that religion beat reporters are more transient in their roles than environmental beat reporters. Buddenbaum (1997) doesn't give exact figures but claims that most religion reporters worked other beats before taking their current role, and that many who are in other beats have spent time covering the religion beat. Paul Moses (1993) recalls that when he was first given the religion beat, some of his colleagues were surprised and asked if he were being punished. Such is the environment where people move in and out of the role, some filling it out of necessity. Whether by choice or by force, while in the role of religion reporter, long-established patterns of behavior are hard to drop. Hynds claims that some religion reporters respond to questions about their own religious beliefs with statements such as "I do not divulge my personal beliefs about religion in order to protect my impartiality." (Hynds, 1999, p. 46). Buddenbaum (1997) confirms this by saying that religion reporters have been socialized by professional norms to "downplay anything that could be constructed as detracting from their position as neutral, outside observers."

More than this, though, religion journalists seem much more willing to offer simple description in their work. While evidence provided earlier suggests that environmental journalists look to alert the public to ecological challenges—presumably so that action will be taken—religion reporters appear willing to merely let readers understand the current spiritual conditions. Peter Steinfels (1993) recounts the goals he had when he first took on the beat. Chief among them was to report religious debates in a theological tone—rather than political or sociological—and to give a sense of the full spectrum of religious experience. Strupp (1999) quotes onetime *Los Angeles Times* editor David Lauter who claims the key goal with the recent expansion in religion news "is to look at the impact of religion on people's lives more than just institutional news." Great effort is made to "find the religion angle in more mainstream stories." Diane Connolly of the *Dallas Morning News* echoes this sentiment with claims that the paper has been able to do "larger stories on trends in religion and what is shaping people's values" (Strupp, 1999). Similarly, Hoover (1996) quotes Tracy Weber of *The Orange County Register* who claims "There is so much going on, religiously, that the public has to struggle to keep up with it all. My role is to help them with that."

The "objectivity" issue seems to come into play when these stories veer into controversial issues that go beyond religion itself. Given all that was said about "cafeteria" theology and diversity, such stories cannot be approached from a religious *perspective*, but from religious *perspectives* in the plural. Willey (1996) quotes Joan Connell who suggests "Every religion speaks its own moral voice. Journalists need to maintain some skepticism and know their sources. Moral dilemmas such as gun control, physician-assisted suicide, or in vitro fertilization will be addressed differently depending on the theological or ideological perspectives of different religions." When such issues come to the forefront, religion reporters appear to revert to the traditional maxims of objectivity. Oddly enough, they may be doing so at a period when many other journalists are asking serious questions about this tradition.

CHALLENGES TO SET PATTERNS

At this juncture a short summary may be in order. Though environmental reporting and religion reporting share much in common, the former has tended to develop an ethos that allows for—or even encourages—advocacy, while the latter has not. There is some evidence to suggest that the reason the latter does not lend itself to advocacy is that it deals in areas of faith, areas that are presumed to be beyond reasonable dispute based on facts. In addition, several factors lead religion reporting to rely heavily on traditional notions of objectivity and balance.

Yet the key distinctions between environmental news and religion news may be less substantial than some of the evidence above would lead us to believe, and there may be growing challenges that will eventually break down distinctions that have been presented here. Chief among these are movements toward civic/community journalism within the profession of journalism, and cultural tendencies toward postmodernism in western culture at large (reflected in the field of journalism itself).

The first of these, the development of what is often called civic journalism[1] could eventually have serious impact on broadly held beliefs about reporters' advocacy in general. Enough has been written about the approach to the profession that little description is needed here. Rosen (1993; 1999), a champion of civic journalism does a very good job of describing and exemplifying its key tenets. Most important for our purposes is the advocacy component, summarized by Rosen (1993) as he says a journalist's role is to "engage people as citizens, to improve public discussion, [and] to help communities solve problems" (p. 2). Naturally, the extent of such engagement will vary greatly, but there is perception that such engagement borders on advocacy. Kraeplin (1998) reported a survey that was mailed to members of the National Conference of Editorial Writers concerning civic journalism. Forty percent of those surveyed felt it encourages a certain level of advocacy or activism. The journalist's role thus moves beyond simple description. The journalist's role is to be proactive, and in doing so to inspire action on the part of readers. This should cause a recollection of much of what was said in regards to environmental journalism. One phrase that might come to mind is Watkins' claim that such journalism is more like a "crusade" than a detached observation/description of the world.

While civic journalism is growing in strength, however, the world for which this crusade is striving might be losing some clarity. Another major development in the re-conceptualization of journalism in recent years has been an emphasis on postmodern thought. Such thought calls into question the very nature of the world and our ability to perceive it clearly. A large part of the discussion within postmodern thinking has to do with the language we use to describe the world

[1] The terms "civic journalism," "community journalism," and "public journalism" are often used interchangeably. For purposes of brevity, the term "civic journalism" will be used here to describe the movement as a whole.

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and the inability to escape the limitations of that language. Bybee and Hacker (1990) argue that such difficulties will eventually lead to a crisis in journalism that is insurmountable. Davis (1995) also hints at such a crisis and the likelihood that a new form of postmodern journalism will possibly emerge. Ettema and Glasser (1994) see such changes in a positive light and have even laid out guidelines as to what a new form of journalism might look like. Glasser (1992) focuses on the shortcomings of reporting as it has been traditionally been conceptualized—especially in regards to objectivity. Ettema (1994) and Ettema and Glasser (1994) take advantage of this opportunity to offer concrete examples of journalists who are blazing the trail in such a direction. A cornerstone of their approach is the abandonment of overarching narratives and truth in favor of allowing as many voices as possible to tell their stories.

Needless to say, not all journalists are enamored of the advocacy principles of civic journalism or the abandonment of traditional forms of journalism in favor of more postmodern forms. Gade, Abel, Antecol, Hsiao-Yin, Hume, Morris, Packard, Willey, Fraser, & Sanders (1998) present a very thorough summary of the manifold concerns professional journalists have about civic journalism. Moreover, in the case of postmodern approaches to reporting, the abandonment of objectivity is often attached to an abandonment of the notion of objective truth altogether. As Moore (1999) explains, the implications of such a shift are of great importance for environmentalists and are thus worthy of discussion, much more discussion than can be given in this brief treatise. What is worthy of some attention in this essay are the repercussions should such alternatives to the dominant model be widely accepted.

PRESSURES ON ADVOCACY AND OBJECTIVITY

Of course, nobody knows for certain how drastically conventional modes of news operation will change during this century. Bybee and Hacker (1990) clearly demonstrate earlier shifts in journalism practice and the astute reader might wonder how cognizant practitioners were of those shifts as they were occurring. One might wonder the same thing today. Very possibly new forms of journalism practice will become mainstream in such a fashion that nobody is really aware they are the new mainstream except in hindsight. The implications for both environmental reporting and religion reporting are important. Thus the challenges of civic journalism and postmodern journalism should be examined in that light.

A key to civic journalism is a higher willingness to accept advocacy. Where traditional modes of reporting saw the reporter as separate from his or her community—almost as an alien who reported from a distance—civic journalism sees the journalist as a citizen who is proactive in improving life therein. Briefly stated, civic journalism works with an assumption. That assumption is that the journalist is an integral part of the community and therefore the community matters to the journalist. He/she should actively engage the citizens of the community for community betterment. These principles, when applied to environmental reporting, are founded on an assumption also, but the assumption is slightly altered. The assumption is that the journalist is an integral part of a biophysical system and therefore that biophysical system matters to the journalists. He/she should actively engage other inhabitants of that biophysical system for its maintenance and even improvement. Finally, for religion journalists the key assumption is different yet again. The assumption is that the journalist is part of a system where spiritual dimensions of existence—rather than material dimensions exclusively—matter and therefore that spiritual dimension should matter to the journalist. He/she should actively engage other spiritual beings to help them better understand their spiritual nature.

Certainly many editors have already accepted the first assumption (from the civic perspective), some have apparently also accepted the second (from the environmental perspective), presumably a small number have also accepted the third. But we might expect that initial reactions would be most negative to the third, given epistemological issues raised earlier.

Yet it is as postmodernism as a worldview gains a foothold—and this is odd from the standpoint of the dominant orthodox Christian position—that the third position may also make up ground. The literature suggests that many editors look at matters of faith very differently than matters of science. Yet much of the distinction made between the two crumbles as we enter what Bybee (1999) refers to as the "post-factual" age.

Granted, many religion writers are averse to postmodern views of the world and would not want to take advantage of an opening for advocacy that occurs on the basis of the success of that worldview. But, then again, many are probably equally skeptical of the modernist worldview in which they have been operating. The levels of comfort might only be a small factor in regards to their overall freedom to operate.

IMPLICATIONS FOR FURTHER THOUGHT AND STUDY

The crucial point to note is that evidence presented here does suggest that religion reporting is currently more restrained by structural factors than is environmental reporting. Another major area of newswriting (politics) is being made less restrained by the influx of civic journalism. Without critical analysis of the situation, quite possibly religion reporting will maintain restraints that no longer inhibit other forms of journalistic writing.

Unfortunately, given the exploratory nature of this work, all of the data that have been used to make and support this claim is secondary. Therefore, in concluding the essay I would like to make some suggestions for further research that would help clarify the matter. Perhaps further research will show that the distinctions made in this essay are not as clear as elements from the literature make them appear to be. Perhaps they will be even stronger. In any case, practitioners are not wise to make changes in current practices based on the speculative data provided here. Therefore, some future study is recommended.

One area for interesting study is the blending of the two key dimensions mentioned here.

We said earlier that the environmental journalist suggests that the biophysical system matters and that its maintenance and improvement is important. Of course, such assumptions are based on values, and values often originate from religious bases. In this case, why do we assume that the current eco-system is worthy of protection? Certainly we realize that the total elimination of life on the planet is highly unlikely. In other words, even if a large number of species were driven to extinction, life on the planet—in some form—would persist and evolve. In fact, the the scientific community tells us that we started with single cell organisms and slowly developed the biological diversity we now experience. Yet in spite of this, many of us feel that maintaining the current eco-system is a wise policy choice. Are there religious dimensions to these preferences, especially as they are held by environmental journalists? Good work is already being done in the relationship between religious commitment and environmental beliefs (see Boyd, 1999; Guth, Green, Kellstedt, & Smidt, 1995; Schneider, 1998). Little work has been done on the religious beliefs of those from whom most of us get our news about the environment.

Beyond looking at this unusual coalescence of the two themes of our study, though, there are areas in which distinctions need further attention. Secondary data presented here intimates that environmental reporters and religion reporters have differing views on the issue of advocacy. Nobody has investigated this question directly. Given the fact that both forms of journalism now have professional organizations, obtaining a random sample of each group and administering a questionnaire on this issue would be quite feasible.

Another appropriate area for survey research is the impact of the two forms of journalism. A specific area of research suggested in this essay is the perception of those who actually labor in the fields that the journalists describe. That is, how do professional environmentalist and ordained clergy feel of the coverage of their fields? Dart and Allen's oft-cited finding that clergy see an anti-religious bias in religion reporting is worthy of replication.

At the same time, whether environmental professionals feel good about news coverage or environmental issues (a pro or anti-environment bias) would offer an interesting opportunity for comparison and contrast.

Finally, one other interesting area of investigation is the end result of advocacy. While this study has suggested that environmental reporters are more prone to see themselves as advocates than are religion reporters, there is no study that has addressed this question directly. Such analysis of reporters themselves is called for. Perhaps more interesting, though, would be investigation into the perceptions of readers as the urgency of news reports about the environment and religion. A quai-experimental design could be set up to measure the perceptions of news readers/viewers/listeners in regards to the descriptive or prescriptive nature of news reports. In other words, are stories written by environmental writers more prescriptive and stories about religion more descriptive?

In conclusion, some will say that environmental stories are more prescriptive for good reason. That reason is that we all live in a physical environment that we require for sustenance. Moreover, that environment is presumed to be deteriorating. Yet some religion reporters might believe the same thing about the spiritual environment. From certain theological perspectives, we do live in a spiritual world, whether we want to acknowledge it or not. Should not messages to maintain and improve that spiritual world be just as forceful as those written in regards to the biophysical world are? These questions thus go beyond simple religion reporting and environmental reporting. Both groups can presumably believe that almost all stories have some dimensional level at which they connect with their ideology. For example, a religious individual who writes about politics can certainly make connections between most stories and his/her faith. Environmentally astute reporters can also see connections between most any political story and ecology. Schmalzbauer (1999) aptly demonstrates how this applies to Christian journalists. The point of all that has been written here is that we should seriously consider whether the guidelines created for describing the political world are equally worthy of our adherence when we are writing about the natural world or the spiritual world. Perhaps failing to address the question seriously is a way of answering that politics reigns supreme, at much cost to both our environmental and spiritual health.

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Religion and Media Interest Group

The Rise of the Early Christian Church: A Triumph of Public Relations?

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The Rise of the Early Christian Church:
A Triumph of Public Relations?

That public relations has an image problem is a reality that even ardent practitioners of the craft do not question. An acceptance of this reality may best be illustrated by the belief that "the term 'public relations' carries such a negative connotation that most independent companies and company departments now go by the name 'public affairs,' 'corporate affairs,' or 'public communications.' "[1] Put in succinct terms:

> One of the ironies of public relations, both as an activity and as an industry, is that it has...terrible public relations. We dismiss information as "just PR." Public relations professionals are frequently equated with snake oil salespeople, hucksters, and other willful deceivers. They are referred to both inside and outside the media industries as flacks.[2]

Public relations scholars do not deny that many of the criticisms directed at practitioners and practices in the field have considerable validity. Baskin and Aronoff, for example, allow that "the history of public relations is filled with allegations and confirmations of unethical behavior."[3] Newsom, Scott and Turk acknowledge that "there will always be some people in the business world who are convinced that all they need is a lawyer to keep them out of jail and a PR practitioner to keep bad news out of the paper."[4]

I have found that this "defensiveness" about the practice filters down even to students at the undergraduate level. If one asks in a general communications class (media and society, media law and ethics, etc.), for example, what a student's major is, those with a concentration in public relations will frequently appear almost embarrassed to answer. It is as though they fear they have given up something of their virtue in the process of declaring themselves even "potential" PR persons.

A "Public Relations" Response in PR Textbooks?

Almost every public relations textbook--particularly those intended for the introductory course--contains a chapter on the historical development of public relations. By and large, these discussions are useful and provide students with a fairly objective appraisal of the triumphs <u>and</u> failings of those who have been most instrumental in public relations evolutionary growth over the years.

In one particular aspect of that historical review, however, the rhetoric too often begins to resemble an effort somewhat akin to what communication theorists refer to as <u>transference</u>. Lee and Lee define transference as an effort to extend "the authority, sanction, and prestige of something respected and revered over to something else in order to make the latter more acceptable."[5] One

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can immediately think of several examples from advertising. An obvious example, of course, has been the effort by cigarette manufacturers to identify the women's movement with smoking. Another classic example from the tobacco industry, which has been "thought by some experts to be the most successful advertising campaign in 40 years, was...(the effort) designed to transfer the ruggedness and virility of the cowboys...to the cigarette and to the people who smoke Marlboros."[6]

In relating transference to public relations textbooks and their examination of public relations history, I am speaking of the tendency of authors--and defenders of public relations generally--to equate the rise of the early Church to a successful public relations campaign. A quote from the Newsom, Scott and Turk book is illustrative:

> St. Paul wrote his Epistles to encourage membership growth and to boost the morale of the early Christian churches, which were spread about the Roman Empire. His PR campaign was a great success, and his slogans and words of encouragement are still quoted.[7]

As noted, they are not alone in suggesting some linkage between the efforts of the early Church to proclaim its message to the world and public relations. Grunig and Hunt, in fact, make the almost identical argument:

> It's...not stretching history too much

> to claim the success of the apostles in spreading Christianity throughout the known world in the first century A.D. as one of the great public relations accomplishments of history. The apostles Paul and Peter used speeches, letters, staged events, and similar public relations activities to attract attention, gain followers, and establish new churches.[8]

Cutlip, Center and Broom likewise speak of the efforts of St. Paul--while also making reference to St. Matthew:

> Public relations is in reality but a new name for activities centuries old in the churches. It was St. Matthew who long ago said, "Let your light so shine among men that they may see your good works and glorify your Father which is in Heaven." And it was St. Paul who wisely advised those who would communicate with their fellowman, "Except ye utter by tongue words easy to be understood, how shall it be known what is spoken? For ye shall speak into air."[9]

This is not to imply that there has been an insidious effort to establish a direct and continuous correlation between the endeavors of the Church Fathers to carry their message to the world and contemporary public relations. Wilcox, Ault and Agee, for example, state that "public relations is a twentieth-century phenomenon whose roots extend deep in history; in a sense it is as old as human communication itself."[10] They acknowledge that "none of these (early) endeavors was called public relations, of course, but their purpose and their effect were the same as those of similar activities today."[11] Newsom, Scott and Turk allow that although "various functions and uses of public relations have certainly existed throughout civilized history...many of the tactics of twentieth-century PR...depend on relatively recent inventions."[12]

Nevertheless, one must be extremely cautions when drawing largely unnuanced analogies between the contemporary public relations practice and efforts to establish the Church in the immediate years following the crucifixion. While incorporating such largely unnuanced analogies may reduce the anxieties of some potential public relations majors about the ethics/morality of their chosen field of study, students contemplating a career in public relations must not be lead to believe that St. Paul and Ivy Lee (often referred to as the "father" of public relations) were in the same "business." Furthermore, there is a danger that drawing such analogies may lead some--including persons representing the Church in a formal public relations capacity--to assume that they are serving a higher religious truth when they substitute the "public relations answer" for the genuine truth on those occasions when a particular truth may be "uncomfortable" for a number of persons and/or from a number of perspectives.

The Professional Advocate

There is a critical property that differentiates completely the efforts of a St. Paul from those of public relations figures such as the before mentioned Ivy Lee or the legendary Edward Bernays. This differentiation must not be ignored because it goes to the core of one of the central questions to which public relations practitioners and educators must respond--a question that takes on particular importance when one attempts to evaluate the social significance/contribution of public relations to contemporary society.

That question revolves around the role of the public relations practitioner as a "professional" advocate. Some of the most vigorous debate relative to ethical considerations that impact on the public relations practitioner center around the issue of advocacy and the practitioner's utilization of various forms/techniques of persuasion in serving management or a client. While there is not room in this paper to present the entire history of that debate, some reference to it is necessary.

Many, in fact, have defined the public relations practitioner's role primarily in terms of service as an advocate for a particular organization or client. Cutlip, Center and Broom, for example, argue that "the counselor is primarily an advocate of a cause, a client, a company, an institution. Much of the confusion in the public's minds about the field is due to the refusal of many practitioners to face the fact that they are advocates in the court of public opinion."[13] Haberman and Dolphin make the same point:

> Public relations people in a corporate setting have to accept the fact that they work for the owners and directors, the leaders that a majority of the owners have selected. Practitioners who work for organizations and agencies must accept that they work for the officers and directors who chart objectives and formulate policy.
>
> ...public relations employees must be forthright about whom they represent. We cannot insist that public relations is one of the most important aspects of management and have it otherwise.[14]

There has been, it must be noted, considerable effort to redefine the practitioner's role so less emphasis is placed on advocacy or persuasion. Grunig and Hunt, for example, acknowledge that "public relations developed as a persuasive communication function."[15] They suggest, however, an evolving model of public relations--two-way symmetric--where "practitioners serve as mediators between organizations and their publics. Their goal is mutual understanding between organizations and their publics."[16] Regarding the question of persuasion under this model, Grunig and Hunt state:

> If persuasion occurs, the public should be just as likely to persuade the organization's management to change attitudes or behavior as the organization is likely to change the publics' attitudes or behavior. Ideally, both management and publics will change somewhat after a public relations effort.
>
> Frequently, however, neither will change attitudes or behavior. The public relations staff brings the two groups together, and as long as both communicate well enough to understand the position of the other, the public relations effort has been successful.[17]

Clearly, the issue of "professional" advocacy has been the subject of much discussion--particularly as public relations has evolved beyond its "press agent" days. That however, does not resolve the issue of concern here. There remains--whether one speaks about mutual understanding or advocacy--a need to ensure that rhetorical flourishes do not drown reality when one examines and evaluates the historical development of public relations from a social utility perspective--and equates the practitioner's role with the efforts of those who were so instrumental in the rise of the early Church. In fact, describing the practitioner as one concerned primarily about mutual understanding may complicate the matter even further. That is, persons like St. Paul were clearly advocates.

Professional Versus Personal Advocacy

The advocacy efforts of the Church Fathers can--and must--be clearly and unequivocally differentiated from the efforts of many contemporary public relations practitioners in one particularly important way--that of professional versus personal advocacy.

The contemporary public relations practitioner may not even agree with that end toward which he/she is lending his/her expertise. Many practitioners, although as noted certainly not all, follow the Ivy Lee "model" and present themselves as the equivalent of an attorney representing a client in the court room. They are "professional" advocates who are willing to sell their services (expertise as advocates) to those able to pay their fees. Grunig and Hunt suggest that Lee, for example, followed a lawyer analogy. Lee "believed...that a lawyer does not always examine the correctness of his client's motivations. Instead, he represents his client's interest as far as possible within the limits of the law."[18]

That is not to suggest that a practitioner adopting such a position does not also serve the public interest/society at large. In fact, Cutlip argues--in words reminiscent of John Milton and **Areopagitica**--that it is precisely in their role as advocates for particular causes that practitioners do serve the greater public good. Cutlip contends:

> The social justification for public

> relations in a free society is to ethically and effectively plead the cause of a client or organization in the freewheeling forum of public debate. It is a basic democratic right that every idea, individual and institution shall have a full and fair hearing in the public forum--that their merit ultimately must be determined by their ability to be accepted in the marketplace. To obtain such a hearing, the idea, individual, or institution needs the expertise of the skilled advocate....
>
> The public relations specialist contributes to the Miltonian principle of the self-righting process in a democracy, a principle embedded in historic decisions of the U.S. Supreme Court.[19]

In sharp contrast were the "advocacy" efforts of early Church evangelizers like St. Paul. These were not "professional" advocates who were selling their services to whomever was willing to pay their fee. They were certainly advocates of the message they were proclaiming. Of critical importance, however, is the fact that they were advocates who believed passionately in that which they were presenting to their audiences.

These were persons who made a personal commitment to the cause they were advancing--who willing risked their lives to spread the Christian message. In fact, the cause and how they defined themselves were intrinsically linked. Because the cause defined who they were, their overriding concern was always the ultimate objective--bringing the Christian message to the world. They were not paid advocates--being a professional advocate did not define who they were and what they were about. Instead, they were persons with a cause who used particular communication techniques and strategies to reach what they believed to be a most important end. A commentary in the **Christian Community Bible: Catholic Pastoral Edition**, puts it well when it declares: "Disciples should be the first ones to believe what they themselves proclaim."[20]

The Art of "Spinning"

Because the contemporary public relations practitioner may not be a firm supporter (believer) in that which he or she advocates, there is always a temptation to resort to the "slick" techniques of professional advocacy when one finds the message itself less than mollifying and/or pacifying from any number of perspectives. This is somewhat akin to the lawyer who believes he or she cannot win on the merits of a case and, consequently, attempts to manipulate the letter of the law to his or her client's advantage.

The before mentioned Scott Cutlip is speaking precisely to this concern when he charges that public relations practitioners have too often "cluttered our already choked channels of communication with the debris of pseudo-events and phony sound bites that confuse rather than clarify."[21] Because of something approaching a habitual use of such "spin" techniques, Cutlip argues that "public relations has corroded...(the) channels of communication...with cynicism and 'credibility gaps'."[22]

Ivy Lee--the previously cited "father of public relations"--was frequently criticized for issuing statements many saw as meant more to confuse than to clarify. In fact, Lee has been descried by Marvin Olasky as one who "became adept at creating dishonest impressions from factual statements."[23] On one occasion in the early 1900s, while representing the Rockefeller family in the midst of a biter coal strike, Lee suggested that women and children who died "while fleeing in panic from an out-of-control militia...may have been victims of their own carelessness."[24] Olasky notes that "reporters...pointed out the foolishness of expecting persons fleeing in panic to watch their step, and cursed Lee as a Pharisee."[25] He also points out, however, that Lee could argue that he had not told a literal lie--he simply put the best possible "spin" on a carefully constructed and nuanced statement.

Something similar occurred while Lee was representing the Pennsylvania Railroad. Apparently hoping to convince the public that what was good for the Pennsylvania Railroad was also good for the American people, Lee "emphasized the large numbers of people who owned the railroad's stock...(while neglecting to mention) that a very few people held the vast majority of stock."[26] Again, a literally true statement that is nevertheless substantively deceptive. Or, as suggested by Charles Steinberg, yet another attempt to make the worse appear better.[27]

Regretfully, such "twisting" of the truth ("spinning") too often remains a practice engaged in by persons who call themselves public relations practitioners. An article in **The Wall Street Journal**, for example, quotes a public relations practitioner who worked for a large company as stating: "It's so damn easy to massage the numbers."[28] The company he worked for "was able to show in the front of its annual report one year that per-share earnings were as good as management had predicted."[29] Only after working one's way through the fine print and reaching the back of the report would one discover "that earnings were down sharply due to some nonrecurring costs."[30] Another practitioner quoted in the same article was told by his management that "your job is to turn excrement into applesauce."[31] (The **Journal** points out that "the official used a less elegant word than excrement."[32])

Unfortunately, turning excrement into applesauce may well be the way too many in management positions view the role of the public relations practitioner. In fact, it may be the way many persons generally--including students majoring in public relations and persons working in public relations for religious organizations--view the practitioner's role. That is precisely why drawing largely unnuanced analogies between public relations and the growth of the early Church needs to be vigorously questioned and challenged.

Substance Over Style

St. Paul's letters remind even the causal reader that the "campaign" to bring the message of the infant Church to the world was not to be one built around pseudo events and other "spin" techniques. In fact, St. Paul could be writing directly to those who would substitute slick public relations efforts for the substance of the Gospel message in his second letter to the Corinthians. As noted, a reoccurring charge against public relations practitioners is that they are too willing to utilize half-truths and other questionable rhetorical methods to achieve their objectives. Compare that to what St. Paul writes in 2 Corinthians 4:

> This is why we do not feel discouraged as we fulfil this ministry mercifully given to us. We refuse to stay with half-truths through fear; we do not behave with cunning or falsify the message of God but, manifesting the truth, we deserve the respect of everyone before God.

Similarly, in 1 Corinthians 2, Paul makes it clear that it is not the eloquence of his message--the style and packaging in terms of much of contemporary public relations--that is essential. He reminds the Corinthians that:

> When I came to reveal you the mystery

of God's plan I did not count on eloquence or an intellectual approach. I was determined not to know anything among you but Christ Jesus, and him crucified. I came weak, fearful and trembling; my words and preaching were not brilliant, or clever to win listeners. It was rather, a demonstration of Spirit and power, so that you may believe not by human wisdom, but by the power of God.

It is also useful to note that in 1 Thessalonians 2, St. Paul again emphasizes that the evangelizer is first and foremost a person with a message, a message which the evangelizer (communicator) must present with clarity and conviction. He writes:

> ...we dared announce to you the message of God, and face fresh opposition. Our warnings did not conceal any error or impure motive, nor did we deceive anyone. But, as God had entrusted his Gospel to us as to faithful ministers, we were more anxious to please God who sees the heart, rather than men. We never pleased you with flatteries, as you know...

The evangelizer must present the message with honesty of conviction and respect for those to whom it is directed. Jesus, in fact, reminds those who would substitute the slick techniques of contemporary public relations for the substance of the message that all are to "say yes when you mean yes and say no when you mean no. Anything else you say comes from the devil" (Matthew 5:37). In other words, no pseudo events and phony phrases meant more to confuse than clarify!

In Summary

Because there are so many misconceptions about the field--and because public relations has received so much negative press--it is essential that practitioners active in the field and potential practitioners in the classroom have a genuine understanding of what the evolving field entails. Public relations textbooks very clearly differentiate the activities of the contemporary public relations practitioner from those of the nineteenth century press agents and leave no doubt that "liking people" is not the major prerequisite for success in the field.

These same texts, however, tend to "stumble" when "linking" the evolutionary development of public relations--in a too often unnuanced way--to the rise of the post-resurrection Church. In most instances, it appears not so much an intentional effort, but more a failure to **clearly** differentiate the usage of the techniques of persuasion from the contemporary public relations practice as it has evolved into a comprehensive and highly structured management-communication process. It needs to be acknowledged, however, that--as noted--there also does appear to be some tendency to attempt to "legitimatize" public relations by transferring the prestige of historical giants like St. Paul to the contemporary practice.

Put in admittedly blunt terms, public relations is not a substitute for the "genuine article." It would be much more efficacious, in fact, to consider how a contemporary St. Paul might make use of a public relations practitioner. Would he, for example, be amendable to hiring a PR firm to help shape and hone his message? How would he respond if the firm suggested he place less emphasis on the crucifixion and more on turning water into wine in order to attract a large following? Similarly, one could more easily "spin" walking on water than spending 40 days in the desert without food!

Questions such as these become increasingly important in this era in which society is experiencing an explosion in communication technology. We are rapidly advancing into an age in which, quoting Marshall McLuhan, the medium is becoming the message.

The well publicized problems that have befallen several televangelist ministries give evidence as to what can happen in religion when the medium becomes the message. Too many televangelists learned to use the techniques of the contemporary public relations practitioner while ignoring the reality of the message they were supposedly propagating. They failed to grasp what commentators in the **Christian Community Bible** are alluding to when they assert that what Christianity needs are not "propagandists with arguments and biblical quotations...but witnesses who speak of their experience."[33]

In some ways, public relations might be likened to sex. Surely even the most conservative religious commentator will allow that sexual relations within the context of a permanent commitment between a man and woman are a good and holy thing, a channel of grace in which a man and woman become one and in the process play a central role in the continuance and evolution of God's creative design for the universe. The problem isn't sex. The problem concerns the way human beings too often have managed to transform the sacredness of genuine erotic love into debasing and/or pornographic exploitation.

The same is true regarding contemporary public relations. Modern communications technology and techniques can provide a means by which the Church can better communicate what St. Mark (1:1) calls the Good News of Jesus Christ to the world. A public relations practitioner with expertise in the techniques and tactics of modern communications can play a valuable role in this process.

When, however, the techniques and tactics overtake the message, then image has indisputably overtaken reality. And when a public relations practitioner suggests to the Church that it should be more concerned about image than the truth, Jesus provides the only acceptable response: "Get behind me, Satan! You would have me stumble. Your thoughts are not from God but from man" (Matthew 16:23).

Yes, that is how Jesus would ask that the Church respond to those who would recommend the utilization of pseudo events and phony phrases meant more to confuse than to clarify. It is also in that context that one must reject any suggestion--without, as noted, all the appropriate nuances--that the rise of the early Church was, in reality, a triumph of public relations.

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Religion + Media IB

Mormons in Las Vegas: A Study of Entertainment Media and Secularization Defense Strategies

by

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Abstract

Mormonism is the third largest denomination in Las Vegas with 70,000 members. With official doctrines opposing gambling and strong admonitions to avoid unsavory media content such as R-rated movies, a number of tensions have emerged. Focus groups and non-participant observations reveal how Mormons experience entertainment media. Five ways of defining conflicts or "secularization defense strategies" are identified. These findings raise new issues for future research about ways religiosity is applied in media use.

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Mormons in Las Vegas: A Study of Entertainment Media and Secularization Defense Strategies

Introduction

The culture of Las Vegas, Nevada revolves around the gambling and entertainment industries. The casino business is the heart of the city's billion dollar economy which benefits from 32 million visitors each year (Las Vegas, 1999, p. 2). Beyond gambling, Las Vegas is a complex media environment offering a wide range of entertainment from family-oriented shows, to adult fare such as strip tease and elaborate nude dance revues. Examples of diverse offerings might include the Bellagio Hotel's gallery of classical art at one end of the "Vegas Strip" (Las Vegas Blvd.) and the Riviera Hotel's topless burlesque-style revue, "Crazy Girls," at the other.

The mystique of Las Vegas has inspired a number of popular literary works, including the novels, Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas (Thompson, 1971), Fools Die (Puzo, 1978), Leaving Las Vegas (O'Brien, 1990), and The Death of Frank Sinatra (1996), in which author Michael Ventura writes, "There are no innocent bystanders in Las Vegas. Nobody comes to Vegas to be innocent" (p. 3). Philosopher and urban planner Lewis Mumford (1962) denounces the city as "an incoherent and purposeless nonentity" (p. 108) and culture critic James Twitchell (1992) labels Las Vegas "permissive, commercial, and irredeemably vulgar" (p. 40).

These assessments contrast sharply, however, with more positive reactions from government officials, business leaders and visitors who call Las Vegas the "entertainment capital of the world" (See Las Vegas, 1999, p. 1) and a site of "tremendous success of the tourism industry" (p. 2). Consistent with this assessment is the fact that about 63 percent of residents rate the city's quality of life as either "good" or "excellent" (Quality, 1999, p. 2).

Coexisting with the entertainment industries are the religious communities of Las Vegas. A number of denominations have a strong presence; there is one church for every 1700 residents (Experience, 1999, p. 485). One of the major hotels, The Riviera, even has a non-denominational church on its second floor, as well as a full-time priest to counsel employees and guests (Holy, 1999). Also of interest to demographers is the growth of the Mormon Church (officially The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints) whose members first settled the area in the 1850s. Today, there are 165 Mormon congregations in the region (Experience, 1999, p. 485), accounting for over a third of all churches, and Mormonism is the third largest denomination after Catholicism and Protestantism (p. 486).

Mormon teachings oppose gambling (Oaks, 1987) and admonitions against unsavory media and entertainment are particularly strong (Gospel, 2000). The Church's discouragement of "R-rated" movie attendance is but one example (See discussion in Stout, 1996). The simultaneous growth of Mormonism as well as the Las Vegas entertainment industry, creates a new opportunity for the study of religion and media. Specifically speaking, Las Vegas seems an appropriate environment for in-depth examination of how members of a conservative religious group define and resolve conflicts of worldviews between religious and secular cultures. Such conflicts are not unique to Mormonism, and this study may have implications for the larger literature of moral conflict and the sociology of religion. The "all for nothing attitude" that underpins the Las Vegas gambling industry contradicts values spoken about by Weber (1930) in

The Protestant Ethic, which lists hard work and thrift as the *sine qua non* of Christian values.

Mass communication researchers are increasingly interested in how the sociology of religion expands knowledge about audiences of television, films, and other media. Media use within a number of denominational structures has been studied, including Judaism (Cohen, 2000), Islam (Palmer & Gallab, 2000), Catholicism (Jelen, 1996), Mainline Protestantism (Buddenbaum, 1996), Evangelicalism (Schultze, 1996), Mormonism (Stout, 1996), and Fundamentalism (Bendroth, 1996). The majority of these studies describe what religious leaders teach their members, as well as how media are actually used in everyday life. How religious audiences negotiate the boundaries of religious and secular culture in Las Vegas, however, has not been addressed in depth. Because fairly rigid doctrines regarding media use raise a number of moral dilemmas for Mormons in Las Vegas, the city provides a unique research environment for the study of the *secularization hypothesis* or the idea that religious commitment and identity is weakened through increased exposure to, and involvement with the values, practices, and norms, of the larger culture (See Smith, Sikkink, & Bailey, 1998).

A Brief History of Mormons in Las Vegas

Mormons occupy a number of pages in the unfolding history of Las Vegas. Mormon-guided wagon trains led to some of the first settlements of the region, and Brigham Young dispatched Mormon missionaries to Las Vegas Valley in 1851 (Castleman, 1999). Mormon settlements remained quite small, however, and it wasn't until the Salt Lake to Los Angeles Railroad came through in 1905 that the town began to flourish as a business center (Land & Land, 1999).

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Besides the railroad, the two most influential events in the history of Las Vegas were the legalization of gambling in 1931 and the completion of Hoover Dam in 1935 (McCracken, 1996). With the construction of the Flamingo, Thunderbird, and Desert Inn hotels in the early 1950s, the Las Vegas gambling and entertainment industry was underway. The Mormon Church's uneasy relationship with this business also coincided with these developments.

Of the 450,000 residents of Las Vegas in 1980, about 35,000 were Mormon (Gottlieb & Wiley, 1980). In 1990, the Mormon population had grown to almost 60,000 (Bradley, 1992), and by 1997, about six percent of the entire population was Mormon (Las Vegas, 1999). Today, the Mormon population in Southern Nevada is growing at a rate of about 500 per month (Willis, 1999).

Mormons occupy a number of influential positions in Las Vegas government, business, and the arts (See Gottlieb & Wiley, 1980), but the entertainment industry creates a number of tensions, especially with regards to gambling and the sex industry. Elder Dallin H. Oaks of the Twelve Apostles states that "The Church... stands opposed to gambling, including government-sponsored lotteries" (Oaks, 1987, p.69). Members have also protested zoning changes permitting new "neighborhood casinos" (Thompson, et.al, 1993).

The city's sex industry also creates conflicts with Mormonism's "law of chastity, " which forbids sexual relations outside of marriage as well as condemns pornography in all its forms (Gospel, 2000). The prostitution business continues to thrive in Las Vegas and soft porn magazines are available for free in sidewalk boxes on Las Vegas Boulevard (Castleman, 1999). The "Entertainers" section of the telephone directory often carries over 30 pages of listings for strippers, exotic dancers and escort services. Even some of the city's most respected hotels, some of which are touted as family-oriented, run adult shows such as "Splash" (The Riviera Hotel) and "The Folies Bergere" (Tropicana) which contain elements of nudity.

Mormons and the Secularization Hypothesis

This paper uses secularization theory to examine how Mormons talk about their experiences within the Las Vegas entertainment culture. According to Wilson (1982), secularization occurs when "religion ceases to be significant in the workings of the social system" (p. 150). Berger (1967), however, goes farther in arguing that in a secularized culture, religion is missing from the arts, philosophy, and literature. The secularization hypothesis, therefore, holds that exposure to competing systems of information, culture, and technology undermine religious commitments (See Maguire & Weatherby, 1998). Smith, Sikkink, & Bailey (1998), for example, found that religiosity increases when one moves to areas of high religious commitment, and decreases when people move to a region of lower religious commitment.

Secularization, however, is a controversial theory among sociologists of religion. Some argue that the hypothesis does not hold because religion has not declined as a dominant activity in the U.S. (See Stark & Iannaccone, 1994). Another criticism is that excessive emphasis is placed on church attendance as a primary measure of secularization (Dobbelaere, 1989; Miller & Nakamura, 1996). This situation prompted Hadden (1987) to argue for more valid and well-defined studies of the theory.

This paper examines how Mormons themselves talk about Las Vegas entertainment media in their own words. Do they consider themselves [illegible] to influence? Do they talk about their religious commitments differently compared to Mormons in other regions of the country? In other words, do they consider behavioral compromise a necessary condition of living in Las Vegas?

Linear or causal models of secularization are limited in addressing these questions. Such approaches are reflected in the "culture wars" discourse of popular literature which assumes that mass media content is generally opposed to religion and gradually serves to undermine religious values (Medved, 1992; Carter, 1993). Cultural media studies, however, shifts the unit of analysis from media messages to the audience. In other words, all church members are part of an *interpretive community* which shares a "code of understanding" about certain types of media texts, in this case Las Vegas entertainment (See Lindlof, 1988). Aden, Rahoi, & Beck (1995), for example, describe the norms and behaviors of an interpretive community of fans of the film, Field of Dreams, and Zelizer (1993) describes journalists as an interpretive community.

Interpretive community encourages us to examine secularization according to the everyday talk of audience members themselves. Actual comments from the audience reveal "shared strategies of interpretation"(See Fish, 1980). Interpretive community is a well developed concept in media studies (Lindlof, 1988; Radway, 1984), but is only beginning to be applied to religious audiences. While interpretive communities usually revolve around reactions to particular media texts, they may also focus on efforts to resist or read against media considered threatening to religious values (See Lepter & Lindlof, 2000). In the case of Las Vegas, for example, Mormons may talk to family and friends about how to resist certain forms of entertainment, and eventually these strategies become standardized norms or patterns of behavior within the interpretive community.

The purpose, then, of this paper is to identify such strategies of resistance that may exist within an interpretive community of Las Vegas Mormons as they make decisions about media entertainment. Because members of interpretive communities have access to each other and participate in "talk" about media issues, it is possible that their attitudes are formed in ways that go beyond institutional directives or guidelines. We tease out the range of diversity in the ways Mormons discuss Las Vegas entertainment and suggest ideas for future research.

Methodology

In order to gain insight about the ways Mormons define and resolve conflicts within the Las Vegas entertainment culture, focus groups and non-participant observations were conducted.

Focus Groups

Qualitative data were analyzed from two focus groups of Brigham Young University students from Las Vegas. A list of 159 students was extracted from the total BYU population using the 1999-2000 Student Directory. Students from the Las Vegas list were telephoned and asked screening questions to qualify them for the focus groups. Questions had to do with length of residence in Las Vegas, religious affiliation, basic familiarity with Las Vegas entertainment/casino industry, and willingness to participate. A total of 14 were invited to each focus group with 10 women and seven men actually participating. The first focus group consisted of six participants (three women and three men). Eleven comprised the second group which included seven women and four men. Each session lasted about 90 minutes.

Transcriptions of tape recordings were made for each focus group. Using a method similar to Browning (1978), two researchers read the transcripts independently, sorting statements into categories according to dominant themes. The researchers then met together to compare results, identify points of agreement, and adjust categories after discussion. Consistent with Glaser & Strauss (1967), a grounded theory approach was taken in order to allow findings to emerge from the data, rather than subjecting them to pre-conceived hypotheses.

Non-participant Observations

In addition to the focus groups, one member of the research team made three days of observations in Las Vegas. This consisted of visits to over 25 major hotels and casinos as well as walking and driving tours of numerous streets, business areas, and neighborhoods. The observations also include conversations with police officers, casino employees, Mormon residents, and Mormon bishops. Notes were recorded in a notebook in order to aid the researchers understanding of the focus group data, especially in terms specific places referred to by respondents.

Results

The sorting analysis yielded five dominant themes or *secularization defense strategies*. Findings suggest that Mormons are quick to defend their presence in Las Vegas, usually on religious grounds. They are aware of secularizing influences, and offer well-crafted explanations of how they defend against them. The data explain how Mormons live in the city, but attempt to physically or mentally separate themselves from Las Vegas culture. The five strategies are: (1) mythical geographical separation, (2) mythical standards of acceptable/nonacceptable behavior, (3) family entertainment umbrella, (4) faith-building environment, and (5) elitism. It should be noted that these categories are not mutually exclusive, and do not represent all of the ways Mormons negotiate the boundaries between religious community and secular culture in Las Vegas. They are, however, more specific ways of describing the specific nature of moral conflict, and identify starting points for future research.

Mythical Geographical Separation

Focus group participants frequently describe two cities of Las Vegas. The first is the neighborhood they live in, and the other is the area they claim to almost entirely avoid (i.e., the strip and downtown). One participant remarked: "It's like two different cities. There's the strip and there's Las Vegas." Emergent in the data was the idea that Mormons don't go down to the strip or frequent popular entertainment venues. Here are some examples:

> "...most locals don't want to go down to the strip all that often."
>
> "...there's no point to go down there [to the strip]."
>
> "...most of the LDS families I know aren't involved in it [Las Vegas entertainment].
>
> "I don't go downtown unless I have to."
>
> "...I don't ever go down there. It's an entirely different atmosphere when you're not on the strip."

The frequent insistence that Mormons effectively separate themselves from the "other" Las Vegas seems to contradict a number of statements implying extensive firsthand experience with Las Vegas entertainment offerings. In other words, there are sufficient data supporting the idea that any geographical demarcation are probably more mythical than real, given additional statements of respondents.

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This conclusion is drawn for two reasons. First, despite claims that Mormons avoid certain parts of the city, comments suggest familiarity with numerous casino-hotels (e.g., MGM, Mirage, and Stardust, etc.) as well as a variety of restaurants and shows (e.g.,"Splash," "Mystere," and "Sigfried and Roy," etc.). Second, the assertion that Las Vegas-type entertainment is only found downtown or on the strip is challenged by a wave of neighborhood casinos which cater to local residents as well as tourists. For example, one participant commented: "I'm on the west side of town. They just built a brand new casino out there, called *The Resort.* It's just probably three miles from my house." *Arizona Charlie's* is another example of a casino adjacent to residential areas. Most neighborhoods also have numerous strip-mall gambling parlors and dance clubs which adapt the look and architectural style of the surrounding neighborhood. Movie theaters are often located within hotel-casinos and traditional theaters may have some form of gambling, usually slot machines. Walks and drives through the city reveal a significant spillover of the gaming and entertainment culture into virtually all segments of the metropolitan area.

While some Mormons may, in fact, avoid particular sectors of the city, belief in a geographical separation makes possible the idea that one isn't really living in Las Vegas despite residence within the city limits. Direct moral conflicts are avoided through a psychological perception that the questionable and notorious Las Vegas is always located in some other place. This idea emerges in the comment of a Mormon male:

> "I kind of live fairly close to the strip, probably like two blocks. Um, not very far south, it's not like I am in the heart of Las Vegas Boulevard but I am two blocks away from Las Vegas Boulevard. We kind of live, we don't live in a housing complex or anything like a lot of communities are in Las Vegas, we just live in a home. So it's kind of secluded."

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Despite living only two blocks from the strip, he claims to be "secluded" from the city. Such statements raise the need for additional research about the ways members of religious groups define their sense of place. The data suggest that such perceptions are psychological as well as physical.

Mythical Standards of Acceptable and Non-acceptable Behavior

An interesting theme in focus group comments is that the Mormon Church has clear standards regarding acceptable behavior in Las Vegas. Perceptions of what these policies are, however, vary greatly across focus group participants. For example, one said that you would be denied admission to the temple if you "worked in a casino," while the son of casino cashier considered his father's work acceptable because punishments are "limited to only those who deal directly with the games themselves--they can't hold temple recommends." Another participant said the Church takes action when people become involved in "actually running a casino" and another said the line was drawn when "you win money gambling."

Varying perceptions about rules reveal that it may be easier to live in a conflicted environment when official proclamations validate one's behavior. The arduous question of how religious commitment is affected by the larger culture is circumvented, somewhat, by personally molded standards of acceptability. It is worthy of note, however, that few if any respondents assess their own behavior as in violation of the standard they articulate.

Family Entertainment Umbrella

Another way that Mormons defend against secular influences is by redefining casinos as "family entertainment" rather than sinful experiences. This dominant theme in the focus group data suggests that Las Vegas entertainment is complex in its variety and that Mormons simultaneously criticize and praise it. For example, one participant remarked that "there are some things that are ok in Las Vegas to participate in. Not everything there is bad." At times during the focus group sessions, participants spoke about the deleterious aspects of Las Vegas. However, a number of statements described a side of the city that seemed more consistent with religious life:

> "I know in my ward [congregation] we would do that [go down to the strip] all the time. We would go to the ones [shows] in Vegas or out at State Line [casino]. There's all sorts of things that you can do around Vegas."

Contradicting claims about how the strip was mostly avoided by Mormons, participants talked at length about how casinos had much to offer families:

> "They're all building amusement parks in the back. You can drop the kids off."

> "Our family would always come and see the free attraction and eat the cheap buffet food."

> "Yeah, its [local neighborhood casinos] got a buffet and gambling machines and sometimes movie theaters, because the locals will go see movies and stuff there..."

One participant related how her Mormon ward (congregation) went to a country music casino to see a show while another praised the art galleries in the Venetian and Bellagio hotels. A Mormon mother interviewed during the participant observations said she took her children to an educational exhibit on Egypt in the Luxor Hotel and Casino.

These findings imply a certain confidence on the part of church members regarding their ability to screen out unwanted aspects of casinos and use other aspects to one's advantage, even within the context of religious goals. This is a departure from the oft-quoted admonition by Mormon Church leaders to avoid even the appearance of evil as well as not exposure oneself to unsavory movies or entertainment. This style of talk contrasts sharply with more direct-effects assumptions by Mormons living in other areas

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(See Stout, Scott, & Martin, 1996). In a unique environment such as Las Vegas where gambling and sexually explicit entertainment exist alongside desirable activities for families, it seems that an active audience strategies are necessary to maintain religious identity. Conveying this idea, a participant commented:

> "There's a lot of good if you want to, to go down and see the sights, there's nothing wrong with that. It's just be careful where you wander into and don't go to shows that have...Like they pretty much label them 'adult audiences' and things. You just don't go to those. And it's fine. I've never run into anything that I've particularly hated or shouldn't have been there for, so..."

The family umbrella is a useful strategy for Las Vegas Mormons because it implies the ability to screen out or ignore anything that isn't useful to families. Speaking about nudity on billboards, a respondent explained that "that's part of the city that I live in. You know, so I think that sometimes we just ignore it." Recognizing that this ability to see family benefits of Las Vegas entertainment might be unique to the city, another respondent explained:

> "I think we as children grew up a lot...because we [kids raised in Vegas] are exposed to so much when we are growing up that we grow up and we know about the world. We know about more about that sort of thing. It doesn't really scare us. Like I can see someone coming down from Utah and saying wow this is crazy, we just, it's part of life."

The conclusion of this section is that Las Vegas Mormons have a different style of talk compared to other Mormons when it comes to shielding the family. Future research must probe deeper into the question of why Las Vegas culture promotes a different view about media effects compared to what previous studies have revealed about Mormons in other areas.

Las Vegas as a Faith-Building Experience

Another way that Mormons shield themselves against secularization is by defining the Las Vegas experience as faith-enhancing rather than faith-destroying. Controversial media and entertainment are seen as opportunities to make a stand and strengthen religious convictions. In this sense, Mormons evoke that aspect of religiosity emphasizing works and the earthly tests that all must confront in growing to become like God. Examples of this way of thinking would be:

> "It's kind of nice [being exposed to a negative element in Las Vegas] because it teaches you to stay focused and disciplined."
>
> "I think that because the members live there it does make them stronger…"
>
> "Yeah, it's really hard to sit the fence there [in Las Vegas]."
>
> "I'm partial to Las Vegas, obviously. But, they have a really nice balance, you know living in the world but not of the world."

In making this point about Las Vegas as faith-promoting, the city was often contrasted with Utah which was deemed weak in terms of necessary tests and refining experiences for spiritual growth. For example, a participant said that living in Utah was not as good because in Las Vegas "you have this opposition and you want to be an example to other people and stuff like that."

Frequently the term, necessary "choices" was used in arguing that religion is all about confronting and overcoming opposition. Las Vegas forces one to make choices and this is consistent with the Mormon plan of salvation which characterizes earthly experience as a testing ground:

> "But I think that if you always go along with nothing as a temptation or opposition and nothing that is going to make you choose, that when the choice comes, if you haven't already made that choice, then it's going to be really hard. Like, from the beginning of high school, [living in Las Vegas] I had to make those choices, and we're not going to do certain things because we have already made those choices."

Conceptualizing Las Vegas as faith-building illustrates the idea that religiosity is a multi-dimensional phenomenon that is divergently accessed, making oppositional interpretations possible. Las Vegas, then, becomes both a spiritual liability and opportunity simultaneously.

Las Vegas Mormons are Special and Elite

In analyzing the focus group transcripts, a sense of elitism clearly emerges. To be a Las Vegas Mormon is to be a member of a special group with a unique identity. Implicit is the idea that not everyone can make it there and that few understand the religious culture of the city:

> "I think they're [Mormon residents of Las Vegas] less judgemental. I think they have a better overall view...they have a nice balance, you know living in the world but not of the world. Their outlook on life is really realistic...the fact that we can walk through a casino that does have people dressed in cocktail outfits but not even have to really focus on not focussing right?"

Partcipants use terms such as "more intelligent," "focused," "more prosperous," "less judgemental," and "stronger" in describing Las Vegas Mormons. They are considered to be successful financially and more often become "government leaders." Participants are emphatic that Mormons have a good reputation because they can be trusted in what otherwise might be compromising environments. One participant speculated, for example, that during the Mafia era of Las Vegas, Mormons "held more positions because they were more trusted." The elitist secularization strategy is intriguing in that it justifies Mormon presence in Las Vegas based on the idea that only the residents themselves truly understand it. It is a special mission for a special group.

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Discussion

The purpose of this paper is not to better understand media "effects," but to uncover strategies Mormon employ in resolving conflicts between institutional expectations and the Las Vegas entertainment environment. As Hitchcock (1979) notes, the paradox of Western Christianity is the "world," from which Christians are taught to draw out that which is good, and reject that which is profane. Results of this study indicate that Mormons both accept and reject aspects of Las Vegas entertainment culture. Religiosity, therefore, turns out to be a multi-dimensional phenomenon which allows for oppositional readings of media or "divergently correct" interpretations (See Lepter and Lindlof, 2000). This was particularly evident in comments suggesting that exposure to entertainment media can be faith-promoting by providing opportunities for growth.

These data contradict the dualism of "culture wars" views of secularism which imply linear, direct weakening of religious convictions by popular culture texts. The Mormons interviewed consciously categorize desirable and unsavory media within the context of their own experience, and some seem to preserve religious values while visiting casinos, seeing shows, and doing business downtown and on the strip.

Such findings raise new questions about religious worship and *physical place*. What appears to matter most is how borders between the sacred and the secular are drawn in the minds of church members. Mythical geographical separations as well as personal perceptions about rules and standards suggest the ability to construct cultural divisions psychologically and socially where it is impossible to draw them physically. Focus group comments suggest that even in environments that appear to be threatening to religious values, perceptual lines of demarcation are inevitably drawn.

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Such information might be useful to parents and religious leaders as they think about media literacy from a religious perspective. While religious groups tend to endorse avoidance or rules-based approaches to media use, participants indirectly disclosed a desire for a deeper, more meaningful view of media literacy, one that allows them to select, use, and interpret media in optimal ways for personal improvement. Such issues deserve the attention of future research.

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Running Head: SPIRITUALITY IN USES AND GRATIFICATIONS

Religion, Spirituality, and

Uses and Gratifications Theory

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RELIGION, SPIRITUALITY, AND USES AND GRATIFICATIONS THEORY

Religion, as a concept, can be said to be comprised of two main components. Any religion first requires a set of formal propositions defining the nature of humanity and their relationship to a higher being or a higher reality. These statements constitute what are typically called "beliefs." Second, religion needs an organizing institution, or "church," that governs and regulates the practice of those beliefs. Contemporary studies addressing the intersection of religion and media have generally focused on this belief/church dichotomy. Some studies have addressed how media technologies shape the presentation of the prime tenets of the gospel (Gill, 1990; Muggeridge, 1979; Owens, 1980; Romanowski, 1993). Others have investigated how religious media content affects traditional church institutions (Gaddy & Pritchard, 1985; Schultze, 1991).

Seemingly forgotten in academia's approach to religion and media is the aspect of spirituality. "Spirituality" differs from both "beliefs" and "church" for it is much more of a transcendent, ontological concern than either cognitive beliefs or immanent institutions that mere "religion" concerns itself with. Whereas religion focuses on the material, the here and now, and the things of this earth, spirituality reaches beyond them all, opening the self to possibilities beyond the temporal.

In recent years, spirituality has become much more prominent in American mass media content. Some have declared America to be in the midst of a spiritual revival, the likes of which mirror the country's previous 'great awakenings.' Beaudoin (1998) perhaps made the strongest statement concerning the re-emergence of God in American culture:

> While spiritual themes often appear in American culture, an important shift is occurring. For a generation widely presumed to be indifferent to religion, religious themes and images are strikingly prevalent. It may be overstating things to declare that

God is on everyone's mind, but God—or at least a quest for meaning beyond the world of banality—is nearly a mainstream topic. (p. 42)

As evidence of this increased interest in spirituality, one only has to look to current trends in mass media. The success of the television series "Touched by an Angel," the pop music genre 'contemporary Christian music,' films such as "Dogma," "End of Days," and "The Omega Code," as well as the book series Left Behind all testify to the increased prominence of spiritually-oriented messages in today's mass media content.[1] Yet, scholarly examinations of spirituality in media are lacking in published media studies. If one takes the number of published studies as an indicator, spirituality in the media as a topic of scholarly inquiry has been marginalized for much of the 1990s—despite an increased presence of spiritual themes in media content. Notable exceptions do exist (Engnell, 1995; Romanowski, 1992; Reid, 1993), but on the whole, scholarly research has not kept pace with the exponential increase of spirituality in the media.

Spirituality as a formal component of religion, can be somewhat problematic for researchers. Deriving from a variety of disciplines, including theology and mysticism, spirituality defies an easy definition. As a subject of academic inquiry, it has a short history. Schneiders (1990) noted spirituality "only 20 years ago connoted suspect enthusiasm or mindless piety" (p. 30). It may be that spirituality fails to fall neatly into either of the above recognized categories of "belief" and "institution," serving rather more as an overarching, invisible framework for the operation of the two more easily identifiable components of religion. Certainly, researchers prefer to examine that which they can see, rather than that which is hidden. Yet, the increase in spiritual content of today's mass media certainly deserves scholarly attention.

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Recent work by several media scholars (Hoover and Lundby, 1997; Warren, 1997) has called for a re-conceptualization of the relationship between religion and media. Central to their arguments is the claim that the institution of the church is losing its influence as a disseminator of religious belief. What is called 'belief' is now being shaped more by media and media content than by the formal institutions of the church. Hoover and Venturelli's (1996) conception of the "religious" is a radical departure from the above traditional paradigm. Drawing on social and cultural theory, they place modern conceptions of religion squarely within secular culture and "contemporary mediated discourse" (p. 260).

This certainly seems to be a move in the right direction for media studies that wish to probe deeper understandings of religion. Yet, I would contend that despite the insightful intentions of academic scholars to re-direct research agendas, there is still a fundamental problem with today's research into religion and media. The questions we are asking are still being answered with the older categories of belief and institution, to the exclusion of the emerging academic concept of "spirituality." We are not moving forward in our understanding of spirituality and its connection to established notions of religion. Hoover and Lundby (1997), major proponents of re-conceptualizing the interrelationship between religion and media, encourage scholars to address "new modes of spirituality" (p. 31). However, their recommendations fall short of truly looking at religion and spirituality anew. They eventually resort to the old paradigm, urging researchers to study "the complex relations between religious institutions and the media" (p. 31) [emphasis mine].

This paper aims to re-conceptualize religious media studies in light of the explosion of spirituality evident in contemporary mass media content. It is my desire to propose a more precise means of examining questions of spirituality in media. This will be accomplished primarily by re-thinking the major media theory used to investigate media and media content:

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uses and gratifications. Despite the theory receiving a healthy dose of criticism over the years (Elliot, 1974; Swanson, 1977), uses and gratifications theory does provide a useful framework for examining media consumption motives (McQuail, 1984; Palmgreen, 1984). I argue, however, that to be properly applied to spiritual media content, a reconsideration of the theory is in order. As applied in past studies examining religious media content, the uses and gratifications framework does not advance our understanding of the spiritual, only what we would consider "beliefs" or religious "institutions." In the remainder of this paper, I will review the major tenets of uses and gratifications theory and show how previous studies have applied the theory to religious media and religious media content. Then, I will offer a hopefully plausible definition of spirituality, proposing potential variables or typologies for inclusion into future uses and gratifications studies that attempt to further our understanding of spirituality.

Primary Tenets of Uses and Gratifications Theory

The history of uses and gratifications research has been recounted many times in the literature (McLeod & Becker, 1981; McQuail, 1984; Rayburn, 1996; Rosengren, Wenner, & Palmgreen, 1985). Two items inherent in the approach bear emphasis here—first, the theory's focus on the individual audience member, and second, the rational characteristics of the audience member.

Katz (1959) provided the necessary push toward an audience-centered line of research when he wrote, "less attention [should be paid] to what media do to people and more to what people do with media" (p. 2). Up until the late 1940s, most media research was focused on "uniform" or "direct effects." It was widely held that people were powerless to resist media messages. Klapper (1960) began to formalize the existence of intervening effects, which began

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to dismantle the dominant powerful effects paradigm. McQuail (1984) noted the change this idea brought to media studies:

> The guiding thought was that effects would be more likely to occur where a corresponding or relevant motive existed on the part of the receiver. In turn, this had a place in the development of theory and research concerning the active or 'obstinate' audience and of interactive, in place of one-way, models of media influence. (p. 179)

The active audience, who select media to consume for the purpose of meeting specific goals, has remained a key tenet to the uses and gratifications paradigm (Katz, Blumler & Gurevitch, 1973, p. 510; McQuail, 1984, p. 185).

Hand in hand with the active audience concept is the rational audience concept. McQuail (1984) noted uses and gratifications involved "a view of media consumption as a logical and sequential process" (p. 185). The rational audience is primarily a methodological concern for uses and gratifications, for most research in the area involves self-reporting of gratification needs. Becker (1979) wrote, "It must be assumed that the respondent is capable of providing answers to the questions posed regarding relevant gratifications" (p. 56). Coupled with the assumption that audiences are capable of reporting their gratification needs, the rational audience view also holds that individuals are free to choose the media they consume (McLeod & Becker, 1981).

Uses and gratifications as a research paradigm has been heavily criticized by media scholars (Elliot, 1974; Swanson, 1977). Most notably, critics charge that uses and gratifications lacks a theoretical basis for its claims, that it is overly functional, or positive, in its view of media, and it never gets beyond normative claims of media use—in other words, it fails in its ability to predict media use (Katz, Blumler, & Guervitch, 1973; McLeod & Becker, 1981). It should also be noted here that the normative typologies of uses and gratifications

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have not changed much over the years. In the last twenty years, uses and gratifications studies have typically employed typologies including relaxation, companionship, entertainment, passing time, escapism, and information (Palmgreen & Rayburn, 1979; Rubin, 1983; Elliot & Quattlebaum, 1979; Pearse & Courtright, 1993). If uses and gratifications is to resuscitate itself, perhaps it should look to incorporate new typologies and seek to broaden its explanatory power. Perhaps by reconsidering how uses and gratifications theory might serve issues of spirituality, it would accomplish just that.

Spirituality and Uses and Gratifications

One of the overarching themes of this paper is that if uses and gratifications theory is going to be applied to new studies of spiritually oriented media content, it must be reconceived and reconceptualized. In this section, I will review several key past studies and show how they do not advance our understanding of spirituality.

As noted above, spirituality is an abstract concept. For the most part, it is hidden from view and therefore, admittedly, it is hard to accurately research. Korpi and Kim (1986), in their examination of televangelism, noted the difficulty in operationalizing such abstract concepts:

> Uses and gratifications researchers often tend to resort to socio-structural variables such as standard demographics, especially age, sex, income, education, and occupation, availability of leisure time and media channels. They also resort to psychological variables such as needs and motives. However, these two kinds of variables (socio-structural and psychological) provide at best indirect explanations of why people attend to media. (p. 412)

As we will now see, this difficulty—measuring the abstract indirectly—only yields a limited understanding of the spiritual.

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Abelman perhaps undertook the most well known examinations of religious gratifications derived from media. In a series of studies (1987, 1988, 1989) he investigated uses of televangelism by the religious media audience. Drawing on the work of Rubin (1984), Abelman identified ritual and instrumental viewers among the religious television audience—that is, religious audiences were found to view religious television out of habit and a need to stay informed. Interestingly, Abelman also identified a third viewer type, the reactionary viewer. The reactionary viewer consumes religious television primarily as an alternative to secular media (1987, p. 304). This viewer is largely dissatisfied with the offerings of commercial television and views religious programming to gain a sense of "moral support not found in secular programming" (p. 304).

What is intriguing about these studies is their failure to identify any uniquely spiritual gratification of religious programming. The reactionary viewer, according to Abelman, is "not unique to religious television" (1987, p. 304; 1988, p. 164). The motives of this type of viewer are actually rooted in secularism, rather than in religion or even spirituality. Abelman makes the claim that these viewers seek spiritual guidance and moral support, but fails to illuminate the roots of these needs, or what he means by "spiritual" and "moral." No mention is even given to the potential network of beliefs that may have informed the need for "guidance."

As with most gratification studies, the normative typologies used to measure the gratifications in these studies were drawn from known examinations of "secular" media. No consideration is made as to whether the gratification typologies are uniquely spiritual or not. Abelman weakly defines one of his most interesting typologies—"religiosity"—as "the importance religion has in one's life" (1987, p. 305; 1988, p. 116). We come away from these studies still not knowing how or what particular dimension of spirituality informs media choices, much less knowing how religion was defined. In his earliest study, Abelman argued that "religious programming has been ignored" in gratifications research (1987, p. 294). In can be said that while these studies at least pay attention to religious media, we still don't have any better idea of what people are seeking spiritually from such programming. These studies do succeed at defining gratifications received from religious programming, if "religious" is confined to an earthly, institutional concern. Abelman's important work does not advance our understanding of the transcendent qualities of the spiritual.

It seems that all too often, variables measuring religious belief are lumped together into a single variable called "religiosity." Gaddy and Pritchard (1985), in their examination of religious television as a functional alternative to physical attendance at a worship service, defined religiosity in terms of "the religious attitudes, values, and beliefs an individual holds" (p. 129). While religiosity was seen as an important factor in the analysis, this definition still does not move beyond the concerns of this world to the transcendent experience. Abelman (1987, 1988, 1989) utilized religiosity in his studies, calling it "the importance religion has in one's life." Hamilton and Rubin (1992) employed religiosity as a term measuring church affiliation (p. 671). In these cases, we can see religiosity serving as a catch-all category that places what could be 'spiritual' concerns into limiting 'religious' categories, which do not advance our understanding of the religious experience beyond the confines of "belief" and "institution."

To their credit, the above researchers may not have been seeking to explain aspects of the "spiritual." They apparently aimed for understanding "the religious" and one can admittedly say they succeeded. My overall purpose in this essay is to go beyond the scope of these studies. Seeing how these past studies are limited to traditional conceptions of religion and religiosity, I now wish to advance an empirical definition of spirituality which can serve to inform future research in this area.

Defining Spirituality

It is my central argument here is that "spirituality" is fundamentally different from "religion." Spirituality addresses itself to things not of this world, while religion concentrates on earthly practices. Cousins (1985), in writing the preface to the Christian Spirituality series, said, "The spiritual core is the deepest center of the person. It is here that the person is open to the transcendent dimension: it is here that the person experiences ultimate reality" (p. xiii). Schneider (1990) defined spirituality similarly, emphasizing "the fundamental dimension of the human being" and "the lived experience which actualizes the dimension" (p. 17). These definitions are good ones, for they define spirituality in terms of transcendent experiences, "rather than in attitudes or relationships" (Eire, 1990, p. 57) which can bind our conception of what spirituality is to earthly dimensions. I propose that the most important aspects of our definition of spirituality go beyond earthly parameters. Spirituality must be the transcendent experience of humanity and the communion with a higher reality within that experience.

Once spirituality is conceptualized as transcendent experiences of a higher reality, one must ask, "what is that higher reality that the spiritual person experiences?" Here, I believe Otto's The Idea of the Holy (1952) provides a sufficient starting point for answering this question. Idinopulos (1996) called Otto's work "a profound and penetrating analysis of religion" (p. 141). The Idea of the Holy is useful for it allows us a glimpse at the characteristics of a possible higher deity, and it affords us a means of understanding our experience with that deity.

Otto's thought is complex and several basic ideas must first be established. Concerning a deity, Otto says there exists a "wholly other," a *numen*, a highest being that exists "above and beyond the meaning of goodness" (1952, p. 6). Our experience with that deity is "unthinkable and unspeakable, because it is unlike any other possible experience" (Raphel, 1997, p. 8). The reason we can make sense of such an encounter is because we make use of Kantian *a priori* categories of understanding (Idinopulos, 1996, p. 140). The overall effect of this encounter with an unspeakable deity via *a priori* understanding is a raw "creature-feeling" (Otto, 1952, p. 10), labeled *mysterium tremendum et fascinans*—translated loosely as mystery, trepidation, and fascination. Mystery represents a type of irrationality, "something of whose special character we can feel, without being able to give it clear conceptual expression" (p. 30). We are paradoxically separated from, yet also a part of the divine (Raphel, 1997, p. 153). Trepidation connotes fear of the "other"—fear of its "awful majesty" (Otto, 1952, p. 20). Idinopulos (1996) described it as "the self awareness of being mere nothing…before the presence of the Lord" (p. 141). Finally, the concept of fascination beckons the self to join the wholly other, despite the fear and mystery of the deity. Like Kierkegaardian dread, we are attracted to what frightens us. Together, this wholly other is "the divine [that] is indeed the highest, strongest, best, loveliest, and dearest that man can think of" (Otto, p. 39) and *mysterium tremendum et fascinans* is how we encounter it.

So, what is spirituality empirically? Having examined Otto's thought, we can begin to move toward a definition. It is the experience of, or the communing with a reality, a deity, that exists beyond the limits of this temporal world. Probing deeper, we can also say that the spiritual experience involves a conflicting set of impulses, attraction and repulsion, fascination and mystery. With wonder, awe, and fear, we encounter a higher reality outside of our temporal being. It could be said that such experiences go against human rationality. Irrationality, along with transcendence, emerge from this brief overview as important considerations in spirituality. With such a conception in mind, we can now begin to place spirituality within the uses and gratifications framework.

Reconceptualizing Spirituality in Media Gratifications Studies

It should be painfully obvious at this point that a large paradox is at hand. The definition of spirituality proposed above contains elements that are antithetical to the primary tenets of uses and gratifications theory, namely that of the rational individual. How can uses and gratifications employ irrationality to examine consumer motivations of spiritual media content? To reconcile such a paradox, we must look to Otto once again.

Otto's spiritual typology of *mysterium tremendum et fascinans* contains elements of irrationality in that we are simultaneously attracted and repulsed by the *numen*—that which we can not know or observe. I would suggest that this is not such a paradox when applied to spiritual media use. The rational individual element of uses and gratifications theory is largely dependent upon the individual being in control of their choices. In other words, we must have freedom to choose what media we consume and we must know why we consume it (McLeod & Becker, 1981). When consuming media of a spiritual nature, we still are in control of our choices. The spiritual experience does not necessarily preclude our loss of control. How can this be?

The answer truly lies in the experience. As an element of spirituality, the experience grants us the ability to choose rationally. Once we experience the wholly other, we desire to re-experience "the highest, strongest, best, loveliest, and dearest that man can think of" (Otto, p. 39) again. Using the *a priori* categories of knowledge, we come to some understanding of the wholly other. Consumption of spiritually oriented media may facilitate the re-experiencing of the *numen*. We are able to make rational choices despite the object of our choice being largely mysterious, frightening, or fascinating. Even though we can not fully know or express our numinous experience, we still desire community with it and we choose purposefully, rationally, and freely in order to fulfill that desire.

New Variables/Typologies for Uses and Gratifications

In order to fully move beyond the normative paradigm of uses and gratifications theory and into a reconceptualized theory that includes the spiritual dimension, I now wish to propose three new variables, or typologies, that merit inclusion into future uses and gratifications studies that examine questions of the intersection of spirituality and media. The variables are transcendence, irrationality, and community.

Transcendence. The first variable/typology of transcendence should not come as a surprise, for it has informed much of the above discussion. Hoover and Venturelli (1996) wrote, "Media theory and research must find a way to enter into discourses beyond 'the secular' if they are to fully account for contemporary practices of meaning construction" (p. 259). This variable aims toward that end. The work of Eire (1990) is especially helpful in formulating how such a variable would be used in such examinations.

Above, I have spoke of spirituality as the transcendent experience. Eire wrote, "since the experiences studied by spirituality are principally those in which individuals claim to transcend the world in which they live, it is imperative that all future studies in spirituality examine closely the concept of reality which informs any given experience" (p. 58). Along these lines, as researchers, we should ask, "What experiences qualify as transcendent? What is the other reality that media content affords for us? How does the spiritual experience of another reality inform media choices? How can choices in the immanent satisfy the transcendent?"

Uses and gratifications research must also move beyond its conceptions of media consumption as the end of human need. Too often, we perceive that we can be satisfied by interaction with a medium itself. I propose that individuals interact with media because there is something beyond the medium itself they are looking for. Any medium is just that—a facilitator of something else. Perhaps only in cases of habitual consumption do we perceive interaction with the technology as the end telos of media use, but there exists a need in everyone where we recognize that we as humans are fundamentally unsatisfied with our terminal being. Maybe only the complete skeptic would disagree, but I offer that we as humans have an innate desire to seek eternal satisfaction outside of ourselves. Spiritual uses and gratifications research is aware of this, viewing media as a means to affording that transcendent satisfaction. If uses and gratifications researchers want to fully understand spirituality of media, we should begin to ask about how our experiences of another, transcendent reality, are served by media content.

Irrationality. Again, this variable/typology should come as no surprise for it has also played a prominent part in the forgoing discussion. Irrationality, as conceptualized here, can play a major part in understanding how the spiritual dimension informs media choices. Irrationality, for purposes of empirical investigation, can be conceptualized as conflict.

Weber noted how religion was a system that gave meaning to behavioral norms. In The Sociology of Religion, Weber (1963) wrote how a rational system of religious beliefs could be overwhelmed by a number of factors, namely a social economic system which encouraged privatization of beliefs (pp. 27-28). The result of this privatization was a basic conflict of worldviews:

> The conflict between empirical reality and this conception of the world as a meaningful totality, which is based on a religious postulate, produces the strongest tensions in man's inner life as well as his external relationship to the world. (p. 59)

Conflict, as a dimension of irrationality in spirituality, is also noted in Otto's typology of the "wholly other." The spiritual experience is irrational because it is, at first, unknown to us (1952, p. 134). Over time, it gradually becomes familiar to us, but in it's "crudest" form,

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the "wholly other" is shrouded in mystery. It is mysterious because the spiritual experience alerts us to fundamental differences in our reasoning processes. Otto wrote of the moment of conflict between apprehending the "wholly other," or "numinous," and pragmatic reality. "We are dealing with a case of association between things specifically different—the 'numinous' and the 'natural' moments of consciousness" (p. 27).

Irrationality can fit within the uses and gratifications paradigm for researchers can look for conflict within individual use of religious media. What tensions are evident in one's choices? What processes must one sort through in making media choices? What doubts does one have about the potential fulfillment of gratifications by a particular medium? As noted above, irrationality doesn't necessarily have to be seen as antithetical to uses and gratifications. While we are still in control of our media choices, we choose purposefully, to satisfy our need for the numinous experience, even if we must sort through fear, doubts, and uncertainty about the object of our choices.

Community. The work of Eire (1990) is particularly useful in conceptualizing this final variable/typology called "community." Eire postulates that any spiritual experience must also "take the social dimensions of the experience into account," asking, "how should the individual experience be related to its setting?" (p. 59). Community as conceptualized here attempts to understand how one's network of relations, and the depth of those relations, inform and influence one's media choices.

The term "community" involves moving beyond the mere "social interaction" variables that dominate much of the uses and gratifications literature (Elliot & Quattlebaum, 1979; Perse & Rubin, 1990). "Social Interaction" connotes an emphasis on the needs of the individual, but "community" shifts the focus of need fulfillment to common needs among several religious media consumers. Durkheim (1965) located society at the heart of the religious experience (p.

419). Under his paradigm, all rituals shared by individuals qualify as sacred. Tukey (1990) also made this connection that the self must be balanced with a sense of a larger community. “Being human means being a social-spiritual amphibian and only a structure in the psyche equally at home in both environments provides a suitable center” (p. 67). Community can be that structure that balances the importance of self experience with a spiritual indebtedness to otherness.

There has been some work toward this end in the literature, although it is still in an embryonic state. Woods (1999) made community—defined as “fellowship”—a major typology in his examination of religious music radio (p. 230). We must begin to ask if we are all disconnected individuals, or are we intimately connected via *a priori* needs for fellowship with others? How do our associations with those around us inform and influence our media choices? How do our choices of media content, infused with spiritual dimensions, help us form communal relationships? And how does community, derived from media use and content, enable the spiritual experience?

Conclusions and Implications

If academic research into the spiritual gratifications derived from media is to keep pace with the growing amount of spiritually infused media content, it must reconsider how spirituality is approached and defined. As it stands, the past research into these questions has failed to fully capture what spirituality is. Certainly past studies help us understand why people attune to religious media, but they shed less light on what spiritual gratifications truly are. Obviously with the amount of spiritually oriented messages in the media growing, attention to this area demands the best possible variables and methods.

The three new variables proposed here aim to give researchers better typologies to incorporate into religious media studies that focus on the spiritual dimension. If Otto, Weber,

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Eire, and Durkheim are right, then true spirituality includes elements of transcendence, irrationality, and community. Current media investigations do not go beyond examining traditional parameters of religion, such as belief and institutions. These proposed variables move beyond such simplistic conceptions and aim to incorporate elements of social identity and social origins of needs which, as we have seen, have been discarded from much gratifications literature. Perhaps this new arrangement can move uses and gratifications in those directions. It is not my desire here to offer methodological proposals for using these proposed variables, but rather to stimulate reconceptualizations of spirituality, which would yield a fundamental change in how we approach the cross section of religion and media.

Tukey (1990) in his essay on advancing spirituality in rhetorical studies wrote, "How we view the nature of human communication depends upon our conception of the nature of being human" (p. 66). This current essay argues the same. If the increase in spirituality in today's media is an indicator of our humanness, then we are indeed spiritual beings. We need strong, well-developed conceptions of what it means to be spiritual if we are to more fully understand use of media content containing spiritual dimensions. Hopefully, this essay will nudge the paradigm that much closer to such understanding.

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Notes

[1] Certainly in popular culture, artifacts abound that testify to a renewed interest in spirituality. In television, Touched by an Angel is the first series since 1991 to last more than one year that blatantly incorporates spiritual themes into its plot lines (Schindler, 1997, pp. 40-41). In 1997, Touched by an Angel garnered a 13.3 rating and a 20 share, making it one of the highest rated dramatic shows on television that year (Rice, 1997, p. 26). Book publishing is noting increased attention to spiritual issues. While Hal Lindsay's The Late Great Planet Earth set the early standard for spiritual book sales in the 1970s, selling 20 million copies (Di Sabatino, 1999, p. 13), Carrigan (1995) noted a "marked increase in requests for religious and spiritual books" toward the end of the decade and into the next (p. 36). Religious book sales are projected to increase by eighty-two percent between 1987 and 2010 (p. 37). One of the most popular fiction series published today is the evangelical series Left Behind, by theologian Tim Lahaye and writer Jerry Jenkins. The six books in the series, telling of a post-rapture earth, have sold more than 10 million copies since they debuted in 1995 (Murphy, 1999, p. C1). Publishers Weekly noted the series currently sells an average of 1.1 million copies a month (cited in Halls, 1999, p. I-1).

Perhaps the single best indicator of spirituality's resurgence in popular media is the growth of contemporary Christian music. Contemporary Christian music (CCM) developed during the Jesus movement era of the late 1960s as a form of cultural evangelism (Romanowski, 1992). Throughout much of its history, CCM was ghettoized and far removed from mainstream pop music circles. In the 1990s, however, CCM has emerged as a forceful genre. Since 1991, the CCM genre has averaged 22% growth a year (Zimmerman, 1996, p. 6D). Bolstered by the successes of Amy Grant and Michael W. Smith, sales of CCM by mainstream outlets increased 40% between 1992 and 1993 (Gubernick & Franco, 1995, p. 40). In 1996, CCM record sales totaled $538 million (Price, 1997, p. 45). By 1998, combined sales of records and concert tickets totaled $1.3 billion (Sandler, 1998, p. 32).

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Advocacy, Objectivity, Editorial Freedom and Journalistic Quality: A Study of Issues in the Protestant Press

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Abstract

The reporting of religion by daily newspapers and the nation's news magazines is an area of increasing interest among communication scholars. Much less research has focused on periodicals written by and for religious believers. Estimates of the number of religious publications in America runs as high as 3,000. The two Protestant press associations claim their member publications reach approximately 47 million readers each year. Millions more people read Catholic, Jewish and other religious magazines. But most religious publications boast small audiences and therefore operate outside the mainstream of American public consciousness. Few of the publications are regularly quoted in the mainstream press or distributed on the nation's newsstands. Critics say the religious press is invisible because of poor writing and design, and because the publications are out of step with mainstream America. This paper explores some of those issues through a survey of Protestant press editors. The survey explores perceptions of their journalistic philosophy, their editorial freedom and their response to criticism from their detractors. The study suggests future areas for fruitful study.

Advocacy, Objectivity, Editorial Freedom and Journalistic Quality: A Study of Issues in the Protestant Press

The reporting of religion by daily newspapers and the nation's news magazines is an area of increasing interest among communication scholars (Buddenbaum, 1998; Olasky, 1986; Dart & Allen, 1993; Religion and the News, 1994). Much less research has focused on periodicals written by and for religious believers. Indeed, in their prescriptions for helping the media better report on religious issues, Dart and Allen overlooked the role religious periodicals might play in educating journalists. For all intents and purposes, the religious press is invisible; yet, estimates of the number of religious publications in America runs as high as 3,000 (Fackler & Lippy, p. xi) The two Protestant press associations claim their more than 400 member publications reach approximately 47 million readers each year. Millions more people read Catholic, Jewish and other religious magazines. But most religious publications boast small audiences and therefore operate outside the mainstream of American public consciousness. Few of the publications are regularly quoted in the mainstream press or distributed on the nation's newsstands. Still, Austin (1990, p. 115) notes that the religious press, "shares with the secular press the role of the responsible journalist who questions, probes and reports with the objective truth and the reader's interest." Austin also asserts that, "the secular press is often blind to or simply ignores the role that religion plays in newsworthy events; and it is incumbent upon the church-related press to fill in this gap." Buddenbaum (1998, p. 139) advises religious writers for mainstream papers to regularly read religious media because these publications can "alert reporters to situations that otherwise might go unnoticed. . . .[M]onitoring the religious media church leaders and members use regularly can be virtually the only way to spot trends or to determine whether what is going on locally is typical or atypical."

Throughout American history the religious press has focused on two major article types: devotional and informational pieces that enrich the personal piety of the reader; and motivational articles that challenge the reader to engage society and culture--through spreading the message of the faith, through involvement in acts of compassion toward others less fortunate, or by organizing public opinion to combat cultural changes that threaten religious values. Approximately 75 percent of Protestant publications receive some support from either their denomination or from the organization that owns them. These organizations include the so-called parachurch groups that unite a broad spectrum of believers to combat a particular social problem such as hunger, poverty or homelessness. A handful of publications are independent of any denominational control and survive like their specialized magazine peers, which rely on strong editorial content to attract a critical mass of subscribers and advertisers.

The few scholars who have studied the religious press have criticized the unimaginative writing and design of the publications, the poorly-researched or sensationalized news coverage, and the printing of self-serving news releases from denominational leaders. For the most part, editors of religious magazines have not participated in a dialogue with those academic researchers who have commented on the quality of religious publications. The Protestant and Catholic press associations, mindful of this criticism over the years, sponsors a bevy of practical skill-building workshops at their annual conventions and as a result, the quality of religious publishing has improved dramatically during the past few decades. Because they are focused on religion, and their audiences are narrowly-defined, the editorial philosophy and approach of religious publications is one of advocacy. Yet many of the publications employ writers and editors whose have been trained as journalists and their training and experience compel them to cover potentially controversial stories in an objective manner, a manner that clashes with the expectations of their superiors and their audience. This occasionally leads to conflicts over objectivity within the framework of advocacy publications. This paper, using survey research, provides descriptive information about these key issues within one segment of the religious press—Protestantism—and furthers our understanding of the complexity of religious publishing, and opportunities to further research this overlooked area of scholarship. The examination of only the Protestant press at this point reflects the

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researcher's familiarity with those publications, access to the Protestant press mailing lists and archives, and support from the two Protestant press associations.

Literature Review

Church historian Martin Marty has been a friendly critic of Protestant media for the past 40 years. Marty says too many religious publications print PR releases from denominational leaders, and that the Christian message of relevance to today's society is "denied in the press when the whole thrust is toward organizational self-enhancement and protectionism." (1963, p. 36) He has written on several occasions that the religious press is out of touch with the needs of every-day Americans and, thus, "seems to add to an already trivially regarded religious institutionalism." (1963. p. 17). While he sees the religious press as playing an important role in informing and educating believers, and adding to group cohesiveness, he feels that the publications miss one of their most important opportunities: to impact the larger culture, to be part of the ongoing discussion within the national public debate. Marty has consistently called on the religious press to create a national news publication providing analysis of world, national and local events from a Christian worldview perspective. Using the Christian Science Monitor, as an example, Marty has challenged Christian leaders to explore the difficult moral and social issues of the times with credible, thoughtful and well-researched articles. While he has admitted recently that Protestant publications are better edited and designed than in the past (personal conversation, March 7, 2000), he still voices concern about the relevance of many of the publications to the nation's dialogue about social, cultural and political issues (1998, p. 663).

Marvin Olasky, a University of Texas journalism professor, has called the writing in Protestant publications tepid and joyless. He criticized publications for presenting "warmed over sermons" rather than realistic and detailed articles that teach boldness in advocating one's position on issues (1996, p. xiv). He also criticized articles that try to advance a particular Christian viewpoint because they do so "in a tone so screeching as to be useless in coalition-building." Indeed, the introduction of Olasky's book on revitalizing Christian journalism (1996) is called "The Sad State of Christian Journalism." He notes:

> Too often evangelical publications, instead of exhibiting the journalistic excitement of the hunt, are content to print public-relations releases and carry on their business in a joyless manner that makes them resemble a proctologist's press. (1996, xii).

One-third of these much-maligned religious editors received bachelor's degrees in journalism, while others received their degrees in communication, English and theology (Trouten, 1999). While some like Olasky say religious editors simply unquestioningly reprint news releases, other scholars note tensions between those with training and experience in journalism and the objective method, and executives whose vision of corporate communication is to publish those news releases. Put another way, journalistic training sometimes butts heads with public relations mandates. Religious editors believe their publication is a vehicle for sharing the ultimate truth of God, but sometimes that truth means exposing difficult and controversial issues within the church, or in Christendom at large. Austin (1990, p. 112) notes:

> These battles—and they are widespread and occur in nearly every denomination and organization at one time or another—generally pit those with an understanding of journalistic freedom against those who feel that information put out by an organization should more narrowly "serve the needs" of the organization. 'Stories on controversial subjects, "bad" news, embarrassing mistakes, or failed programs, though "newsworthy," might not serve these needs and therefore should be squelched, say the organizationally-minded.

Two press associations serve the Protestant press. In its Statement of Ethics and Standards of Professional Practice, the Associated Church Press (1998) notes that the "special purpose of the religious press is to use the print medium to *foster development and growth among the faithful* and to seek effective communication between the faithful and others in society" (italics added). In its statement of ethics the church press association also notes that seeking truth, accuracy and objectivity in news reporting are goals member publications should strive to attain. Truthfulness, comprehensiveness, honesty, fair play and civility are key words in the Evangelical Press Association (1999) statement of ethics.

Even when the publication is independently owned, its editors may find themselves at odds with the expectations of their readers. That is the story of one publication of promise that eventually failed.

National Courier was founded in 1975 by Dan Malachuk. Malachuk created a powerful book publisher that catered to charistmatic and Pentecostal Christians, people who believe in miraculous healings, speaking in tongues and other physical manifestations of God's presence on earth (see Mills, 1985). Malachuk wanted a weekly newspaper that would provide a Christian perspective on world events, written by professional journalists who were also Christian. The editors and writers he hired approached their craft as journalists, providing a Christian perspective that occasionally considered difficult social and cultural problems—be it abortion, homosexuality or Presidential candidates—by allowing the reader to see a multitude of perspectives. While not embracing abortion or homosexuality, for instance, the writers carefully created stories showing the difficult choices Christians had made as they navigated the slippery slope of daily living (See Waters, 1994). Readers and advertisers embraced the initial concept, but subscription renewals fell sharply and readers began complaining about the lack of firm advocacy in the news sections of the paper. They also demanded more good news stories of spiritual conversions and miraculous healing. Malachuk, meanwhile, caved in to pressure from his primary supporters in the Pentecostal movement and demanded that the Courier change from its quasi-objective approach and present more good news and edifying content (Waters, 1994, p. 58). Soon the newspaper mirrored a number of other Christian periodicals that featured personalities and watered-down "good news." What was billed as journalism's finest hour, became a financial nightmare as the Courier lost hundreds of thousands of dollars before it folded (Quebedeaux, 1983, p. 97). The lesson drawn by several editors was that Malachuk's interference coupled with the reader's rejection of stories showing "the other side" of controversial Christian issues killed the grand experiment.

Norton's observation about the fickle nature of religious readers proved prophetic in the case of the National Courier. He wrote: "When religious interest publications attempt to tell the whole story, advertisers and church member subscribers apply an economic boycott." (Norton, 1971, p. 25). Still, in his analysis, Austin, says:

> By far the more interesting segments of the Protestant press today are those publications that have inherited as sense of journalistic freedom or those that have championed movements within various sections of the church. Often beset by their sponsors, publications like these attempt to take the church tradition of a free press and make it work within the church (1990, p. 112).

One of the most interesting experiments in Christian journalism today is World magazine. According to editor Olasky, the journalism profession errs not only in its attempt at objectivity, but its attempt to find a suitable philosophy to replace objectivity. He claims that the profession today leans toward what he calls journalistic morality, the idea that practicing the steps of objectivity—even while admitting true neutrality is impossible—is the best a journalist can do. Yet Olasky argues that it takes moral people to practice moral journalism that is fair and accurate. "Biblically, we know that we are sinners," he notes (February 19, 1999). Thus the traditional journalistic method fails because it is, de facto, advocacy for the humanistic, politically-liberal agenda of the secular press. He is also critical of the uncritical onslaught of "good news" stories that characterized the final days of the National Courier and a bevy of other religious publications. "Journalistic moralism emphasizes the good, uplifting parts, so we can feel better about ourselves; the churchy form of journalistic moralism presents happy, smiling church people, removed from the sinful world and moving from one triumph to the next," he claims (1999, February 19). Instead, Olasky crusades for what he calls biblical journalism, a form of directed reporting or advocacy. Biblical journalists see the world through the lens of God's word, the Bible. Christian journalists tell stories as God would see the event or issue, offering a perspective consistent with the truth of God's word. "Directed reporting is designed to show readers the salient facts in bible-based contextualization, and allow them to agree or disagree with the conclusions reached" (1996, p. 33). Olasky admits that there are some issues upon which the Bible is very clear, and others in which the writer must rely on historical precedent, inference or a reasoned judgement based on biblical morality. He likens these to traversing rapids that range from very difficult and dangerous to fairly mild and benign.

In practice, Biblical journalism has led to its share of controversies, including an ethical brouhaha within the Evangelical Press Association. In April of 1997, World's cover screamed "Femme Fatale," promoting an article about a new translation of the immensely popular New International Version. This gender-neutral translation, said World, was being considered by the International Bible Society and Zondervan Publishing (S. Olasky, April 19, 1997). Zondervan, a subsidiary of Rupert Murdoch's News Corp., holds the United States publishing rights to the translation. World's article, written by Olasky's wife, Susan, claimed that this so-called "stealth Bible," planned to misquote God himself as the translators changed numerous male references. After the World story appeared, Zondervan and the International Bible Society accused the publication of misrepresenting the facts, and of not doing a thorough job of reporting. Eventually the groups filed ethics charges against World with the Evangelical Press Association. At the time, Olasky told his readers: Fighting for God's Word. . . means not only upsetting feminists, jeopardizing advertising pages, and taking a lot of heat, but also (temporarily, we hope) reducing public confidence in Zondervan and the International Bible Society" (1997, June 14/21). He criticized his fellow religious editors for not exposing the "stealth Bible" before World and accused them of catering to public relations pressure.

A three-person committee appointed by the executive director of the EPA did fault World for its sensationalism and lack of thorough research, but agreed that it had the right to publish its stories. (Report of the Ethics Committee, July 1, 1997). Because of technicalities within the EPA by-laws, the ethics committee report was shuttled by the Board of Directors and the ethics charges were never settled. At the conclusion of the controversy, Olasky noted:

> We were also criticized for publishing what "appears to be a news report, yet techniques of commentary are evident." Exactly: reporting and commentary are not separate in the Bible, and we do not think they should be separate in biblical journalism. To us at World, our successful exposure of the "stealth Bible" was our proudest moment; to critics, it was terrible sensationalism. The battle showed there is not one type of journalism practiced by Christians now; there are two, and they are diametrically opposed (1999, February 19).

Recently World came under fire for its thorough, but largely negative, analysis of Presidential hopeful Sen. John McCain. Copies of World's analysis of McCain were sent to members of Congress and major media throughout the country. The coverage of McCain raised the ire of syndicated columnist William Safire who accused World of sleazy and unethical journalism because the analysis was written by a son of Bob Jones, president of Bob Jones University (Safire, February 20, 2000, B-11). That university was the site of a major rally held by McCain's adversary, candidate George W. Bush, Jr. The university has also been roundly denounced for its conservative social policies including a ban on interracial dating. In addition, Olasky had served as an adviser to Gov Bush and is said to have termed the phrase "compassionate conservatism" for the governor. While Olasky says he recused himself from editing any stories on the Presidential campaign, he later admitted, "If we now have any appearance of impropriety, it's my fault and I take responsibility—although I still don't see that there was any perfect way out" (March 11, 2000, page 38). He added, however, that his commitment to World's style of reporting would remain firm. "We want a magazine so provocative and evocative that it will be essential reading even for those at the New York Times who despise us."

As controversies over the quality of religious publications, and their approaches to editing continued, a long-time religious editor surveyed his peers in the Evangelical Press Association. Trouten(1999) found similarities and differences between editors of religious publications and their counterparts on daily newspapers. His master's degree study (1999) used Weaver and Wilhoit's previous surveys (1991), adapted slightly for the religious editor. Trouten found that 46.5 % of evangelical editors felt they were not as skilled as their secular counterparts (p. 58). Thirty-eight percent said they were about as skilled, while only 4.2 % felt they were better skilled. Ironically, these editors are better educated than their secular peers. Over 40 % of EPA editors boast graduate degrees, verses only 10 % for journalists. Of the degrees cited most often, 31 % of the evangelical editors said they had degrees in journalism, while 22.5 % reported receiving degrees in Bible. Evangelical editors report that they have far less autonomy in choosing and editing stories than do their secular peers (Trouten,1998, p. 59). Half said they were had complete freedom in selecting stories, but 90.2 % said their stories were edited by others within their organization, most likely a superior in a marketing or public relations capacity, or an executive within the hierarchy of the organization. About 60 % of the respondents to Weaver and Wilhoit said they had complete freedom to select stories, while 71 % said no one read or edited their stories.

Most religious journalists are employed by denominations or parachurch organizations, rather than by independent publications, and a final finding may indicate some of the discontent Austin says permeates religious publications. The evangelical editors shared the same commitment to news values and to journalistic ethics as their peers in daily newspapers. Trouten noted that these similar values came from the same sources--usually "on the job training"--but that religious training was another important indicator of values and ethics. He found 97.2 % of evangelical editors said their religious training informed their news values and ethics, while only 35 % of the respondent's in the Weaver and Wilhoit study said religious training was an important factor in their values and ethics.

Interestingly, Trouten found only 26.7 % of EPA journalists felt their organization's performance at informing the public was outstanding or very good (1998, p. 70), while the surveys of newspaper journalists found job satisfaction levels above 50 %. Put another way, just under three-fourths of the editors felt they worked for an organization that was not practicing full disclosure of information about the opportunities and challenges faced by that organization or denomination. That being noted, paradxocally, far more religious journalists reported high levels of job satisfaction than did their secular counterparts (Trouten, 1998, p. 69).

The landscape of Protestant journalism is one of complexity and paradox. Still, millions of people receive religious publications each year and in varying degrees the content of these publications affects the spiritual growth and activity of millions of believers. To further explore this complexity, a survey of 414 editors was conducted among communication executives associated with the two main Protestant press associations. Protestant publications used for this study are members of either the Associated Church Press or the Evangelical Press Association. The ACP is an 80-year-old association of editors affiliated with the major U.S. and Canadian denominations, characterized as more theologically liberal and socially progressive than their counterparts, the Evangelical Press Association. EPA was founded just after World War II to unite fundamentalist and evangelical editors into an association focused on mutual

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support for more conservative doctrinal and social endeavors. Today ACP contains 175 member publications, while EPA has just over 400 member publications.

Research Questions and Methodology

The questions for the survey were generated by the preceding review of literature, the author's past work as an editor and writer for Protestant and Catholic publications, and from comments to an open-ended questionnaire distributed to 50 editors attending the 1999 Evangelical Press Association meeting. The current survey focused on a variety of issues; in this paper, issues related to the magazines' editorial philosophy, particularly views of objectivity and fairness in reporting, are examined. Additionally, the paper allows editors to express their own opinions about the quality of their craft.

The survey sought to answer the following questions:

1. How does the religious advocacy press define objectivity, if they do at all? What elements of the journalistic routine do they emulate and what do they reject?

2. What editorial philosophy guides the selection of stories and the approach those stories take?

3. Do publications within the two major press associations differ on key philosophical editorial foundations? Or is there a uniformity among Protestant editors?

4. Do editors have the freedom to choose their own stories, or are they beholden to the editorial directives of denominational or organizational executives such as public relations people? Are they free to criticize their organization or the cause their organization advocates?

4. What do the editors themselves think about critics' charges that the quality of design and writing is sub-par?

5. What implications do these findings have for religion writers who want to use the Christian press as a news source?

6. What further research is called for based on this exploratory study?

A 20-question multi-item survey was mailed to nearly all (N=144) members of Associated Church Press (N=126) and Evangelical Press Association (N=288) member publications during the spring of 1999. Magazines published outside the United States, and Roman Catholic publications affiliated with ACP, were not surveyed. A check was made to avoid overlap should a publication hold dual membership. A follow-up mailing took place in late summer of 1999 to boost the response rate. The survey sought demographic data about the editors and their publications, and used likert-type scales to probe issues of concern. Open-ended questions allowed for further response.

Results

The respondents

Two hundred and one publication executives responded to the survey, a return rate of 48.6 %. Forty-two percent of ACP members responded (n=53) while 51.4 % of EPA members responded (n=148). Of the overall respondents, 26.4 % are ACP members, while 73.6 % are EPA members, thus the results are likely to show a bias toward the more conservative theological and social views of evangelicals. Of the publications responding, 179 (89.1 %) are national or international in scope, while 22 (10.9 %) are regional.

Survey respondents identified themselves as editorial executives (64.5 %), publishers (8.6 %), and non-editorial staff (26.4 %) such as marketing, fundraising or support personnel. The average length of their employment was 7.2 years, with a majority, just over 54 %, saying they had been in the job for less than five years. The ages of respondents ranged across the spectrum. The largest group is middle-aged and male. Forty-seven percent identified themselves as between the ages of 41 and 55. Another 30.8 % said they were between the ages of 26 and 40. Just over 27% said they were 55 or older. Males (54.3%) outnumber females (45.7%).

Objectivity or Advocacy?

Editors were asked, "Would you describe your editorial philosophy as promoting objectivity, as you understand the meaning?" Just over 56 % said yes, while 42.8 % said no. Editors were asked to explain their answers, to provide the researcher with a better gauge of what they understand objectivity to mean. Objectivity, according to most editors, is the pursuit of balance, fairness and accuracy, an editorial integrity built on reporting the truth. "We try to allow space for all sides of stories and maintain an inclusive publication," one editor noted. Another editor said: "Yes, objectivity means 'fair, balanced and aware that there are usually legitimate opinions on both sides of a question.' In that sense, we try to be objective." A commitment to accuracy

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characterized the answer of one editor: "We fact check before reporting controversial material. We strive for balance—attempt to cover more than one position on controversial issues. We place a high value on fairness."

Because they believe God is ultimate truth, and their goal is to present information and encouragement to people who believe in God, most Christian publications operate with a "yes, but. . . " attitude toward objectivity. The dispassionate, detached element of objectivity is usually not present in the editorial world of the Christian journalist. Several admit they try to use journalistic techniques within the parameters of their publication's mission to promote their denomination. As one editor noted: "We try to be fair and balanced, presenting both sides of controversial issues, while recognizing that our bias is toward promoting the Presbyterian Church and its policies and programs." Another denominational editor said: "My editorial philosophy is to encourage and equip readers to reflect theologically on issues in church and society and act on the positions they develop out of their reflection. To me 'objectivity' is not the goal, but rather clarity of reflection, action and commitment." Another editor said: "We have two goals—energize our constituents with stories of God's work among Friends, and equip readers to participate in shaping our Friend's future—that latter requires reporting issues and controversies among us." Several editors leaned toward Olasky's definition of biblical objectivity. "We are objective in that we promote the cause of Christ. Example: we oppose abortion and promote the sanctity of life; we do not give 'equal time' to pro-abortion arguments," said one. Another editor noted, "[Our] purpose is to encourage biblical discernment—a very biased approach to the world. True objectivity is achieved only upon the true foundation of God's word."

A third group of editors disassociated themselves from objectivity, noting instead that they are advocacy publications. "Our publication would fall under advocacy journalism rather than pure objective journalism that typically is dispassionate and non-editorial," said one editor. Another noted, "The current editorial understanding of 'objectivity' seems to be a mechanical attempt to provide equal space for all points of view. The terrible responsibility of the editor is to serve the reader, in spite of pressure from any person, group or class." Another editor stressed fairness, rather than objectivity. "We seek fairness in reporting, but we are definitely subjective," he said.

Those thoughts were echoed by another editor: "We have definite beliefs—standards of right and wrong—that underlie our editorial philosophy. I would say 'truthful' and fair' are more accurate."

Finally, one editor pointed out that the question of objectivity in Christian journalism is no different from the question of objectivity in any type of journalism. "This is unfair yes/no question. There is no secular objectivity, i.e. Time magazine is not really objective; we promote spiritual reality, which may appear subjective to some," he said.

Editorial Philosophy

To better understand how the editors' worldview informs their editorial philosophy, the survey presented nine statements containing a seven-point likert type scale. These statements encapsulated ideas extrapolated from Olasky's biblical journalism concept and from statements and observations by others who have studied the Protestant press. Mean scores show that none of the statements were considered highly descriptive. Editors say they stress biblical instruction and insight (M=4.47), social involvement (M=4.34), people's sinfulness and God's holiness (M=4.11), God's work in using sinful people to achieve great things (M=4.03), showing how much sinful people need God's healing (M=4.0), sharing how the organization has been blessed by God (M=3.70), depicting "good news" rather than the bad news of people's sinfulness (M=3.31), stressing personalities more than issues (M=3.15), and educating Christians about the evils of the culture (M=3.10).

The stress on biblical instruction is a variable related to personal piety and individual growth, while the stress on social involvement is a call to action on the part of readers. Getting right with God, and taking the Christian message to society, are two historical hallmarks of the Christian religion and of its press (see Moore, 1968; Marsden, 1990; Nord, 1984; Toulouse, 1993; Lueck, 1999). Variables that attempted to describe biblical journalism are somewhat descriptive of the philosophy of the publications. These variables included showing people's sinfulness and God's holiness, showing God at work in sinful people as they achieve great things, and showing how much sinful people need God's healing. Charges by some critics that religious publications only print good news, or PR about their organization were not substantiated. Printing only good news, promoting only positive actions of the sponsoring organization, and placing feature stories before issues-related articles were not considered descriptive of the content of most Protestant publications.

While none of the editorial philosophy variables was rated "highly descriptive" by respondents, statistically significant differences between responses from ACP and EPA members were found. Evangelical editors are more likely to stress biblical instruction and insight (See Table One). While not statistically significant, there is a strong trend for EPA publications to stress social involvement more than their ACP counterparts. Given that evangelicals tend to emphasize personal responsibility before God, and concepts of sin and salvation, it is not surprising that EPA publications stressed variables associated with biblical journalism. EPA publications were far more likely to stress people's sinfulness and God's holiness, or God's work among sinful people to achieve great things. Evangelicals also emphasize content that stresses that sinful people need God's healing, and they also print articles to educate Christians about the evils of our culture and times. EPA publications also favor an editorial philosophy that believes "personalities are more interesting than issues." This is to be expected given that the evangelical movement grew out of the influence of strong personalities such as Billy Graham, Oral Roberts and Pat Robertson and an emphasis on lay involvement in ministry activities permeates the movement (see Marty, 1991; Marsden, 1980; Silk, 1988; and Flowers, 1984).

Story Approval Issues

Protestant editors seem to indicate that they have internalized a philosophy of Christian communication that blends objectivity and advocacy. Yet critics say that these same editors are often at odds with denominational leaders about the extent to which they explore difficult topics and independently seek to cover stories. Responses to the seven-point likert scale were collapsed into a three-point scale of "very descriptive," "moderately descriptive," and "not descriptive" for the sake of analysis (See Table Two). Most editors said they exercised considerable editorial control. Just over 80.6 % strongly agreed that they had, "the final say on content and on editing stories and articles." Fourteen percent indicated that the statement was moderately descriptive, while 5.5 % found the statement "not descriptive." A related statement asked editors to rank the descriptiveness of, "The publisher (an executive, bishop, etc.) of our organization or denomination edits and approves all content." Sixty-eight percent of the respondents said no superior edited or approved their articles. Eleven percent indicated moderate agreement, while 21 % said that a superior did edit their articles.

Responses to these statements raise interesting questions. Just over five percent of respondents to the first statement say the editor does not have final story and editing approval; in the second statement, 20.7 percent indicate that a publisher or other executive wields final authority. The likely answer to this discrepancy is that some of the respondents hold dual titles of editor and publisher. Confusion in reading the statements may have also contributed to the discrepancy in the answers. A chi-square analysis of answers to these two questions shows a statistically significant difference in responses between members of the Associated Church Press and the Evangelical Press Association. Consistent with Trouten's findings, more evangelicals say their publisher is likely to have significant control over the content of their publications. This makes sense when one considers that EPA membership contains many publications from parachurch organizations, colleges and seminaries and these publications are, by nature, tied to the communication or marketing areas of the organization. Thus the publications' content mirrors the overall public relations objectives of their organizations.

Finally, editors were asked if denominational or organization leaders suggested or influenced article selection. Forty-eight percent said they were not even influenced by others within their organization, while 40.3 % found the statement moderately descriptive. Only 11. 7 % said they were influenced by denominational or organizational leadership. Thus it would appear that editors do wield a strong degree of editorial freedom within the institutional mission of their organizations.

Critics contend that editors lack the freedom to criticize their own denomination or cause, or to publish articles that might reflect negatively on major Christian leaders. The survey item stated, "News that might reflect negatively on our executives, cause or major figures in our church would not be run." Almost half the respondents indicated strong disagreement (they would publish negative stories). Twenty-six percent found the statement moderately descriptive (they might publish negative stories), while 23.7 % found it highly descriptive (they would not publish negative stories). It should be noted that a statistically significant difference between ACP and EPA members shows up in the analysis. [X^2=16.05. d.f.=2. p<.001]. Among ACP members, 73.5 % found the statement "not descriptive," meaning they might run articles that reflected negatively on their denomination or cause. Only one percent agreed that they would not publish such stories. On the EPA side, however, 28.9 % said they would run negative articles, while 41.4 % said they would not publish such articles. It would appear from these responses that the concept of journalistic objectivity is more prevalent among ACP than EPA publications.

To what extent do marketing decisions and denominational leadership influence story selection? Several statements probed those dimensions. Editors were asked if their stories were discussed with marketing or circulation staff prior to their assignment. Seventy-nine percent said there was no interaction prior to story assignment while only 4.6 % said they discussed stories in advance. Once stories are assigned, however, others within the organization were informed. In response to the statement, "No one in marketing or advertising knows about our content in advance," 61.7 % found the statement "not descriptive," while 18.9 % found it "highly descriptive." There is a statistically significant difference between responses to the first question on the issue of story assignment [X2=7.69, d.f.=2, p,.05]. More EPA than ACP members said they were likely to discuss stories with marketing and circulation staff prior to assignment.

A final set of statements looked at the relationship between advertisers and editorial content. Because many of the publications are subsidized by the denomination or organization that sponsors them, advertising is not as prevalent among religious publications as it is in other types of specialized periodical publishing. About 42 % of the respondents to this survey said their publication accepted some advertising. Of those who do accept advertising, traditional barriers that separate editorial from advertising are strongly evident. Editors were asked to respond to the statement, "Advertising considerations factor into our editorial decision making." Eighty-eight percent found the statement "not descriptive." Only 2 % said advertising considerations influenced editorial content. An additional statement to which editors responded was, "Stories criticizing a major advertiser would not run." Eighty-six percent found this statement "not descriptive," while 8.8 % admitted that they would not likely run stories that criticized a major advertiser. No statistically significant differences were noted between

ACP and EPA members on these advertising dimensions. Within Protestantism the universe of potential advertisers is limited, usually to book publishers, music companies and church supply houses. To incur the wrath of a potential advertiser could therefore endanger a publication's financial survival. Thus it appears a few editors would be loathe to bite one of the few hands that feeds them.

Professional Definition and Values

Are Christian editors journalists or public relations people? Does their faith take precedent over their profession? Or are they professionals working within a faith-based editorial concept? Can they define their values in a word or phrase? Given that many don't endorse traditional definitions of objectivity, terms such as communicator, writer--or even public relations professional--might seem more appropriate for someone engaged in this form of advocacy journalism. That line of reasoning led the researcher to propose a series of statements allowing the editors to define themselves in relation to their profession and their faith. Editors were presented with six statements, and asked to indicate how descriptive the statements were based on a seven-point likert scale. Looking at mean scores for their responses, editors consider themselves writers and editors who are Christian ($\underline{M}$=5.27), Christians who use journalistic techniques to communicate ($\underline{M}$=4.72), professional communicators who are Christian ($\underline{M}$=4.0), journalists who are Christian (M=3.6), publishers or executives who are Christian ($\underline{M}$=2.5) and PR people who are Christians ($\underline{M}$=2.15). Based on the two highest mean scores, editors appear to be saying, in essence, "both/and" to the survey's attempts to ferret out distinctions between their profession and their faith. What is clear is that most do not consider themselves to be public relations people and few are executives within the organization that employs them.

To further explore distinctions between the editor's self-definition, the seven-point likert responses were collapsed into categories of "very descriptive," "somewhat descriptive" and "not descriptive." Nearly 62 % of the editors consider themselves as writers and editors who are Christian, a strong indication that they eschew the connotations of the word journalist in their self-description. Nearly 53 % consider themselves Christians using journalistic techniques. At the other end of the spectrum, 68.5 % say the label "executive or publisher who is a Christian" is not descriptive of their job, while 73 % find the label "PR person who is a Christian" not descriptive of their position. No statistically significant differences were noted between editors of the two press associations. Significant differences were noted when the responses were cross-tabbed by gender. More men found the label "journalist who is a Christian" very descriptive than did women (X^2=8.87, d.f.=2, $p<.05$). These findings may be explained by the fact that more women are currently holding editorial assistant positions within the leadership of the magazine, or work in marketing or PR positions. More men than women found the label "executive who is a Christian" very descriptive of their job (X^2=15.19, d.f.=2, $p<.001$). This reflects the fact that while women are moving into editorial positions in Christian journalism, few have reached the status of publisher or editor and fewer still are in other positions of leadership within the organizational framework.

Quality of Publications

To determine if the criticism of Marty and Olasky rings true with Christian editors, they were asked to respond to the following open-ended question:

> *Some people who have studied Christian journalism feel Christian periodicals are not well-written or edited. They have also criticized the content because it does not present news or information, but public relations releases from denominational leaders or Christian leaders in general. How do you respond to these comments from critics of Christian publications?*

About half the respondents made comments to this open-ended question. An analysis of the responses suggests that editors realize their field has been criticized and to a degree they agree with the criticism. One editor stated: "Completely true—the 'Christian ghetto' has generated third rate material that is fodder for a mocking world!" Another editor was equally critical. "Amen, he said. " Much of what is published today is little more than trying to give readers exactly what they want, without challenging them to think or act." Yet another editor noted that Christian journalism is often associated with mediocrity. "Very accurate—we don't hold each other to high enough standards," she said. " We're satisfied with mediocrity if the content says 'Jesus' often enough." One editor noted that religious publications are often understaffed and under-funded. "Generally true. Often Christian publications are staffed not by trained professionals but by the best qualified or available [person]. Often finances are key. To have the finances to be published, there are organizational ties that expect PR exposure. Plus there are often not resources to do investigative journalism and that is left to secular periodicals." One critic noted that the source of the criticism is suspect. "Much criticism is valid, although much criticism from the world is more against Christianity than against mediocrity," he said. "The valid criticism, however, should shame us."

Despite the criticism, a large number of respondents felt that religious publications have improved dramatically during the last decade. Several cited the quality of publications that receive excellence awards at the annual meetings of the Associated Church Press and the Evangelical Press Association. Both groups retain experts in journalism writing and design to judge entrants in a variety of competitive categories. "Check out the award winners of the EPA to see great design and writing," notes one editor. Another says, "They haven't seen the award winning publications in the Associated Church Press! They are among the best designed and best written and edited publications in the world, regardless of niche!" Another editor echoed the sentiment that publications have improved dramatically. He said: "I encourage such critics to try looking at some magazines from the 1990s. That criticism is outdated." Other respondents said that despite tight budgets, Christian publications should be commended. "Too broad an accusation," one wrote. Certainly true of some, but many Christian journalists strive very hard—on limited budgets—to turn out first-class work." Another said publications should not be judged by a universal standard, but by how well they accomplish their mission. "The heart of the matter is, 'do they live up to and accomplish their mission statement with truth and excellence?' What I see in EPA, for the most part, is high quality." Another added, "Most Christian periodicals do not pretend to be journalism. They exist to fulfill organizational mission statements and inform donors."

Echoing the sentiment of many of those who responded in defense of Christian publications was this bit of wisdom: "Nobody ever built a monument to a critic."

Conclusion

This study surveyed editors of Protestant periodicals to seek their input into the conversation among academicians. Editors were surveyed about the quality of religious publications, their editorial approach and philosophy, and the degree to which their editors are free to exercise their journalistic skills within organizations committed to

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furthering the religious cause. Editors define themselves as both Christians and writers, eschewing terms such as communicator or PR person—and to a degree even the term journalist--to describe their craft. Many of the editors are schooled in the method of journalistic objectivity, and adopt all of its tenets save the call to examine all sides of an issue in a detached manner. Protestant editors thus adhere to what might be called responsible advocacy. The responsible advocate holds strongly to values such as accuracy, fairness, thoroughness in reporting, reasonable balance and considered reflection as they encourage readers to develop a stronger relationship with their God and their fellow human beings. While Olasky may see this concept of reasonable advocacy as different from biblical objectivity, many evangelical editors operate from a worldview similar to his. This similarity is seen in editor's responses to doctrinal beliefs like all people have sinned and fallen short of God's glory and therefore need to be rectified to Him through His son, Jesus Christ. The editorial reflection of this belief is seen in articles that reflect people's sinfulness and God's holiness and God's work among sinful people to achieve great things. The effect to which the beliefs of editors are successfully carried out in their periodicals is an area meriting further research.

Scholars say that a tension exists between journalistically trained editors and their superiors when potentially controversial stories are being covered. Most editors, however, report that they have a fair degree of freedom to shape stories in a manner they feel is most credible for the audience. Further questioning of editors is needed to determine the story approval and editing process within these publications, since they occasionally serve as news sources for daily newspapers and national media reporters.

The editors confirm that their two main purposes are to publish articles that help edify people as they better understand biblical teaching, and to call people to Christian compassion or involvement in the public debate over social and cultural issues. How effective are they in their missions? Readership studies of those who consume religious publications would assist scholars, and help religious editors, understand the influence these publications exert on believers and, indirectly, on society at large.

Editors report a mixture of responses to the level of quality they infuse into their work. Some say the profession as a whole, beset by limited budgets and lackluster support from superiors, reflects poor quality and performance. Others feel the publications operate effectively within the confines of their mission to their readers. Additional studies on this issue of quality would also be important for scholars to consider. Finally, as the worldwide web grows in popularity as a communication medium, might religious publications by-pass the expensive costs of preparing printed publications and move their content completely online? This would free up more funds for reporting; but are religious readers amenable to receiving their publications online?

This paper, then, has explored the under-researched field of religious periodical publishing. As a potential news source for religion editors, and as a genre of publications that are consumed by millions, the area merits continued attention from those studying the intersections of religion and media. By allowing the editors to speak for themselves on some of these issues, it is hoped this paper has contributed to what should be an ever-increasing dialogue among scholars.

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Table One

Comparison of "Very Descriptive" Scores for Associated Church Press and Evangelical Press Association on Policies Regarding Story Approval Processes

	Overall % very descriptive	ACP % very descriptive	EPA % very descriptive	p	X^2
Editor has final approval	80.6	88.7	77.7		
Negative stories about our leaders or cause won't run	23.7	8.2	29.0	.001	16.05
Publisher or executive edits or approves our copy	20.7	13.2	23.4	.005	10.48
We don't discuss with advertising people prior to publication	18.9	19.6	18.6		
Den/Org leaders suggest articles	11.7	11.8	11.7		
We won't criticize major advertiser	8.8	8.3	8.9		
Contents discussed with marketing staff before publication	4.6	0	6.2	.05	7.69
Ad considerations influence content	2.1	2.0	2.1		

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Table Two

COMPARISON OF "VERY DESCRIPTIVE" SCORES FOR ACP AND EPA ON EDITORIAL PHILOSOPHY VARIABLES

	Overall % very descriptive	% ACP very descriptive	% EPA very descriptive	P	X^2
We provide biblical instruction and insight	35.6	16.7	42.0	.05	10.1
We encourage Christians to help solve social ills	33.9	46.9	29.4	.055*	5.77*
We show God using sinful people to achieve great things	31.6	11.9	37.8	.05	9.95
We show how our organization has been blessed by God	28.8	23.0	30.8		
We show how much sinful people need God's healing	26.4	4.4	33.8	.001	24.80
We show people's sinfulness and God's holiness	22.5	4.7	28.2	.001	30.22
People want to read "good news" of God's blessings	20.9	14.6	23.1		
We educate Christians about the evils of our culture	16.2	6.3	19.6	.05	6.82
We believe personalities are more interesting than issues	15.6	2.0	2.03	0.5	12.08

* included to show strong trend toward significance

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TESTING THEORETICAL CONSTRUCTS OF FRAMING

by

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Introduction

Agenda setting is one of the most studied areas of journalism scholarship, with more than 200 research articles over the past quarter-century (Rogers, Dearing, Everett and Bregman, 1993). However, most of these have dealt with simple issue salience passed from media to public, or, more recently, source to media to public. Scholars are now interested in framing, which some agenda-setting advocates dub "second-level" or "attribute" agenda setting (Ghanem, 1997).

Frames are the often-unstated ways journalists organize data on news subjects (Bateson, 1972), utilizing issue conceptualizations (Williams, Shapiro and Cutbirth, 1983), sources (Liebler and Bendix, 1996), and technical facets of journalism (Tankard, *et al.*, 1991).

Specialists in research on agenda setting say the two terms are not necessarily interchangeable, although sometimes used this way. Attribute agenda setting is concerned with how the emphases on certain subissues or facets of a message affect the public's perception of the subject portrayed (Takeshita and Mikami, 1995). There is a stress on linking message attributes to subsequent public attitudes. However, in studying the messages themselves, there is virtually no difference between examining frames and attributes (Takeshita, 1997). Therefore, studying how frames are constructed should provide understanding of the link to affect of the reporter writing the story and hints as to how the public will consume the resulting news message.

While many ways to view frames have been conceptualized, measurement has been a primary problem. Furthermore, there seems not only to be a need for discerning how to measure frames, but also finding which measurements are most likely to relate to the affective orientation of the story, and, by inference, the affective consumption of it.

One of the most popular definitions of framing and its components was advanced by Entman (1993), which has been cited in 50 research articles in refereed journals ranging from *Political Communication* to *Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly* to *American Behavioral Scientist* (Institute for Scientific Information, 1999). Frames "highlight some bits of information about an item that is the subject of a communication, thereby elevating them in salience," he wrote (p. 53). He believes these highlights have four main functions: defining problems, diagnosing causes, making moral judgments and suggesting remedies. This definition clearly implies evaluation in the construction of frames by news reporters, but, as Hackett (1985) has noted, goes beyond the 1960s and '70s set of bias studies, delving deeper into the messages explicit and implicit in news stories. Saying a story is positive, neutral or negative in tone is important, but begs the question, Why that evaluation?

By testing Entman's fourfold list of the dimensions of framing for applicability and linkage to the affective dimension of news stories, vital data on the heretofore problematic measurement of framing may be gained. Quantifying what many researchers have found as an impressive qualitative contribution could assist in uncovering the depth of framing's impacts as well as provide clues to the possible instruments for detecting and decoding such frames.

The difficulty of controlling for political persuasion is a concern. Are the same devices used in covering and reporting divergent philosophies? One of the most reported aspects of politics over the past two decades has been the rise of religio-political leaders, especially conservative ones (Persinos, 1994; Green, 1995). Their progressive counterparts were first on the scene, but have declined in popularity and portrayal (Huckins, 1998). Thus, this study compares portrayals of religious left and right over time, allowing the contrast of political viewpoint in an arena of significant interest to researchers and the American public today.

Literature Review

Defining problems. Frames "determine what a causal agent is doing with what costs and benefits, usually measured in terms of common cultural values," asserted Entman (1993: 52). Due to the storytelling imperative, news reports in narrative form tell the viewer, reader or listener about something or someone (Darnton, 1975). These are dependent on sources — the people or documents that reporters consult to help them construct the narrative.

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What sources selected say can constitute framing, too. Clayman (1995) identified three reasons behind the selection of key quotes and sound bites. The first, narrative relevance, fits with the storymaking imperative, with the source material fitting into the story's overall contours. Second, conspicuousness focuses on sensational source material, including three-part lists, metaphors, and contrasts. The last, extractability, involves how easily obtained that material may be for a newscast or print transcription, whether it requires much context or the source has stumbled significantly in relating it.

News stories tend to "anthropomorphize" the source, Sigal (1986) has written, making the person or group a symbol for an institution or viewpoint in American society. Therefore, what sources say and what logic they use (or is attributed to them) for their position should be important in revealing not only what the source thinks, but also what the reporter thinks and what the audience will think after seeing a report.

Interestingly, very little research has been devoted to analyzing the social or political appeals used by/attributed to sources. Liebler and Bendix (1996) examined source statements for whether they made appeals based on ethics, economics, legal reasoning, politics, science, or traditional beliefs. These showed considerable variance based on source and point of view.

These rhetorical strategies can change with time, indicated a study of adjectival and adverbial portrayals of the religious left and right (Huckins, 1998). These changes may give clues to shifting priorities of movement and media.

One of the great difficulties activists in social movements such as Moral Majority and the anti-nuclear cause have faced is getting media reporters to report on content rather than tactics (Small, 1994). Groups find that they must use unusual or confrontation tactics in order to attract media attention, then discover that once newspeople cover the story, those tactics are what is discussed rather than the reasons for them. Coverage of the Native American rights movement, for example, focused on the perceived militancy of those activists with settings conducive to viewing the effort as outside the mainstream, Baylor (1996) reported.

This is not to say, however, that these activists have no agency. Barnhurst (1991) detailed how the Sendero Luminoso ("Shining Path") in Peru used media in that South American country to further its message, even while viewing such media messengers as "repressive forces" of the state. The true problem, perhaps, has been in these movements not being taken seriously as news sources; rather, they seemingly simply have been used to fill space and time in reports. Some efforts, such as the Cultural Environment Movement (CEM), have pursued corrective action for this difficulty in lobbying for rooting out corporate dominance of journalistic institutions and the content they create (Hellinger, 1996).

Diagnosing causes. Frames "identify the forces creating the problem" (Entman, 1993: 52). The balance of sources is a common facet of framing studies (see Lowry and Shidler, 1995; Huckins, 1996a; Robinson and Clancey, 1985). The idea has been that the "balanced" media story would have half the sources in support of one particular point of view, while the other half of sources would oppose that position or at least be advancing one of their own.

If only a small percentage of sources come from a particular viewpoint or if the group or person is not allowed comment at all, then marginalization of that lesser- or non-represented group or person can occur. Entman (1994), in examining African-Americans as news sources, discovered they were far less likely to be used than whites in commenting about "non-black" issues, even proportionately to the U.S. population. This might be termed the "ghettoization" of sources, with certain people or groups with insights potentially useful in several areas being limited to but one.

Who is interviewed for a story can be as important as what their position is on the item's main topic. Both Liebler and Bendix (1996) and Entman and Rojecki (1993) have examined the backgrounds of sources. In the latter case, investigating the treatment afforded the nuclear freeze movement by *Time* and *The New York Times*, the authors found eccentrics and peripheral players depicted more frequently in the religious left-oriented movement by the *Times*, while more reputable movement leaders dominated *Time* pages.

Media tend to reinforce cultural norms and values, often relying on governmental and societal institutions for information and story ideas (Sigal, 1973; Tuchman, 1978). As Herman and Chomsky demonstrated in their *Manufacturing Consent: The Political Economy of the Mass Media* (1988), reporters often work in informal tandem with policymakers both to formulate stories and provide data for stories. Media, then, may be friendlier to those providing solutions to problems rather than causal agents, since the latter may upset traditional order and power structures.

Contrary to longtime criticism of media from official channels, several studies have found social movements seeking to challenge or change government norms and values generally have had a difficult time securing what their leaders view as fair media coverage. Small (1994) and Gitlin (1980) both noted this with regard to organizations and workers opposed to U.S. involvement in the Vietnam War. This track record sometimes has disgusted activists so much that they have literally "turned off" media. Those working for the rights of the disabled, for example, decided to bypass major media altogether in trying to pass the Americans with Disabilities Act because they felt previous stories on the disabled were stereotypical and insulting (Shapiro, 1994; Clogston, 1990).

Silk (1995) made a compelling case for media buttressing "mainline" religious denominations (i.e., Episcopalian, Methodist), but alienating what newspersons see as "radical" forces (Mormons, Scientologists, Branch Davidians). This goes well with Gans' (1979) observation that elite, well-resourced groups get the most and best reporting, called "information subsidies" by Gandy (1982). Shoemaker (1984) saw socially centrist interest groups as media favorites, while more "militant" organizations, including Moral Majority, fall from grace. Definition, then, may be related to judgment.

Making moral judgments. Frames "evaluate causal agents and their effects" (Entman, 1993: 52). As Gitlin (1980) found in his investigation of news coverage afforded Students for a Democratic Society (SDS), emphasizing violence, appearance and other factors tending to marginalize the group brought members more extreme than the founders. This made for a cycle in which SDS continually lost prestige until it lost its place at the media table. Description, then, is one component of the frame.

This makes a clear linkage to the objectivity literature; for example, Merrill (1965) found adjectival bias to be a key ingredient in how *Time* portrayed U.S. presidents. Describing a president as "angry," "extreme," "low-key," or "highly aggressive" indicated something about how the reporter viewed both the person reported on and his or her position on the issue covered.

At the elite level, the religious right was described as less sinister and militant over time, while the left became more extreme and threatening (Huckins, 1998). This change may be related to source shifts, but could also come from re-evaluations by reporters.

When a reporter has a low degree of knowledge about a source, in the work of Stein (1995), the Roman Catholic Church, distortion of a major newsmaker or social institution may occur. This could reflect poor reporting skills or a lack of desire to understand the source's viewpoint.

Suggesting remedies. Frames "offer and justify treatments for the problems and predict their likely effects" (Entman, 1993: 52). Thematically investigating frames involves more than simply checking the accuracy of a story. The same facts may be portrayed in any of several ways. As Meyerowitz and Chaiken (1987) pointed out, functionally equivalent messages differ in impact depending on whether framed negatively ("half-empty") or positively ("half-full").

Benton and Frazier (1976) examined a single issue — the economy — and identified 13 different rationales for action from media reports. Five of these dominated coverage, taking four times as much space and air as the others. This could be taken as an indication of media endorsement of those viewpoints.

Again, though, there are indications that change in evaluation is possible. Dickson (1994) looked at *The New York Times*' thematic frames of the invasion of Panama, dividing them into Noriega and U.S. government sections. She found that these themes, comparable to Entman's diagnosing causes and suggesting remedies, changed over time: Before the invasion, Noriega frames fared far better than after it.

Research Questions

The literature review yielded the following questions:

1. *What are the most salient dimensions of long-term framing?* The Entman (1993) model gives four purposes for frames, with each purpose capable of being tested for appearance and durability in news stories:

a. Defining problems: measured through finding what sources say are the reasons for the issue at hand, as well as what the journalist conceives as factors.

b. Diagnosing causes: tested by examining which sources are used in stories, and whether the journalist attaches causal status to the source for the issue or topic under discussion in the news article.

c. Making moral judgments: found through looking at what is said by the journalist about the subjects in news stories and the frames applied.

d. Suggesting remedies: evaluation of causes and solutions advanced by journalists, especially at crucial points in stories.

2. *Are there different framing devices for those on opposing sides of a distinctive socio-political group?* By comparing the framing and its affective links of those of opposing opinions but in a shared context, the range and depth of Entman's definition can be tested.

Method

The study involved articles concerning the Rev. Jerry Falwell, representing the religious right, and the Rev. William Sloane Coffin for the religious left. Falwell founded Moral Majority in 1979, the first major conservative religio-political group in the United States

(Green, 1995). It is widely considered to have been influential in the 1980 election of Ronald Reagan as president and a Republican majority in the U.S. Senate (Snowball, 1991), and was one of the most-covered religious groups of the 20th century during its 10-year life span, garnering thousands of articles and other items of publicity (Huckins, 1996).

Falwell has had a high profile in the media both while leading Moral Majority and since its demise. Pastor of an independent Baptist church (now Southern Baptist) for more than four decades, he has used media to declare opposition to gay rights, abortion and evolution-only teaching in schools (see, for example, *Listen America!* ; Falwell, 1980). His religious activity and outspokenness inside and outside specific organizational structures allowed several aspects to contrast in this present study.

The Rev. Coffin, an ordained Presbyterian minister, differs greatly from Falwell in ideology but matches well in other characteristics, allowing for appropriate comparison. Both are white, Protestant, have served as pastors, are of roughly the same generation (Falwell was born in 1934, Coffin in 1924), and had careers in ministry before and after becoming nationally known in media.

Coffin is perhaps best known for his opposition to the Vietnam War and nuclear weaponry, serving as president of Sane/Freeze in the late 1980s. The preacher had long tenures as pastor of Riverside Church in New York City and as the chaplain of Yale University, and now is retired to Stafford, Vt. Like Falwell, he continues his ministry through media appearances and writing, including *A Passion for the Possible*, published in 1993.

Other figures, including the Rev. Jesse Jackson, were considered for inclusion in the study. In each case, however, the principal did not give as much basis for comparison as Falwell and Coffin; for instance, in Jackson's case, race likely would be a significant factor in determining his coverage.

The time period of study was 1980 to 1989, the formative decade for the modern era of religion and politics in America (J. Dart, personal communication, April 1996). This extended period provided a continuous accounting of media framing as well as comparison and contrast of portrayals of the two men during a congruent time frame. The media of study were *The New York Times*, *Los Angeles Times*, and *Washington Post*, defined as elites in numerous studies (i.e., Brown and Vincent, 1995; Myers, 1968), and regarded as among the most-read and respected by U.S. journalists (Johnstone, Slawski and Bowman, 1976; Weaver and Wilhoit, 1986).

One of the primary problems of framing studies is coder reliability, as noted by Tankard, *et al.*, (1991). Their very systematic and meticulous approach to coding for particular themes or complex frames nevertheless resulted in low intercoder reliability in most circumstances reported.

Swenson (1990) studied media reports on the highly controversial issue of abortion, parallel to the divergence of views likely in the present work. She achieved strong intracoder reliability (that is, results matching from the same rather than different coders) by basing her content analysis on specific items contained within the broader context of framing.

While intercoder reliability generally is regarded as more internally valid than intracoder testing, her concept of framing warrants further consideration. The present study uses the preferable intercoder reliability testing.

Of the 11 items mentioned as focal points for framing by Tankard, *et al* (1991), four seemed particularly valuable in evaluation of the elements of this study: leads, selection of sources/affiliations, selection of quotes, and concluding statements/paragraphs of articles. These were also facets studied by Liebler and Bendix (1996) as they looked at the polarized logging controversy in the Pacific Northwest, achieving acceptable reliability and intriguing, in-depth results. However, this article also included assessments of rhetorical rationales of sources cited.

Additionally of help was Merrill's (1965) use of adjectival bias in his study of *Time* and its depictions of six U.S. presidents, and adverbial selection mentioned by Lipari (1996).

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These measures had been used in previous studies of religious left and right (Huckins, 1996; Huckins, 1999), with strong reliability.

A set of frames from an earlier content analysis of the religious right and left was used after being subjected to pre-testing and final adjustment. These were applied to specific adjectives, adverbs, synonyms, verbs and leads and concluding paragraphs, and then intercoder reliabilities were taken. The theme of each frame is indicated here, followed by sample words for each:

1. Political: Denoting a political nature or belonging to a wing or facet of established or prospective parties; having a position on a controversial policy issue. *conservative, liberal, political, anti-gay, pro-abortion.*

2. Religious: Specifically religious language, sectarian labels, individuals as religious leaders. *Christian, evangelical, fundamentalist, church-based, preacher.*

3. Militant: Outside of regular democratic processes; politically abnormal or extraordinary behavior in a negative light. *accused, extremist, offensive, critics, out of step, threat.*

4. Systemic Power: Showing strength, popularity, leadership or related positive qualities or impact within the political or social system. *united, popular, mastering, potent, success.*

5. Hero: Person-oriented extraordinary expressions of admiration or impact . *born orator, brilliant, keen, clever.*

6. Villain: Person-oriented extraordinary expressions of disgust or hatefulness. *clumsy, foolish, disaffected, stammering, misguided.*

Each term, story and conclusion was then also coded "positive," "neutral or balanced," or "negative," based on definitions adapted from Stevenson, Eisinger, Fineberg and Kotok (1973), in their replication of Efron (1971) and her oft-criticized study of the 1968 presidential election and network television news bias. Sources were included at this level.

Positive: That generally reflecting favorably on the subject of study; favorable reaction or greeting; indications of gaining strength or popularity, influence or support; endorsement by

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another group or person; indications the person is becoming known.

Neutral or Balanced: The absence of judgment; statements of fact (i.e., "Falwell is a Baptist"); non-evaluative reports about rallies, gatherings, etc.; or those terms or sources containing approximately equal weight negatively, positively, and neutrally.

Negative: That generally reflecting unfavorably on the subject of study; hostile reaction or greeting; apathy or coolness; loss of strength, popularity, influence or support; attacks on views by another group or person; refusal to state views or be interviewed; negative statements about image or style; isolation of views.

The quotations and paraphrases attributed to each source were evaluated for their rhetorical strategy, based on categories adapted from Liebler and Bendix (1996):

Economic: Reflecting monetary or fiscal impact

Political: Concern over political parties or interests

Moral: Standards of common, non-religious behavior

Religious: Specifically Christian or other religiously oriented standards

Legal: Referring to or upholding laws of the locality, state, nation or world jurisdiction, or personal rights (i.e., First Amendment)

Technical/Instructional: Value-neutral descriptions of processes or commands

Measures, then, for each research question were:

1. *What are the most salient dimensions of long-term framing?*

a. Defining problems: matching the rhetorical rationale employed by sources in attributed comments to those conceived by the journalist.

b. Diagnosing causes: following the balance of sources in stories involving the subject (whether weighted in favor of or against the subject); seeing whether assigning causal status to a subject for the issue under discussion makes an impact on tone of story (this was defined by asking the coder to decide whether the subject was viewed in the article as advancing the cause or solution to the issue at hand, simply attempting to address it, or none of these.)

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c. Making moral judgments: examining the tone of terminology applied to the subject of study under each frame; also, checking whether the frame afforded the subject in the story impacts the overall tone of the story toward the subject (i.e., Does putting Coffin in a sectarian frame make negative coverage more likely?).

d. Suggesting remedies: examining whether the subject of study is assigned status as providing the solution to the issue considered in the article, or acts in some other capacity, and what the impact of this status is on the article's tone toward the subject (i.e., If Falwell provides what the journalist considers the solution, is he portrayed more positively than if he is merely addressing the issue?); whether the last major point of the story is pro- or anti- the view of the subject of study or neither, and whether this has an effect on the overall story's tone toward the subject.

2. *Are there different framing devices for those on opposing sides of a distinctive socio-political group?* Comparisons between Falwell and Coffin of the strength of framing devices and their links to the affective dimension.

Only news articles (non-opinion) were coded. All articles mentioning Jerry Falwell and William Sloane Coffin from 1980 to 1989 in the three papers were eligible for inclusion in the analysis. Coding was done for the appropriate number of articles each year to achieve results within 5 percent of the true mean (according to standard formulae for sample size and error). Random selection resulted in 629 articles coded for Falwell (of 1814) and 141 for Coffin, a census in the latter. These were located in Lexis/Nexis and, for the pre-1985 *Los Angeles Times*, microfilm.

Intercoder reliability was calculated according to the Holsti (1969) formula, using one other coder analyzing more than 10 percent each of the Falwell sample and the Coffin sample. This entire population was subjected to intercoder testing; being selected randomly, this allowed the results to be projected to the entire sample (Lacy and Riffe, 1996). Reliability figures for each variable were as follows:

Overall tone: 92.5%
Lead (rhetoric): 96.3%
Subject role (causality): 92.5%
Summary/conclusion (rhetoric): 97.5%
Summary/conclusion (tone): 93.8%
Sources cited (rhetoric): 93.6%
Sources cited (tone): 96.6%
Terminology (frame): 90.1%
Terminology (tone): 93.7%
Overall frame: 92.5%

Results

To begin the analysis, story tone is depicted to give the reader an overall conception of the story tone toward the principals.

Table I STORY TONE TOWARD FALWELL AND COFFIN BY YEAR

Tone	1980	1981	1982	1983	1984	1985	1986	1987	1988	1989	Overall
Falwell											
Positive	14.8%	12.0%	19.2%	12.8%	13.0%	16.5%	13.0%	21.1%	0.0%	10.4%	13.7%
Neu/Bal	33.3	32.5	38.5	48.9	47.8	46.8	37.7	40.8	51.9	29.2	40.7
Negative	51.8	55.4	42.3	38.3	39.0	36.7	49.3	38.2	48.1	60.4	45.6
N=	54	83	52	47	69	79	69	76	52	48	629
Mean=	1.63	1.57	<u>**1.77**</u>	1.75	1.74	1.80	**1.64**	<u>**1.83**</u>	<u>***1.48***</u>	1.50	1.68
Coffin											
Positive	46.2%	40.0%	57.9%	33.3%	64.7%	47.1%	52.9%	61.5%	41.7%	46.2%	50.0%
Neu/Bal	53.8	40.0	31.6	61.1	29.4	47.1	41.2	23.1	41.7	38.5	41.0
Negative	0.0	20.0	10.5	5.6	5.9	5.9	5.9	15.4	16.7	15.4	9.0
N=	13	5	19	18	17	17	17	13	12	13	144
Mean=	2.46	2.20	2.47	2.28	***2.59***	2.41	2.47	2.46	2.25	2.31	2.41

(Notes: Significance tests are t-tests on means of previous year, and were not conducted on percentages; "overall," compared to other totals; **<.10**, <u>**≤.05**</u>, ***<.02***, <u>***≤.01***</u>)

1. *What are the most salient dimensions of long-term framing?*

a. ***Defining problems.*** The variability of rhetoric of sources (tables II and III) indicated dynamic sources and reportage. Both Falwell and Coffin were reported to have made significant changes in what rationale they gave their issues.

Table II RHETORIC ATTRIBUTED TO FALWELL AND COFFIN BY YEAR

Strategy	1980	1981	1982	1983	1984	1985	1986	1987	1988	1989	Overall
Falwell											
Religious	39.7%	25.6%	36.8%	***9.4***%	**19.3%**	14.4%	20.3%	20.7%	**39.1%**	***12.2***%	21.4%
Moral	12.1	***29.4***	***10.5***	7.5	***20.2***	15.9	17.4	12.7	17.4	7.3	17.4
Political	46.6	***23.9***	***44.7***	***67.9***	***48.6***	49.2	44.9	***11.3***	21.7	***63.4***	38.3
Economic	0.0	8.3	2.6	9.4	0.9	11.3	17.4	***38.7***	***4.3***	9.8	13.0
Legal	1.7	9.4	2.6	5.7	10.1	5.1	0.0	**14.0**	17.4	**0.0**	7.4
Technical	0.0	3.3	2.6	0.0	0.9	4.1	0.0	2.7	0.0	7.3	2.5
N=	58	180	38	53	109	195	69	150	23	41	916
Coffin											
Religious	22.2%	20.0%	14.3%	30.0%	21.4%	20.0%	0.0%	***20.0***%	***0.0***%	10.0%	18.0%
Moral	22.2	20.0	33.3	10.0	28.6	20.0	**0.0**	***30.0***	**0.0**	30.0	24.8
Political	55.6	60.0	42.9	30.0	42.9	53.3	**100.0**	**32.5**	***80.0***	40.0	44.4
Economic	0.0	0.0	4.8	30.0	7.1	0.0	0.0	10.0	20.0	10.0	8.3
Legal	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	6.7	0.0	2.5	0.0	0.0	1.5
Technical	0.0	0.0	4.8	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	5.0	0.0	10.0	3.0
N=	9	5	21	10	14	15	4	40	5	10	133

(Notes: Significance tests are on percentages of previous year; "overall," compared to other totals; **<.10**, **≤.05**, ***<.02***, ***≤.01***)

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There were strong differences in affect of journalistic reports on Falwell and Coffin when the principals' rhetoric disagreed with the reporter's definition of the issue (Table III). The consistency of the effect between Falwell and Coffin adds to this finding.

The tables give backing for the assertions of Clayman (1995) on the reasons quotes and sound bites are selected from sources by media members. Results here indicate the better the source fits with the reporter's contours, the more favorably the source will be depicted. An additional finding is the less reporter and source agree, the more likely the reporter is to marginalize the source through failing to quote or paraphrase the source's position (again, table III). (Lead and conclusion were collapsed into a single category due to the consistency between them.)

Issue III ISSUE FRAMES AND AFFECT IN STORIES ON FALWELL AND COFFIN

SOURCE POSITION ON JOURNALIST ISSUE FRAME

Story Tone	Agree	Disagree	None
Falwell			
Positive	19.1%	13.6%	2.9%
Neutral	45.5	35.6	34.7
Negative	35.5	50.8	62.4
N=	341	118	170
Mean=	1.84	1.63	1.41

Agree-Disagree, .01; Agree-None, .001; Disagree-None, .01

Story Tone	Agree	Disagree	None
Coffin			
Positive	69.9	46.7	25.0
Neutral	27.4	33.3	60.7
Negative	2.7	20.0	14.3
N=	73	15	56
Mean=	2.67	2.27	2.11

Agree-Disagree, .02; Agree-None, .001
(Note: Following each grouping are anova t-tests among means reaching significance)

b. *Diagnosing causes.* A highly significant relationship between causality and affect was found (Table IV), as reporters tended to be more negative toward causes of issues under scrutiny and more positive toward those providing what newspeople considered solutions to those problems. This is backing for theories advanced by Silk (1995) and Shoemaker (1984) that centrist groups supporting moderate approaches are mostly likely to receive positive coverage.

The negativity toward perceived causal agents is in line with Schudson (1978), Tuchman (1978), and Herman and Chomsky (1988) in their view that news agencies are biased toward official, stabilizing perspectives. Those news actors causing difficulties or issues are disruptive of the "status quo," and thus would be out of favor with institutions dedicated to keeping a stable social order. It also backs the findings of Shapiro (1994), Baylor, (1996), Olien, Tichenoir and Donohue (1989) and others studying social movements that those individuals and groups seeking to impact the status quo likely will be marginalized by media.

There is some dispute possible here with Gans (1979) and his observation that elite, well-resourced groups have the most reporting. Falwell's Moral Majority received great amounts of coverage during the 1980s, yet it was hardly an elite group or, compared to contemporaries, well resourced. Coffin's Sane/Freeze would be closer to Gans' point, as its lack of appeal to elite values marginalized coverage.

An additional point here comes from the lack of relationship between affect and the balance of sources, at least in most years of the study. (The table is omitted here for space considerations and lack of significant statistical relationships.) Rather than discriminating against a perceived negative influence in Falwell, media tended to give him more opportunity to speak, especially early in the decade with the formation of Moral Majority. This was perhaps explained in part by Clayman (1995) when he said that conspicuousness, or the sensational nature of statements, is another way sources get their messages into media.

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Table IV CAUSALITY AND AFFECT FOR FALWELL AND COFFIN BY YEAR

Causality	1980	1981	1982	1983	1984	1985	1986	1987	1988	1989	Overall
Falwell											
Cause	75.9%	*50.0*%	33.9%	34.0%	46.4%	**31.6%**	42.0%	*22.4*%	**36.5%**	45.8%	42.4%
Mean=	1.59	1.36	1.48	1.38	1.53	1.40	1.34	1.35	1.32	1.45	1.43
Solution	7.4	6.0	11.3	17.0	**4.3**	7.6	7.2	15.8	*1.9*	2.1	8.3
Mean=	2.50	2.60	2.86	2.50	2.33	***3.00***	2.80	2.67	*2.00*	3.00	2.67
Att./Add.	11.1	20.5	21.0	**40.4**	**20.3**	*40.5*	37.7	***56.6***	42.3	27.1	32.6
Mean=	1.67	1.71	1.69	1.79	**2.14**	1.91	1.65	1.79	1.73	1.46	1.77
None	5.6	***19.3***	17.7	8.5	*29.0*	20.3	13.0	5.3	**19.2**	25.0	16.7
Mean=	1.00	**1.69**	1.46	1.50	1.70	1.63	1.89	1.75	1.40	1.50	1.65

Cause-Att./Add., .001; Cause-Solution, .001; Cause-None, .01; Solution-Att./Add., .001; Solution-None, .001; Att./Add.-None, .10

Causality	1980	1981	1982	1983	1984	1985	1986	1987	1988	1989	Overall
Coffin											
Cause	0.0%	20.0%	15.8%	5.6%	23.5%	5.9%	23.5%	38.5%	41.7%	30.8%	19.4%
Mean=	0.00	1.00	2.33	1.00	2.00	3.00	2.00	2.00	1.80	1.75	1.93
Solution	15.4	20.0	31.6	**5.6**	23.5	17.6	5.9	23.1	25.0	30.8	19.4
Mean=	3.00	3.00	3.00	3.00	3.00	3.00	3.00	3.00	3.00	2.75	2.96
Att./Add.	76.9	60.0	36.8	**66.7**	47.1	52.9	64.7	**30.8**	33.3	23.1	49.3
Mean=	2.40	2.33	2.43	2.33	**2.75**	**2.22**	2.55	2.75	2.25	2.67	2.45
None	7.7	0.0	**15.8**	22.2	15.9	23.5	5.9	7.7	0.0	15.4	11.8
Mean=	2.00	0.00	1.60	2.25	2.00	2.25	3.00	2.00	0.00	2.00	2.12

Cause-Att./Add, .001; Cause-Solution, .001; Solution-Att./Add., .001; Solution-None, .001; Att./Add.-None, .05

Notes: The top row of each pair of numbers indicates the percentage of articles on that subject in that particular year or overall, while the bottom row shows the affective mean of articles under that definition of causality. The legend for statistical significance matches previous tables.

Statistically significant anova differences are shown at the bottom of each set of entries, where Att./Add.=Attempting to Address the Issue, and None=None of These.

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c. Making moral judgments.

Table V STORY FRAMES APPLIED TO FALWELL AND COFFIN BY YEAR

Frame	1980	1981	1982	1983	1984	1985	1986	1987	1988	1989	Overall
Falwell											
Sectarian	16.7%	14.5%	23.1%	**8.5%**	15.9%	17.7%	27.5%	***57.8%***	***36.5%***	50.0%	26.7%
Mean=	1.45	1.75	1.92	1.50	**2.00**	2.21	1.89	1.77	1.68	**1.33**	1.75
Pol. Part.	53.5	56.6	53.8	63.8	63.8	74.7	62.3	***23.6***	**46.5**	***18.8***	52.6
Mean=	1.69	1.66	1.85	1.83	1.68	1.75	1.56	***2.06***	***1.58***	1.89	1.71
Sys. Pwr.	11.1	3.6	5.8	4.3	13.0	1.3	4.3	0.0	1.9	12.5	5.4
Mean=	2.67	2.33	2.33	2.00	2.00	1.00	2.00	0.00	1.00	1.83	2.09
Militant	16.7	15.7	9.6	10.6	4.3	3.8	5.8	0.0	7.7	2.1	7.5
Mean=	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.40	1.00	1.00	1.00	0.00	1.00	1.00	1.04
Villain	1.9	9.2	1.9	8.5	0.0	1.3	0.0	11.8	5.8	12.5	4.9
Mean=	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00	0.00	1.00	0.00	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00
Hero	0.0	1.2	5.8	4.3	1.4	1.3	0.0	6.6	0.0	2.1	2.2
Mean=	0.00	3.00	2.67	3.00	2.00	3.00	0.00	3.00	0.00	3.00	2.86
Coffin											
Sectarian	84.6%	**40.0%**	26.3%	50.0%	41.2%	29.4%	35.3%	30.8%	33.3%	23.1%	38.9%
Mean=	2.36	2.50	2.40	2.33	2.57	2.40	2.50	1.75	***2.75***	***2.00***	2.38
Pol. Part.	15.4	40.0	57.9	44.4	41.2	58.8	47.1	38.5	50.0	46.2	45.1
Mean=	3.00	2.50	2.82	***2.13***	***2.86***	**2.30**	2.38	**3.00**	***2.17***	**2.83**	2.55
Sys. Pwr.	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	7.7	0.7
Mean=	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	2.00	2.00
Militant	0.0	0.0	10.5	0.0	11.8	5.9	5.9	0.0	8.3	0.0	4.9
Mean=	1.00	0.00	1.00	0.00	1.50	3.00	2.00	0.00	1.00	0.00	1.57
Villain	0.0	20.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	7.7	0.0	15.4	2.8
Mean=	0.00	1.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	1.00	0.00	1.00	1.00
Hero	0.0	0.0	0.0	5.6	5.9	5.9	11.8	23.1	0.0	7.7	6.3
Mean=	0.00	0.00	0.00	3.00	3.00	3.00	3.00	3.00	0.00	3.00	3.00

(Notes: Significance tests are on means/percentages of previous year; **<.10**, **≤.05**, ***<.02***, ***≤.01***; Overall, Falwell F, <.001; Coffin F, <.001; Pol. Part.=Political Participant, Sys.Pwr.=Systemic Power) ("Other," accounting for 0.6% for Falwell, 1.4% for Coffin, is omitted here for space.)

Overall tone of articles showed a tendency toward negativism on Falwell and more positive portrayals of Coffin (Table I). Overall story frames placed on the principals changed with time, with statistically significant differences possible year to year and overall (Table V).

Table VI FRAMING TERMINOLOGY APPLIED TO FALWELL AND COFFIN BY YEAR

Frame	1980	1981	1982	1983	1984	1985	1986	1987	1988	1989	Overall
Falwell											
Sectarian	32.6%	*23.5%*	22.0%	26.3%	28.0%	*17.7%*	*30.0%*	*55.2%*	*37.2%*	39.0%	33.1%
Mean=	1.71	1.82	1.77	***1.99***	1.85	2.02	1.89	1.87	1.87	1.85	1.86
Pol. Part.	40.9	42.9	**48.8**	45.3	44.5	*58.5*	*50.7*	*17.3*	*47.2*	*36.3*	40.6
Mean=	1.99	1.98	1.98	1.98	1.90	1.95	1.98	1.96	1.94	1.79	1.95
Militant	9.0	10.2	9.3	8.8	*3.6*	3.8	5.0	*0.4*	*5.3*	*1.5*	5.3
Mean=	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00
Sys. Pwr.	8.5	5.1	4.5	2.1	*7.8*	*3.6*	3.6	2.8	1.8	*9.2*	4.7
Mean=	2.92	2.77	2.54	3.00	2.61	2.53	2.75	2.36	2.67	2.13	2.61
Hero/Vil.	9.0	*18.3*	15.5	17.5	16.1	16.2	***10.8***	*24.2*	*8.6*	**14.0**	16.2
Mean=	2.05	1.77	**1.98**	1.96	**2.16**	2.05	1.96	1.95	1.86	1.87	1.94
N=	435	763	291	285	422	475	444	905	339	336	4696
Mean=	1.90	1.84	1.87	1.92	1.95	1.97	1.93	1.91	1.87	1.85	1.90
Coffin											
Sectarian	54.8%	46.7%	37.1%	**55.7%**	57.1%	**42.0%**	52.7%	**35.7%**	38.2%	26.1%	41.7%
Mean=	2.18	2.05	1.97	2.15	2.17	2.11	2.00	2.01	2.17	2.04	2.08
Pol. Part.	29.0	28.9	31.5	24.6	30.2	33.0	23.6	**34.8**	44.7	50.0	33.1
Mean=	2.06	2.00	2.32	*1.73*	*2.16*	1.97	1.85	**2.21**	2.18	2.00	2.10
Militant	6.5	2.2	*13.5*	4.9	4.8	6.8	10.9	**1.2**	3.9	10.2	5.7
Mean=	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00	0.00	0.00	1.00	1.00
Sys. Pwr.	0.0	2.2	2.2	0.0	0.0	1.1	3.6	2.5	2.6	**9.1**	2.5
Mean=	0.00	2.00	3.00	0.00	0.00	3.00	2.00	2.67	2.00	2.00	2.41
Hero/Vil.	9.7	20.0	15.7	14.8	7.9	**17.0**	9.1	*25.8*	*10.5*	15.9	17.0
Mean=	2.00	1.78	2.00	2.33	2.40	2.27	**2.80**	**2.25**	2.63	**1.79**	2.20
N=	62	45	89	61	63	88	55	244	76	88	871
Mean=	2.05	1.96	1.98	2.02	2.13	2.02	1.96	**2.15**	2.17	*1.88*	2.05

(Note: Overall, Falwell F, <.001; Coffin F, <.001;"Hero" and "Villain" are collapsed here due to the operational definition of "Hero" words/positive, "Villain"/ negative.)

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This second trend is a difference from the Baylor (1996) study of the Native American rights movement. While the media tended to dichotomize, functioning with two primary frames for each (sectarian and political), they additionally employed substantial percentages of secondary frames, approaching 20 percent of cases. These were highly flexible among years and significantly differed in tone from the others.

Framing terminology (Table VI) served as an amplifier for trends noted in overall tone. While there were relatively few significant shifts in comprehensive totals, this measure was valuable for noting undercurrents in media reports on individual frames, which had numerous highly significant yearly changes. Just as Merrill (1965) found a third of a century ago, adjectival and adverbial biases are apparently components of the media frame. Gitlin (1980) gained backing for his observations of the emphasis of certain aspects over others in framing, with militancy, systemic power, and personal attacks and praise ("hero/villain" category) shifting significantly. Within the two major categories important changes also were possible, with location on the political and sectarian spectra ("fundamentalist" v. "mainline") frequently mentioned. Differing portrayals came between Falwell and Coffin as well.

d. ***Suggesting remedies.*** As appropriate to arguments for the official/institutional bias of media, support was found for the suggesting of remedies as an important aspect of framing. Falwell was either cause or solution is 50.7% of stories, while these categories accounted for 38.4% for Coffin (Table IV). Reports on Falwell were weighted toward causality and Coffin's split equally between cause and solution. When marginalized, the pair were not allowed to suggest remedies, being casually mentioned or alluded to in comments from others quoted within the article. This happened to Falwell in 16.7% of stories, and 11.8% of pieces on Coffin. The measures showed changes over time, as per Dickson (1994).

The concluding major point of the story was a good predictor of overall story tone (Table VII), with highly significant differences between pro-Falwell or Coffin endings, those against their view, and stories finishing without a position supporting or contrary to the

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principals of the study. This was a stronger measure for Falwell, but significant differences were detected between pro- and anti-Coffin conclusions as well. Individual yearly totals are not shown for the two subjects given the lack of statistically significant changes annually.

Table VII CONCLUSION AND AFFECT IN STORIES ON FALWELL AND COFFIN

	POSITION OF CONCLUSION ON SOURCE		
Story Tone	Pro	Anti	Neither
Falwell			
Positive	27.5%	1.2%	9.0%
Neutral	40.2	26.3	51.5
Negative	32.3	72.5	39.5
N=	229	167	233
Mean=	1.95	1.29	1.70
Pro-Anti, .001; Pro-Neither, .001; Anti-Neither, .001			
Coffin			
Positive	76.1	33.3	22.2
Neutral	22.5	33.3	63.5
Negative	1.4	33.3	14.3
N=	71	9	64
Mean=	2.75	2.00	2.09
Pro-Anti, .001; Pro-Neither, .001			

(Note: Following each grouping are anova t-tests among means reaching significance)

2. *Are there different framing devices for those on opposing sides of a distinctive socio-political group?* The major measures of the study — causality, agreement with reporters on rhetoric, etc.— applied to each of the two, be they somewhat weaker but still significantly to Coffin. The difference is likely the smaller number of stories on him due to less coverage as well as that less visible news presences tend to be more subject to individual or organizational whims. Coffin was more positively portrayed under each category.

Discussion and Conclusion

Most of the measures in the study appear to be useful in giving quantitative rigor to Entman's popular definition of framing. Measures under each of his four categories proved useful and had significant predictive links to affect. The balance of sources turned out to have little linkage to affect, but the other tests did.

Of particular note is determining cause and solution in stories, as is the effect of matching and conflict issue-frames between reporter and source rhetoric. These two new measures point to some of the important biases of the news media toward their own institutions and the societal status quo noted in sociological and cultural research.

Frames of the individual (political participant, etc.) remain consistent within a socio-political group but may result in different affectational responses from the reporter. Indeed, the shifts in frames of the individual and terminology applied to him year to year as well as movements on assignations of causality indicate that real-world events and the individual himself may have some agency in the framing process. Attempting to determine the depths of this agency, or, perhaps, "trigger" of framing, would be a suggestion for future research; so would testing other news-story subjects.

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God and Mammon: the Effects of Secular Takeovers of Religious Media Outlets

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Abstract

God and Mammon: the Effects of Secular Takeovers of Religious Media Outlets - William M. Alnor, Mass Media and Communications Ph.D. Student and Instructor, Temple University, Philadelphia, Pa.

Not often examined in reports of media buy-outs and takeovers is the fact that many profit-making secular (nonreligious) companies are acquiring religious publishing companies and religious television stations and entire networks. This has resulted often in the watering down of traditional religious messages, according to this study that was based on content analysis and a survey of evangelical publishing executives. But it has strengthened the financial bottom line.

God and Mammon: the Effects of Secular Takeovers of Religious Media Outlets

Much attention has been given in recent years to the topic of media ownership. In almost every area of the media, fewer and fewer corporations own more and more. It's called media concentration, and with it comes four trends: "*concentration of ownership* within one industry, such as print and broadcast chain ownership and broadcast network affiliation," "*cross-media ownerships*," "*conglomerate ownership*," and "*vertical integration*."[1]

California State University at Sacramento Journalism Professor Shirley Biagi asks us to consider the following. She wrote this in 1996, and since then her trends have become more pronounced. This year the Times-Mirror Company, publishers of the *Los Angeles Times* and other newspapers, was purchased by the Chicago Tribune Company.:

- The top ten newspaper chains own one-fifth of the nation's dailies; group owners (companies that own more than one newspaper) hold three out of four newspapers published in America every day.
- Twenty corporations control more than 50 percent of annual magazine revenue.
- Nearly 40 percent of the nation's radio stations are network affiliates.
- More than half of the nation's TV Stations are network affiliates.
- Almost all of America's movies are distributed by one of the six large studios.
- The majority of recording company profits are collected from six major labels.

[1] Shirley Biagi, *Media Impact*, 3rd ed. (Belmont, Calif: Wadsworth, 1996), 262.

- America's top six book publishing companies account for 40 percent of total annual publishing revenue.
- The nation's top ten advertising agencies bill more than $30 billion annually in worldwide business.[2]

Overseas the trend is similar as multinational corporations are seeking to buy up media properties everywhere, and in some nations the percentage of media properties owned by the select few is actually higher than in the United States. Down under in Australia, media baron Rupert Murdoch "owns half of a major airline group, co-owns one of the country's pay TV operators and a Rugby league, and controls more than 60 percent of the country's metro, regional, and suburban newspapers."[3]

Media Consolidations in the Religious World

But while this trend is heavily reported in communication journals as well as in the trade and popular presses, a related aspect not often examined are similar moves toward media consolidation within the specialized religious media. Throughout the world, and especially in the U.S., *religious* broadcast interests, particularly radio stations, are being bought up or acquired at a record clip. In the publishing world, offers are pouring in at a record clip to buy religious magazine and book publishing firms, and even the religious distribution companies that often supply religious bookstores. Perhaps most significant, profit-making secular (nonreligious) companies are acquiring religious television stations and they are attempting to buy entire religious television networks.

[2] Ibid., 261-62.
[3] Russ Baker, "Murdoch's Mean Machine," *Columbia Journalism Review*, May/June 1998, 51-2.

This has alarmed many in the religious world. Rupert Murdoch's News Corp.'s 1998 purchase of cable television's Family Channel for $1.9 billion[4] literally sent shockwaves through the evangelical Christian world as a large number of religious programming formerly seen on the network was abruptly dumped for secular programming. The Family Channel, formerly a subsidiary of television preacher Pat Robertson's Christian Broadcasting Network, was the second largest religious network in the world, reaching 73 million homes.[5] Since then, according to *Charisma Magazine*, the Trinity Broadcasting Network (TBN), which is the world's largest religious television network with more than 750 stations, has been a target of takeover attempts.[6]

The shockwaves have continued. The September 1998 issue of *National Religious Broadcasters* magazine carried a three-story package examining the implications and controversy over the sale of religious media outlets to secular firms entitled "Dollar Signs of Change of Times?" In the first article expressing the viewpoint of "selling out," Salem Media Group president Stuart Epperson noted that money is behind many of the Christian sales:

> Christian TV stations at least doubled and sometimes tripled in value and many have since sold to secular interest. In one city, people prayed that must carry [legislation ensuring that all local stations are transmitted by cable companies] would pass and save the local Christian station. A few months and a few million

[4] Noel E. Parmentel Jr., "Sky TV," *The Nation*, July 28, 1997, 5.
[5] Linda Moss, "Fox Family Upbeat Despite Slow Start," *Multichannel Online*, Nov. 30, 1998.
[6] However, TBN is not for sale, according to its president Paul Crouch, who is quoted in the May 1998 article in *Charisma* magazine.

dollars later the station is owned by secular interests and many supporters feel betrayed.[7]

Purpose and Scope of the Study

This paper will examine the effects of such takeovers of religious media outlets. It will take a more detailed look of the purchase of the Family Channel and illustrate the vast changes at the network since the takeover through content analysis. It will also take a more detailed look at the purchase and subsequent changes of the largest evangelical publishing house, the Zondervan publishers of Grand Rapids, also by Murdoch's News Corp.[8] In addition, this study will look at the potential advantages and disadvantages of such media takeovers of religious media interests.

Methodology

In order to do this the writer surveyed 161 leading executives of the Evangelical Christian Publishers Associations to come up with a consensus of opinion on this trend. The writer limited his survey to evangelical publishers due to time constraints. Part of the 9-question survey was designed to achieve a "snowball effect" – to obtain more details on the phenomenon and to learn more about the major players. This proved to be fruitful in that the writer also learned that the largest distribution firm supplying bookstores with products from Christian publishers – Spring Arbor – has also recently been purchased by Ingram, a nonreligious firm.[9]

[7] Stuart Epperson, "Selling Out," *National Religious Broadcasters* magazine, September 1998. Accessed on the Internet at http://www.nrb.com.
[8] Actually the purchase took place in 1998 for $57 million. Since then Zondervan has been replaced as the world's largest evangelical publisher due to the purchase of the Word publishing company by the Thomas Nelson firm in 1992 for $72 million.
[9] Lynn Garrett and Phyllis Tickle, "Joyful Noises in the Aisles: Most Religion Spirituality Publishers were Pleased with the Growing Religious Booksellers Show..." *Publisher's Weekly*, June 23, 1997, 59.

The scope of this study was also limited to the *independent* Protestant world. The reason for this is that there have been few takeover attempts of Roman Catholic publications and networks since they are owned by a central authority -- the church, which can't be bought. This also means that media outlets owned by the traditional "Mainline" Protestant denominations[10] were also not included for similar reasons – they are not for sale. But in addition, these Protestant outlets are very small when compared with the giant independent nondenominational religious media outlets. For example, large evangelical publishing houses like Baker Book House, Zondervan, Thomas Nelson, Harvest House and Word in a sense represent much of Protestantism because they all publish some authors from many of the traditional denominations. All four of the previously mentioned publishing giants produce more than 100 titles per year. Why would an author from the United Methodist tradition want to be published by the little known Cokesbury, the United Methodist publishing house, when he or she can make much more money and gain greater exposure by going with Zondervan or Word or one of the others?

Fueled by Money

The survey revealed that the trend toward attempted secular media buyouts of Christian firms is continuing, and that a main target of publishing buyout attempts appears to be family-owned religious publishers. The motive for it, all agreed, is a chance to make more money. Richard Baker, president of Baker Book House of Grand Rapids noted that Baker has received "literally hundreds" of inquiries from nonreligious

[10] Meaning the traditional Protestant denominations such as the Southern Baptist Convention, the American Baptists, the Evangelical Lutheran Church, the United Methodist Church, the United Church of Christ, the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) and other traditional denominations.

firms during the past five years trying to find out if Baker is for sale. It's not, he said. Why so many? Baker noted:

> Independent family publishing firms are prime takeover targets because book publishing is a capital-intensive business. In addition, big name authors are demanding and getting excessively high royalty advances making it very difficult for the smaller firms to compete for pop authors.
>
> ...Most inquiries come from business brokers representing firms who want to get into Christian book publishing. Within the Christian publishing industry we pretty much know what companies are for sale.[11]

Similarly, the Strang Communications Company, publishers of *Charisma* (monthly circulation of over 300,000) and other magazines and publishers of Creation House books, has had plenty of suitors wanting to buy. Stephen Strang, a former Orlando, Florida newspaper reporter, founded the firm 23 years ago. Strang commented:

> I'm guessing there have been 20 written inquiries [seeking to buy his firm]. I have kept no record. They all go into the trash. There was one verbal inquiry from a "Christian" company on a golf course. I considered it only a few seconds before saying no. Almost all the inquiries are from nonreligious companies. However, I'm sure nearly all these inquiries are from brokers who are merely looking for privately owned companies that might want to sell out. I personally doubt anyone is targeting our company because it's religious.[12]

Trend is condemned

[11] Survey/statement from Richard Baker dated 10 Dec. 1998.
[12] Survey/statement from Stephen Strang dated 30 Nov. 1998.

Almost all religious publishing executives condemned the trend toward more religious media buy-outs. Almost all saw it as a dangerous trend for the future. Most thought their religious messages were in danger of being watered down by the new nonreligious owners. "I think it becomes the `golden rule,'" Strang noted. "He who has the gold makes the rules. So if nonchristians own the companies, they will decide what happens."[13] But Strang was more cautionary:

> Of course, good business is for the secular entities to "leave alone" the Christian subsidiaries as long as they are making money. Ultimately, however, money wins out as it did on the Family Channel. I don't think it can do anything but water down the Christian message.[14]

Some were more critical of the trend than Strang. Denny Boultinghouse of the Howard Publishing Company asked:

> Do I think it is a good thing for secular companies to takeover "religious media interests?" Does ANYONE really think it is good? Except of course, for the money people who make a killing on the transaction. Everything I hear, from authors, bookstore owners, vendors, etc. Christian people think it is a bad idea to have Christian ministry companies controlled by secular interests. I am speaking quite calmly and contained. It boggles my mind that any Christian person could possibly think it is a good thing, anymore than if secular companies started taking over churches.[15]

But Alliances with the World has led to More Sales

[13] Ibid.
[14] Ibid.
[15] Survey/statement from Denny Boultinghouse, 01 Dec. 1998.

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But despite the condemnations, all survey respondents believed that the alliances with the secular world have led to more readers of their products and better sales. The purchase of Zondervan by News Corp. gave Zondervan (now a subsidiary of News Corp's HarperCollins) more financial fire power to win a bidding war in 1993 for the rights to publish former New York Jets football player Dennis Byrd's story, *Rise and Walk*.[16] Similarly former Vice President Dan Quayle also took his memoirs to Zondervan. One other advantage to Zondervan's relationship with HarperCollins is that these products can be cross-edited and cross marketed by both publishers.[17]

Similarly, other religious publishing firms have found out that bigger does mean more resources to create more "crossover titles" and more chances to market their products to the secular marketplace. Recently musician/composer John Tesh recently signed a deal with Word Entertainment in which Word (which following its purchase by Thomas Nelson publishers has become part of the largest Christian publishing enterprise) will distribute his music to Christian bookstores.[18] Similarly, Tommy Nelson, the children's book division of the Thomas Nelson company, entered into a multi-year publishing agreement with DreamWorks (partly owned by Hollywood movie producer Steven Spielberg) to publish five books in conjunction with the animated blockbuster movie, *The Prince of Egypt.* [19] Truly these are profitable days for religious publishing houses.

[16] Calvin Reid, "Harper, Zondervan pay $1 M for Byrd comeback story," *Publishers Weekly*, June 21, 1993, 17. The article notes that Zondervan, now a subsidiary of Murdoch's HarperCollins publishing house, beat out Simon & Schuster for the book with Delacorte dropped out at around $750,000.
[17] Maureen O'Brien and Phyllis Tickle, "Quayle Memoirs go to HarperCollins/Zondervan," *Publisher's Weekly,* Feb. 1, 1993.
[18] "Tradetalk," *National Religious Broadcasters* magazine, September 1998.
[19] "Tommy Nelson/Thomas Nelson Announce Publishing Partnership with Dreamworks Consumer Products for *The Prince of Egypt*" Tommy Nelson News Release, 01 Nov. 1998. The press released goes on to say: "Tommy Nelson will also work with other companies in bringing additional licensed products

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Baker noted that although there are "advantages and disadvantages"to aligning themselves with secular companies,

> ...we're very bullish. Business is good and our markets are expanding. The Christian message is getting into the secular markets. Barnes & Nobles and Borders are big buyers of Baker Book House publications. In addition in the past month we've had orders from Sam's Club, Toys-Are-Us, Avon, T.J. Max, LTD Commodities, etc. etc. etc. We exhibit each year in October at the Frankfurt (Germany) Book Fair for the purpose of buying and selling publishing rights. Foreign subsidiary rights are a major source of revenue for Baker Book House. Each year we sell literally hundreds of rights to foreign publishers in all parts of the world.[20]

Broadcast Challenges and Takeovers

In the past several years there has literally been a radio and television station buying frenzy. Part of it is due to a revolution of sorts that began when Congress passed the Telecommunications Act of 1996. It "ushered in a new era in the regulation of mass media and telecommunications services" noted *Communications Lawyer*, the publication of the Forum on Communications Law of the American Bar Association. "Not since 1934 had such comprehensive communications legislation been adopted."[21] The publication was referring to the Communications Act of 1934 that established the Federal

based on ***The Prince of Egypt*** into the CBA [Christian Booksellers Association] marketplace including additional book titles from Penguin Putnam and music titles from Provident Distribution and DreamWorks Records. 'Tommy Nelson will work with DreamWorks to create unique and exciting point-of-purchase materials to bring all licensed products together, as well as a parents guide to the film which will be distributed in CBA stores,'" says Dan Lynch, Vice President of Marketing to Tommy Nelson.

[20] Richard Baker's statement.

[21] M. Anne Swanson, "Telecom Act Throws Open Competition in Electronic Mass Media and Telecommunications," *Communications Lawyer*, Vol. 14, Number 2, Summer 1996, 1.

Communications Commission (FCC) as the "basic regulatory structure that exists today."[22]

Although the courts have overturned several key provisions of the new act,[23] the FCC's new rules on broadcast and television licensing have remained intact.[24] What the FCC did was substantially liberalize radio and television ownership rules, while stiffening penalties and even ownership standards for those seeking a broadcast license or a renewal of their FCC license. What this has meant is that large media conglomerates can now expand much further into the lucrative radio and television markets, and this has led to the belief that many marginal religious television and radio stations can be purchased.

The problem is there are a lot more buyers out there than there are stations, and it has led to a new peculiar phenomenon – the attempt of media firms to wrest control of stations away from others by challenging their FCC licenses. Although this has not worked in many cases, *it has worked in some*. Part of the reason some will use this approach is that it is extremely difficult and expensive to start a radio or television station from the ground floor, not to mention years of time needed in order to acquire a new FCC license – if one can obtain one. (There are few radio and television frequencies available to transmit from.) It is much easier to take over an existing station, and one way to achieve this is to convince the FCC that another corporation can run it better, or that the

[22] Wayne Overbeck, *Major Principles of Media Law* (Fort Worth: Harcourt Brace College Publishers, 1998), 372.
[23] On Dec. 31, 1997 a ruling in *SBC Communications v. FCC* (No. CIV. A. 7:97-CV-163X) overturned sections 271-275 of the act dealing with telecommunications as unconstitutional. The U.S. Supreme Court overturned title V of the Act that dealt with offensive material posted on the Internet in 1997. See *Reno v. ACLU* (1997 U.S. LEXIS 4037).
[24] The FCC did slightly revise is multiple radio ownership rule on March 7, 1996. See FCC News Report No. MM 96-12 (*http://www.fcc.gov/Bureaus/Mass_Media/News_Releases/1996/nrmm6009.txt*)

existing license holder has proven itself unworthy due to wrongdoing. As the result of this, many stations are fighting challenges to their FCC licenses.

It can work due to changes in the law. Here's how: Although the 1996 Telecommunications Act directed the FCC to extend license terms to eight years for both radio and TV stations[25] -- up from three to seven years for radio stations and three to five years for television stations. But in doing so it requires broadcasters to submit "a summary of comments received from the public about violence in the station's programming."[26] Wayne Overbeck states that it also:

> ... mandated a three-point evaluation of license renewals by the FCC. In reviewing each renewal application, the FCC was directed to make sure that the station: 1) has served the public interest, convenience and necessity; 2) has not committed any serious violation of the rules; and 3) has not committed a series of minor violations that constitute a "pattern of abuse." [27]

The FCC is also looking more closely than ever at rule violations in the area of equal employment opportunity (EEO) requirements that mandate a racial balance in stations' hiring practices. This has led in recent years to numerous complaints filed against television and radio stations for alleged violations of these rules. Although few of these complaints have actually led to the FCC stripping a station of its license, the FCC has imposed fines on some. In addition to race-based complaints filed against stations, many others have filed complaints with the FCC arguing that some stations should lose their licenses due to misrepresentations and questionable business dealings. According to

[25] Overbeck, 384.
[26] Ibid., 384.
[27] Ibid.

attorneys familiar with the FCC, there has been a sharp rise in radio and television FCC license challenges.

Religious Television Ownership Reversed in Philadelphia

One ownership change of a television station that was voided by the FCC was that of Channel 61 in Philadelphia that was about to have been taken over by an affiliate of the Trinity Broadcasting Network (TBN) of Southern California, which in owning more than 750 television stations is the largest religious network in the world. That effort failed due to misrepresentations by TBN.[28] Very little was reported on this case by Philadelphia area newspapers, but it received prominent coverage by the *Orange County Register* in Southern California, as well in the national religious media, including *Christianity Today.*

"Under the new rules established by the 1996 Telecommunications Act, there is no longer *any* limit on the number of radio or television stations one company may own nationwide."[29] But there is a limit on percentage of the market share both radio and television stations can have. There are also some rules in effect prohibiting cross-ownership that would create newspaper/radio/television ownership monopolies in various markets.[30]

This contrasts sharply with the old FCC rules that stood for many years that held that "no individual or company could own more than seven television stations, seven AM radio stations and seven FM radio stations nationwide." Later, in 1984, that was revised

[28] See "TBN: FCC Troubles Threaten Network" and "TBN Support Abusive Leader's Attack Against Christians," Spring 1995 *Christian Sentinel.* Available at http://www.cultlink.com. FCC's File number is BALCT-910329AE.
[29] Overbeck, 448-49.
[30] Ibid., 450-51.

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to no more than 12 each,[31] but if a broadcast corporation had a subsidiary firm that was controlled by minority interests that number could be boosted to 14. This is precisely the area the Trinity Broadcasting Network ran into trouble. Trinity tried to take over Channel 61 in Wilmington/Philadelphia via bankruptcy proceedings using the name National Minority Television Inc. *after* it had been operating 12 full-power stations. The deal went through without a hitch at first, but later TBN's takeover bid was stripped when a rival secular firm challenged its FCC license. The FCC ruled against TBN in that case because it said National Minority was simply a front for TBN, and was not a valid company.

The FCC also revoked National Minority Television's license for Miami station WHFT, and gave it to another firm, Glendale Broadcasting. The *Orange County Register* noted that "in 1995, Administrative Law Judge Joseph Chachkin ruled there was `overwhelming evidence' that National Minority Television Inc. was a front for TBN.... TBN has appealed and has remained on the air in Miami."[32] (An accompanying article also reports that TBN, the largest Christian broadcasting corporation in the world, bought out its rivals in the case for $55 million in April, pending FCC approval.[33])

Sometimes Religious Stations Willingly Sell

Russ Bixler, president of Cornerstone TeleVision Inc, a Christian network that now owns eight television stations nationwide, said he was forced to sell some of his stations in the mid 1990s in order to help finance new digital television required at his other stations. In 1995, Bixler wrote that he sold WQEX-TV in Pittsburgh and then

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[31] Ibid., 448. This figure of 12 television stations refers to full-power stations. In addition, broadcasting companies could own more low-power stations.

[32] Carol McGraw and Dina Elboghdady, "Law Keeps Settlement on Low Side," *Orange County Register*, April 14, 1998, 10.

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Cornerstone's commercial license for channel 40 (WWCX-TV, also in Pittsburgh). The result was about $17 million – enough to refit the rest of Cornerstone's stations for digital television. Bixler said that although he sold the stations to a secular firm, Paxson Communications, terms of the sale were that Cornerstone would continue to program the stations from 9 p.m. to midnight six days a week.[34]

Did the Family Channel Sell Out to Murdoch to Make a Profit?

In selling out to Rupert Murdoch's News Corp., Pat Robertson's Family Channel also placed a condition on the sale: that his *700 Club* news and talk show would have to remain on the air. However, almost all other religious programming has been deleted, and the *700 Club* has less viewers than before the purchase due to it being banished to a later 11 p.m. slot. As the result of the sale, combined with the fact of Murdoch's reputation as a shoot and gun sensationalist, Robertson has faced stinging criticism of the sale from his religious brethren. Murdoch, after all, whose Fox Broadcasting Corporation brought the world such programs as *A Current Affair, The Simpsons, Married with Children,* and *Cops*, will most likely bring to the new Fox Family Channel values that oppose the traditional family, critics charge. Murdoch is not a religious man. In "Murdoch's Mean Machine" that appeared in the May/June 1998 *Columbia Journalism Review*, writer Russ Baker charges that:

> Rupert's Rule appears to be that all lines are permeable. And the notion of synergy, so logical and beneficial in many commercial enterprises, takes on a cynical and even malevolent cast when the corporation is a multimedia empire with Murdoch at the helm.

[33] Carol McGraw and Dina Elboghdady, "TBN to Buy Rivals for $55 Million," *Orange County Register*, April 14, 1998, 1.

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> ...Murdoch uses his diverse holdings, which include newspapers, magazines, sports teams, a movie studio, and a book publisher, to promote his own financial interests at the expense of real newsgathering, legal and regulatory rules, and journalistic ethics. He wields his media as instruments of influence with politicians who can aid him, and savages his competitors in his news columns. If ever someone demonstrated the dangers of mass power being concentrated in few hands, it would be Murdoch.[35]

Later in the article, Russ Baker charges that Murdoch pays roughly one-fifth of the rate of taxes paid by other media corporations like Disney, Time Warner and Viacom "by shifting income through an almost unfathomable web to low-tax and no-tax havens in places as far-flung as the Cayman Islands, Fiui and even Cuba."[36] In 1997 alone Murdoch's News Corp. had revenues of $11.2 billion.[37]

Part of the reason for such anger against Robertson was due to the fact that Robertson's Family Channel was built with contributions from religious folks who wanted to build a Christian Network. The Family Channel, formerly known as the Christian Broadcasting Network, came largely from contributions from television viewers. The name "700 Club" was in fact born following Robertson's plea at the beginning of CBN in 1959 for 700 people to join his club through contributions to buy a television station. In the May 18, 1998 magazine, *Christianity Today*, Robertson defending his actions in a published letter, claimed that "the Family Channel was not sold to Rupert Murdoch. Murdoch's company bought International Family Entertainment, a

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[34] Russ Bixler, "A Cornerstone View," *National Religious Broadcasters* magazine, September 1998.
[35] Russ Baker, 51.
[36] Ibid., 52.

New York Stock Exchange publicly traded company with a number of divisions and corporate subsidiaries." But what Robertson failed to mention was that the Family Channel, under pressure by the IRS to divest from CBN due to its profitability, was sold to a new company, International Family Entertainment – of which he was president and his son Tim and other family members had a huge almost exclusive financial interest.

Robertson continued:

> The entire transaction was described by our Washington counsel as a "dream deal." Out of it Regent University [CBN's university] now has a $305 million endowment, which makes it the best-funded evangelical educational institution in the country. CBN has received at least $250 million, which has enabled it to win well over 100 million people to faith in Jesus Christ around the world to date.... On top of that, CBN has retained in perpetuity 17.5 hours of extremely valuable airtime each week on the Family Channel for its religious programs.[38]

But Randall Balmer, author of a previous critical article on the takeover for the magazine fired back, repeating charges on national television that Robertson and his son gathered a personal fortune of up to $227 million personally from the sale:

> Beyond [Robertson's] obfuscation, however, the central questions remains: Did Mr. Robertson and his son, Tom, or did they not garner "a personal profit of $227 million from the sale of the parent company of the Family Channel," as reported in the Norfolk, *Virginian-Pilot* and elsewhere? And isn't it true that this property was developed out of the 700 Club or CBN, which in turn was built from, in my words, "the tax-deductible contributions of the faithful"? To put it another way,

[37] *Columbia Journalism Review* owners Internet site. Accessed at *http://www.cjr.org/owners/newscorp.asp.*

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is there any way that Robertson could have realized millions of dollars in profits had his charitable organizations not received countless checks for 10, 20 and 50 dollars?

Huge Changes at the Family Channel

The programming changes have been huge at the new Fox Family Channel. The Fox Kids network has been merged in,[39] causing a line-up of new cartoons that have all replaced numerous television preachers that were viewed back to back on the old Family Channel, particularly during weekends. Almost everything else has been turned upside down. The programming changes are said to cost \$500 million,[40] and in 1998 the new Fox Family Channel has ordered 20 pilots for primetime series – with most of them being comedies and reality shows.[41] But by late 1999, with ratings still not significantly improving, the new Family Channel owners were changing programming again, seeking a more traditional programming mix.

The Family Channel has found a younger audience

And News Corp.'s \$1.9 billion investment in the network has not yet paid off. "This spring … Fox Family officials guaranteed advertisers a 1.0 national rating for kids two through 11. But the channel has only been pulling a 0.3 national rating for daytime for that age group, according to Nielsen Media Research."[42] But the network has been able to significantly (and successfully) alter its audience composition. The viewers of the

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[38] Letter from Pat Robertson, "Forgiven trespasses," *Christianity Today*, 18 May 1998, 10.
[39] News Corporation Press Release, "Fox Kids Worldwide Consummates Merger With International Family Entertainment," Sept. 4, 1997.
[40] Linda Moss, "Ops Wary of Fox Family Sked," *Multichannel News Online*, July 27, 1998.
[41] Linda Moss, "Fox Family Channel Orders 20 Pilots," *Multichannel News Online*, June 1, 1998. These new show include some Robertson may not approve of including *Rock and Roll Parents* and *Big Wolf on Campus*.
[42] Moss, "Fox Family Upbeat…"

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new Fox Family Channel are younger. Consider the following table from a November 30, 1999 publication:[43]

	Viewers age 50 and above	Viewers age 35 to 49	Viewers age 18 to 34	Viewers age 12 to 17	Viewers age 2 to 11
Old Family Channel	59%	23%	10%	4%	4%
Fox Family Channel	24%	21%	16%	10%	29%

News Corp. has Less Control of Zondervan

On the other hand, there have *not* been many noticeable changes at Zondervan publishers since the 1991 takeover by News Corp. The number of its titles have been up, and profits have been up. There was also an agreement from the beginning, and even before the day of the sale to News Corp's HarperCollins that Zondervan would remain editorially independent. According to a 1991 *Publisher's Weekly,*

> The acquisition by Harper was a happy one. Its president … stressed the importance of Zondervan's retaining editorial autonomy. Harper's own strong religious list and other acquisitions in that area are now consolidated in Harper San Francisco. Currently, the latter's new titles are announced in Zondervan's catalogue as well, and together the two imprints compose about 20% of [Zondervan's] Family Bookstore sales.[44]

But there have been cracks in the alliance that some believe were inevitable. In many ways the differences between the two religious publishing sisters were irreconcilable. Zondervan has traditionally been a conservative powerhouse, while

[43] Table statistics attributed to Nielsen Media Research and reported in Ibid.

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HarperCollins has been liberal. How can two religious publishers promote each others' books when many of their theological views oppose each other. And so a year later Zondervan unsuccessfully sought a buyout from HarperCollins, due to Zondervan's evangelical theological position[45] as contrasted with the religious books published by HarperCollins. Two years later HarperCollins and Zondervan stopped cross-selling each others' books.[46]

Yet there may have been subtle changes with Zondervan; baggage from the Murdoch takeover, some believe. Despite the apparent independence by Zondervan, some Christian industry watchers claim that the firm, though more profitable than ever, has lost a critical edge – and has become a publishing house only producing "safe" books guaranteed to make a profit. Today Zondervan titles and seldom considered controversial, but in the 1960s and 1970s, before the takeover, the company often referred to by insiders as "the big Z," would regularly produce titles that would spawn excitement and sometimes controversy. Titles that achieved this result were Hal Lindsey's *The Late Great Planet Earth* that almost predicted the Second Coming of Jesus by 1988 (with sales of more than 30 million), and Harold Lindsell's caustic *Battle for the Bible* that accused entire denominations (and some prominent Christian leaders) of apostasy. It was trumped on the cover as "the book that shook the evangelical world."

Perhaps the loss of courage to be controversial goes with the territory of being owned by a profit driven company. Notice how many times issues related to profit are mentioned in Zondervan's "Mission Statement." Zondervan's statement found on its web page notes that it wants to:

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[44] Connie Goddard, "Zondervan: looking ahead at 60," *Publisher's Weekly*, 15 March 1991, 33.
[45] Connie Goddard, "Zondervan seeks buyout from HarperCollins," *Publisher's Weekly*, May 11, 1992, 11.

- Create an environment that encourages employees to thrive.
- Build innovative and mutually beneficial relationships with our authors, customers, and suppliers.
- Listen to those who attend church to understand the evolving needs of people in a timely and profitable manner.
- Provide excellent communication resources consistent with biblical principles in a timely and profitable manner.
- Explore and develop all cost-effective distribution channels.
- Assume responsibility to strengthen our local community and care for the environment.
- Operate our business with integrity and maximize investments to meet profit and cash flow objectives.

Conclusion

It is obvious that the Christian media – television, radio, and publishing in all forms – is also being affected by the same market forces that have caused the consolidation of the secular media. However, there is also evidence that secular companies seeking to take over religious media outlets are having difficulty acquiring them due to philosophical disagreements with their owners – and due to the fact that many are extremely profitable already. However, there have been a number of instances where religious media outlets have been taken over – and that has led to drastic changes. But almost every evangelical publishing executive surveyed for this study agreed that

[46] "HC, Zondervan End Cross-selling Effort," *Publisher's Weekly,* Dec. 12, 1994, 16.

these changes have led in most cases to more viewers, listeners and readers -- and they have contributed to creating more profits.

Still religious executives worry about their basic religious messages being eliminated or watered down by the new players in the game who don't share their values. They also worry over a perceived trend that these trends are resulting in hunger for a better financial bottom line that causes them not to produce extremely daring or marginal material.

Secular journalists also worry about the same types of issues. Journalistic values haven't completely disappeared, *New Yorker* columnist Kurt Andersen said in a recent article called "Money Lust" in the Columbia Journalism Review,

> … but they've been significantly subordinated to the general ascendancy of market factors, especially the maximizing of short-term profit. [Magazine editors] are much more explicitly responsible for business success than in the past. I'm not saying its black and white; some of that has always been there. It was light gray; now it's dark gray.[47]

The "Money Lust" article then goes on to say "even Brenda Starr, the comic strip reporter, has gotten into the act. She lamented: `Sometimes I think newspapers care more about profits than they do about people.'"[48]

[47] Neil Hickey, "Money Lust: How Pressure for Profit is Perverting Journalism," *Columbia Journalism Review*, July/August 1998, 30.
[48] Ibid.

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Religion News and "Values:"
A Study of *The Dallas Morning News'* Religion Section

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ABSTRACT

This study explores how well religion news is able to meet the Hutchins Commission's fourth requirement for a free and responsible press – to present and clarify the goals and values of society. An analysis of *The Dallas Morning News'* religion section reveals that religion news presents a mosaic of values, but is severely challenged by a lack of diverse sources and depth, failing to fully examine the competing values that are operating in the stories.

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Religion News and "Values:"
A Study of The Dallas Morning News' Religion Section

Introduction

Although a great deal has been written about the nation's lack of a moral compass, the need to create social capital, to "reformulate"[1] the public and re-engage citizens in public life, few scholars have connected these overriding issues with religion and religion's role in public discourse. As we enter a new millennium, scholars predict that interest in religion will increase, not only among groups that focus on apocalyptic scripture writings,[2] but within the general population as well. Michael Novak, a theologian at the American Enterprise Institute argues that ". . . the twenty-first century will be the most religious in 500 years."[3]

Certainly, the 2000 presidential campaign illustrates how religion and religious values insert themselves into the political realm.[4] In fact, many scholars believe we are in the middle of a "Fourth Great Awakening," a cultural process that inevitably means change. Robert W. Fogel, a Nobel laureate and economist from the University of Chicago, wrote that:

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[1] Robert D. Putnam has written extensively about social capital in *Making Democracy Work: Civic Tradition in Modern Italy* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University, 1993); also "Bowling Alone," *Currents* no. 373 (June 1995): 3-10. "Reformulate" is Jay Rosen's term. A journalism professor, Rosen served as the director of the Pew Charitable Trusts' Project on Public Life and the Press.

[2] Several scholars are studying religious cultic behavior. For a discussion on this see "Waiting for the Messiah: The New Clash Over the Bible's Millennial Prophecies." *U.S. News & World Report*, 19 December 1994, 62-71; Also see Harvey Cox's discussion on the differences in theological perspectives of "post" and "pre" millennium views of the world and how that affects political views in "The Warring Visions of the Religious Right," *The Atlantic Monthly,* November 1995, 59-69.

[3] Michael Novak, "The Most Religious Century," *The New York Times,* 24 May 1998, sec. 4, p. 11.

[4] For one example, see David Barstow, "McCain Confronts Christian Right, Citing Divisiveness," *The New York Times*, 29 February, 2000, p. 1A.

> We are in a process of political change that is to a large extent spawned by trends in American religiosity. One cannot understand current political and ethical trends, nor properly forecast future economic developments, without understanding the role of religiosity in American history and the social, economic and political reform movements they have spawned.[5]

Novak argues that one reason for the preoccupation with religion in our society is that we are in the midst of a "great challenge" in our development as a nation. That challenge is: "How shall we live? How must we live to preserve societies…?[6] These, he suggests, are profoundly moral and religious questions, "more religious than moral." [7] But religion's role in public discourse is a difficult one to grasp. One scholar wrote that religion's role in public life is a "dilemma for democracy," a dilemma that must be addressed in this pluralistic nation.[8]

Pluralism, and the diversified mix of values it generates, presents a challenge for democracy. Journalism plays a key role in determining how to present these competing values for public discussion. Yet today, journalism is facing its own dilemma. Cultural, political, and economic signs indicate that newspapers as well as public life are in trouble. Studies show a significant drop in voter participation, a sharp decline in newspaper readership, and an erosion of public engagement in civic life. Media critics note the blurring of the line between entertainment and news, the lack of substance in news reports, and the growth of giant media corporations that

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[5] Robert W. Fogel, "The Fourth Great Awakening," *Wall Street Journal,* 9 January 1996, sec. A, p. 14.

[6] Novak, "The Most Religious Century," p. 11.

[7] Ibid.

[8] Ronald F. Thiemann. *Religion in Public Life: A Dilemma for Democracy.* (Washington D.C.: Georgetown University Press, 1996).

may not only threaten quality, but that also may jeopardize a free press. Public trust in the media also is eroding.

At the 1998 American Society of Newspaper Editors (ASNE.) Convention, then President Sandy Rowe cited data from a Pew Research Center study that found 63 percent of people polled believed news stories are often inaccurate, a 13 percent increase from the year before.[9] A 1997 survey showed that only 41 percent of Americans watch network news regularly, down from 60 percent in 1993.[10]

At the same time, the 1990s have seen a resurgence of journalistic and scholarly interest in religion news and religion's role in a democratic society.[11] Newspapers are expanding their religion sections, journalism organizations are hosting seminars on religion news, and clergy and journalists alike are attempting to "bridge the gap" that studies say exist between religion and media.[12]

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[9] Sandy Rowe, "Leading the Way Out of the Credibility Crisis," (1 April 1998): On-line. Available from http://www.asne.org.

[10] Chris Lehmann, "Cynical and Proud," *In These Times: Institute for Public Affairs* 21, no. 13 (12 May 1997): 40.

[11] Numerous reports discuss the renewed interest in religion by newspapers. For example, Mark Silk, director of the Center of Religion and Public Life, a former journalist and an associate professor of religion at Trinity College, told participants at a 1996 Harvard Divinity School conference that, because of the success of *The Dallas Morning News'* religion section, more newspapers were expanding religion coverage and hiring religion writers. See the American Academy of Religion web site, Mark Silk, "Something New, Something Old" on-line. Available from http://www.aar-site.org/scripts/AAR/public/silk.html. Other organizations and foundations are focusing on the role religion plays in volunteerism and other charitable activities. See *Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Quarterly* 26, "Special Issue: Small Religious Nonprofits" (Supplement 1997). In addition, foundations such as the Pew Charitable Trusts have selected "religion and media" as one of their priority program focuses. See the Pew Charitable Trusts' "Religion Program 1998 Overview" on its Web site: http://www.pewtrusts.com/docs/relovv.html.

As the country – and the media – face profound societal, moral, and ethical issues, it is clear that there is a struggle to redefine ourselves as a nation. We are, in the words of Michael J. Sandel, searching for a new "public philosophy."[13] At the same time, journalists are reexamining their role in a democracy, attempting to redefine the nature of their craft and its responsibility to society. Whether religion and religion news have a role to play in helping shape a new "public philosophy" is an important question.

This study examines the issue of "values" through a systematic study of *The Dallas Morning News'* religion section and page 1A samples. It creates a framework by which to evaluate religion news and its intersection with public issues and the core values attached to those issues.

Methodology

It is important to note that religion and religious voices – whether liberal or conservative – have been, and still are, major players in public life. Religious beliefs have influenced some of

[12] For example, *The Dallas Morning News* expanded its religion section to six pages in December 1994. See, Julia Duin, "Expansive Religion Section," *Editor & Publisher,* 29 July 1995, 17, 31. In 1997, *The Atlanta Journal and Constitution* created an eight-page, weekly, religion section. See Joe Strupp, "Getting (More) Religion," *Editor & Publisher,* 15 May 1999, 32. There also is evidence that other newspapers are beginning to focus on religion and news. For example, the American Society of Newspaper Editors (ASNE) sponsored a project in 1996-1997 at *The State* in Columbia, SC to explore the relationship between the newspaper and the city's religious community and to examine the role of religion in public life. This was part of a series of ASNE projects funded by the Pew Charitable Trusts. For a discussion on this, see Gil Thelen's editorial, "Exploring Our Readers' Issues of Faith," *The State,* 16 May 1996, D1, D5; also in 1996, within the academic arena, the Association of Educators of Journalism and Mass Communication (AEJMC) authorized the creation of an AEJMC Religion and Media Interest Group to promote research in the area of religion and the media.

[13] Michael J. Sandel, "America's Search for a New Public Philosophy," *The Atlantic Monthly,* March 1996 57-74. Sandel argues that public life is impoverished and "rife with discontent."

the more important news stories of our century, from the abolitionist and civil rights movements to public education, the war on poverty, women's equality, and the public's moral expectations of behavior for officeholders.

According to the Social Responsibility theory of the press, which emerged from the 1947 Hutchins Commission's report on a free and responsible press, journalists have certain responsibilities in a democratic society. Through a qualitative content analysis, using specific criteria, this study examines religion news samples from *The Dallas Morning News* to see whether, and if so, how, they fulfill the Hutchins Commission's fourth requirement for a socially responsible press; that is, to "Be responsible for the presentation and clarification of the goals and values of the society." [14]

Launched in December 1994, *The Dallas Morning News'* religion section was recognized as the "best" religion section in the country for the first three years of its publication, and it continues to win accolades today.[15] Many media observers argue that the section served as a model for other newspapers' that later launched their own religion sections.[16]

The purpose of this study is to provide insights into how well religion news handles value-laden issues in a society that is growing increasingly more diversified culturally and

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[14] Fred S. Siebert, Theodore Peterson, and Wilbur Schramm, *Four Theories of the Press* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1963), 73-103.

[15] At the time of its 1994 launch, *The Dallas Morning News'* religion section was the largest in the country, although in 1997, *The Atlanta Journal and Constitution* created an eight-page, weekly, religion section. See Joe Strupp, "Getting (More) Religion," *Editor & Publisher,* 15 May 1999, 32.

[16] David Anderson, editor of the Religion News Service (RNS), telephone interview by author, tape recording, Dayton, OH, 10 March 1998. Anderson said the resources put into the new religion section "stunned" the journalism world, and that it "served as a model" for other papers.

religiously. Of all the sections of a newspaper, one might argue that the religion section would be the best one by which to test the Hutchins Commission's requirement regarding values.[17]

And, as a generator of a new approach to religion coverage, *The Dallas Morning News* is a logical place to begin to examine how religious pluralism and societal values are being reflected in religion news reports.

To investigate the research question – how well do religion reports meet the fourth Hutchins Commission's requirement for a free and responsible press – a constructed sample of *The Dallas Morning News*' Saturday religion section was created for a two-year period, from January 1995 through December 1995, and from January 1996 through December 1996 – the first two, full years of the section's publication.

According to constructed sample methodology, two constructed weeks are equivalent to one year of news stories.[18] In the same manner, two constructed months are equal to one year of religion sections. Two months of religion sections were constructed for each of the years. This method created a sample of eight religion sections for 1995 and eight for 1996, a total of 16 religion sections.

[17] The idea for using the Hutchins Commission Requirements to analyze the role and potential of religion journalism originated with Professor Edmund B. Lambeth.

[18] See Daniel Riffe, Charles F. Aust and Stephen R. Lacy, "The Effectiveness of Random, Consecutive Day and Constructed Week Sampling in Newspaper Content Analysis, *Journalism Quarterly* 1, no. 70 (spring 1993): 133-139.

A second, purposive, sample of page 1A stories for those time periods also was created to examine the religion stories published on the front page of the newspaper, the prime location that designates news importance, and where Dallas news executives said many religion stories were played.[19]

Using a Nexis search of *The Dallas Morning News* database and the keywords, "1995 and page 1A" and "1996 and page 1A," each story on page 1A from January through June in 1995 and from July through December in 1996 was scanned for religion topics.[20] A total of 18 religion stories were published on page 1A during the first six months of 1995, and a total of 42 religion stories were published on page 1A during the last six months of 1996. All the 18 stories published on page 1A in 1995 were used in the sample. By a random drawing, stories from 1996 were selected, three from each of the six months' sample. In this way, 36 page 1A religion stories were chosen as a sample for analysis.

Each of the six pages of *The Dallas Morning News* 1995-96 religion sections carried a subtitle that indicated a theme. For example, page one was subtitled "Spirituality and Values"; page 2 was "Community of Faith," which included standing features such as "Word and Deed," "Places of Worship," "Kudos and Distinctions," the "Weekly Planner," and "Worldwide"; page 3 was subtitled "Good Works" and included the standing features of "A Helping Hand" and "Living Faith"; page 4 was subtitled "Voices," and included a guest column and a staff column

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[19] Bob Mong, *The Dallas Morning News,* Interview. Dallas, October 1997.

[20] Sample periods randomly selected were the first six months of 1995 and the last six months of 1996 to create a 12-month sample period. It was necessary to scan *all* the page 1A stories for these time periods because no single keyword would be likely to identify "religion" in the stories.

as well as "Reader Feedback"; page 5 was devoted to advertising; and page 6 was subtitled "Views & Reviews," which included standing features "Spirited Media," "Art Matters," "Arts Calendar," and "Religion Watch."[21]

The samples were read and reviewed a number of times to note emerging patterns and to provide a critical analysis, according to the operational criteria established.

Operational Criteria

The Hutchins Commission's fourth mandate for a free and responsible press requires the press to "present and clarify the goals and values of society."[22] The commission believed that "there is a continual need to renew the basic values of our society." Without "sentimentalizing" reports, the press should serve an educational role to present the values of democracy and to clarify "the ideals toward which the community should strive."[23]

The concept of "values," however, is difficult to define. Journalists particularly have a hard time addressing the concept. Journalism scholar Theodore Glasser argues that journalists are reluctant to explore ethical issues, except indirectly. He writes that journalism's tendency to focus on objective "facts" disconnects reporters from values. As he wrote: "The transformation

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[21] Theologian Martin Marty discusses these features in a brief article, "Covering Religion." *The Christian Century*, (19 June 1996): 646-648.

[22] Leigh, Robert. D., ed. *A Free and Responsible Press: A General Report on Mass Communication*. Newspapers, radio, motion pictures, magazines, and books by the Commission on Freedom of the Press (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1947).

[23] Ibid., 27.

of moral claims into claims that are ostensibly only empirical . . . alienates reporters from the moral dimension of their moral discourse. . . ."[24]

To examine *The Dallas Morning News'* religion story samples to see how well they meet this Hutchins Commission's requirement, it is first necessary to discuss the concept of "values."

In *One Nation, After All*, sociologist Alan Wolfe argued that: "Questions about morality are, or rather should be, at the heart of sociological inquiry."[25] In his book, Wolfe interviewed 200 people about what they thought were the leading moral issues facing the American people. Topics of God, faith, and religion surfaced frequently in his interviews and, more importantly, people tended to think of these as basic elements that shape civic values of the culture. For example, Wolfe found that people understood their religious commitments in two different ways: First, as a deep faith that is absolutist in its conviction of "one way to truth"; second, as a personal conviction that is open to acceptance of others' beliefs and welcomes other religious faiths.[26] Religion and media scholar Mark Silk makes the same argument. He wrote:

> Religion in America is caught between the twin impulses of conversion (the inclination to see one's one faith as exclusively right) and adhesion (the readiness to recognize all faiths as part of a legitimate tapestry of "American" faith). In its representations of religion, the news media will necessarily be drawn toward the adhesional pole.[27]

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[24] James S. Ettema and Theodore L. Glasser, *Custodians of Conscience: Investigative Journalism and Public Virtue* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998): 83.

[25] Alan Wolfe, *One Nation, After All: What Middle-Class Americans Really Think about: God, Country, Family, Racism, Welfare, Immigration, Homosexuality, Work, the Right, the Left, and Each Other* (New York: Viking, 1998): 36.

[26] Ibid., 49-50.

[27] Mark Silk, "How Religion Makes the News: Conventions in News Reporting," *The Christian Century* (1 November 1995), 1012-1016.

Many scholars have long echoed Tocqueville's contention that religion, and the religiously based moral views it offers, is necessary to a flourishing democracy.[28] Religious voices in the public sphere can infuse discussions about public issues with value-laden perspectives.

As scholar Judith M. Buddenbaum argues, religious beliefs do not exist in a vacuum. "They carry with them behavior implications."[29] She wrote:

> Religious beliefs become public behaviors with implications beyond the faith-life of the behaver when people take action, speak out or make political decisions that are linked to their core beliefs. They join causes or refrain from joining them, engage in civic or charitable work or choose to be uninvolved. They give to charities or decide to spend their money on something else. They also take positions on issues and they vote. Therefore, religion has always been a force to be reckoned with. Disagreements about issues, policies, political parties and candidates often stem from different understandings of the Bible and different forms of moral reasoning.[30]

Religious beliefs, therefore, do not always remain in the private realm. Religion news is one venue by which citizens articulate their values in public. This diversity of religious perspectives can promote discussion and clarification about values embedded in societal issues; values that people hold dear, but that can, and do, conflict.

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[28] Several religion, as well as media, scholars make this point. For one example, see Ronald F. Thiemann, *Religion in Public Life: A Dilemma for Democracy* (Washington D.C.: Georgetown University Press, 1996).

[29] Judith M. Buddenbaum, *Reporting News about Religion: An Introduction for Journalists* (Ames: Iowa State University Press, 1998): 59.

[30] Ibid., 66-67.

Thus, one way to evaluate religion news reports to see whether they meet the fourth Hutchins Commission requirement is in their ability to present a diversity of religious beliefs, allowing this religious pluralism and differing perspectives to enter the public realm for possible discussion.

The Hutchins Commission specifically noted that the press should present and clarify values important to a democracy. Religion scholar Ronald F. Thiemann argues that religious arguments must not be precluded from entering public debate. He wrote: "Faith is not primarily an individual phenomenon; it is, rather, an aspect of the life, practice, and worldview of a religious community." And even though that belief may not be widely shared, "it is still a genuinely *public* belief, namely, a belief available for public analysis."[31] He argues that any public religious discourse and argumentation must be based on the three core values of a democracy – liberty, equality, and tolerance.

The Institute for the Study of Civic Values, founded in 1973 "to promote the fulfillment of America's historic civic ideals,"[32] lists the following civic values: Ideals of freedom, equality, democracy, and justice that are "embodied in the Declaration of Independence, the Constitution, and the Bill of Rights." Americans also hold valuable the concept of "community" and the "collective efforts to fulfill our shared civic ideals."[33]

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[31] Thiemann, *Religion in Public Life*, 132-133.

[32] Institute for Civic Values Web site, on-line at http://www.libertynet.org/edcivic/iscvhome.html.

[33] Ibid.

In addition, Wolfe's findings identify specific moral issues that are important to people, which may also serve as a barometer from which to gauge the religion news topics and subject matter selected, or covered, as "news."[34]

Many of these issues correlate with what media scholars Sharon Iorio and Susan Huxman found in their study about issues citizens/readers identified as important. These issues included crime, education, taxes, economics, abortion, family life, status of government and leadership, health care, drugs, the future of children, unemployment, poverty, homelessness, AIDS, Social Security, and the moral state of the country.[35]

In addition to these issues and values, there also are standard journalistic values that are embedded in the practice of the craft. The American Society of Newspaper Editors (ASNE), in its 1995-1997 Journalism Values Institute study, examined six traditional journalistic values to "define them in new ways."[36] Many of these values mirror the Hutchins Commission's requirements for a free and responsible press. ASNE identified the following as "enduring journalistic values":

1. Balance, Fairness, and Wholeness – to reflect the "wholeness" of communities. Coverage needs to capture diverse voices and viewpoints, solutions and problems, the profoundly ordinary as well as the unusual, the good with the bad.

2. Accuracy and Authenticity – to get the facts right, but also to get the "right facts." Coverage needs to provide background, context, and perspective, and it must capture the tone, language, experiences, and emotions of people.

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[34] The "leading moral issues" facing Americans, as identified in Wolfe's study are: God and religion, country, family, racism, welfare, immigration, homosexuality, work, and liberal and conservative politics.

[35] These concerns were adopted from opinion polls and a readership study by media researchers Sharon Iorio and Susan Huxman. See "Media Coverage of Political Issues and the Framing of Personal Concerns," *Journal of Communication* 46, no. 4 (winter 1996).

[36] See ASNE's Web site at http://www.asne.org.

3. Leadership – to frame and illuminate important issues in the communities a newspaper serves. Coverage needs to stimulate discussion about the public concerns and help people see possibilities for moving forward.

4. Accessibility – to connect the public to important community issues. Coverage needs to create give-and-take between the newspaper and its communities, and to connect citizens to one another.

5. Credibility – to consistently fulfill journalistic values over time and convey a deep understanding of the communities a newspaper serves.

6. Judgment – to act as the regulator of other journalistic values by selecting, shaping, and bringing definition to what is important, interesting and meaningful in a community.[37]

The foregoing discussion of "values" is intended to help frame the operational criteria used in the analysis of the religion news samples under the fourth Hutchins Commission requirement. Nevertheless, the sample posed a challenge in defining "clarification of values." What does it mean for a religion news story to "clarify" values? For example, the subject matter of several of the news articles in the sample addressed many of the leading moral issues of concern identified by citizens, but just the mere mention of an "issue" does not necessarily "clarify" it. One could argue, however, that simply by presenting the issue within a news story, the press provides an opportunity for the topic to be discussed and debated in the public realm.[38]

This study attempts to reach a working definition of the Hutchins' requirement of "clarification." The *Morning News'* articles that provided sufficient context, historical background, and deeper understanding were deemed to have better "clarified" the values addressed. Those stories that simply mentioned the issue or value were judged as weak, perhaps

[37] Ibid.

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meeting the "presentation" part of the Commission's requirement, but not the clarification element.

This analyses focuses on pivotal stories in the sample that illustrate whether and, if so, how, religion reporting succeeds in meeting, or fails to meet, the fourth requirement of the commission. The critique used two primary operational criteria: 1) the presence or absence in a story of religious diversity and pluralism, and 2) the presentation and clarification of societal values.

Findings: Religious Diversity and Pluralism

If, as scholars argue, it is important for democracy to encourage different religious beliefs to enter public discourse, an award-winning religion section should reflect diversity and pluralism. Taken as a whole, the section presents a wide range of diverse faiths and denominations as well as varied beliefs and values. The lead stories in the sample presented not only a wide range of faith groups, but also broader insights about the topic of "religion" in general. There were lead stories about the Baptists, Evangelicals, Muslims, Jews, Pentecostals, Roman Catholics, Unitarian Universalists and United Methodists as well as stories on broader topics such as youth and religion and sacred architecture.

The lead stories are only the picturesque showcase of the section, however. The hundreds of calendar events and notices, as well as the news stories and standing features, also presented a mosaic of the diverse, and vibrant, religious life of Dallas. As one guest columnist wrote: "In this city, I can travel around the world just by visiting places of worship. . . ."

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[38] It should be noted that the news selection process is an important element within this analysis framework. Sociologist Michael Schudson argues that simply by selecting certain stories for publication, the press confers a legitimacy on the specific topic.

In fact, a number of stories in the section emphasized diversity and pluralism in some manner. For example, the story, "Strangers No More," published December 10, 1995, about an interfaith program that promotes respect and cooperation among faith traditions, strongly focused on the value of diversity. As one participant said: "In today's pluralistic world, citizens need, not just to understand but to benefit from the enormous riches of other [faith] traditions."

One example of a news story that did a particularly good job illustrating how religion news is able to address cultural and religious diversity, as well as provide context and understanding, is "From Relief to Belief," published August 31, 1996 and written by an Associated Press religion news specialist. The story explored the tensions arising from the influx of Asian refugees and their conversion from their traditional Eastern religions to Christianity. The article presented a picture of the changing, and increasingly pluralistic, landscape of religion in the United States, explaining how different faith groups are trying to assimilate or adjust to this change.

The writer included a wide array of religious perspectives in the story including Baptist, Buddhist, Catholic, and Lutheran faith traditions. In addition to its diversity focus, this story also addressed moral and ethical issues about the possibility of "coerced conversions," the responsibility and accountability of Christian faith groups, and the Asians' loss of their centuries-old faith traditions after conversion to Christianity.

Depth and context were provided as well. The writer recounted the similarities and differences between the Asian refugees and the influx of Jewish and Catholic immigrants earlier this century, explaining how these two faith groups adjusted to a new life in the United States. The assimilation process is already beginning with the Asian faith groups. As the writer wrote:

"Buddhists are catching on to the way things work in America. . . . Some temples are starting to provide social services. A few temples have begun Sunday services, and many are offering religious education classes."

The article also implicitly promoted traditional democratic and civic values of freedom, especially religious freedom to choose one's faith. Charity and helping others – without expecting a return – also were values presented in the story, as were cultural heritage and traditions. One minister posed the question: "Are church groups willing and able to take that leap, to affirm someone as Buddhist and still help sponsor them?"

Because the report examined the topic in-depth, it also met most journalistic values as well. It provided balance and completeness in its use of sources, accuracy through its contextual perspectives, and helped to clarify or "illuminate" conflicting values and moral dilemmas.

This story provided an excellent example of how religion news is able to explore values and diversity within the realm of culture and religion. Other stories fared less well. A number of lead stories and features approached their topics only from the standpoint of the particular faith tradition and failed to provide much diversity, depth, or context.

For example, the story, "Teens Apart," published August 26, 1995, and written by a freelancer, described the difficulties Muslim teenagers were having as they attempted to adjust to Western culture while remaining true to their Islamic faith. Only Muslims were quoted in the story, and the lack of diversity severely limited the strength of the article. Numerous questions surfaced. How do these Muslim teens relate to Christian classmates? How do their Christian classmates regard them? What are the challenges for the teachers? The Muslim and Christian parents? The other students? Does the sharing of different cultural and faith values – for example, Islam forbids teenage dating – encourage discussion and better understanding, or are these values even discussed? The story answered none of these questions because it failed to provide a diversity of sources and perspectives. It ended up being a simple "soft" feature with little depth. Its primary message was that Muslim teens in Dallas say they feel socially isolated. This story would have been journalistically enriched had it explored the conflicting values and tension inherent in the story.

It is apparent from these two examples that the subject matter of the story itself can explore diversity, but that, in and of itself, is not sufficient to meet the Hutchins' fourth requirement. The presentation of religious pluralism *is* important, but does not necessarily guarantee the clarification of the values and goals of society. The articles that presented diverse perspectives through multiple sources, explored issues and/or values of importance, either to the faith community, the larger community or the nation, and also dealt with the tensions inherent in conflicting values, were the stories that helped to "clarify the values and goals of society."

Finding: The Presentation and Clarification of Societal Issues, Goals, and Values

Through interviews, polls, and other studies, we have a clearer picture of what issues citizens believe are important to their lives, their communities, and the nation. Wolfe called these subjects the "leading moral issues facing America."[39] Because religion addresses the profoundly moral and ethical issues of humankind, it would seem natural that these topics would, in some way, be present in religion news reports, and that the values underlying these issues would be clarified and enhanced. In some cases this was, indeed, the case. Many of the issues

[39] The "leading moral issues" facing Americans, as identified in Wolfe's study are: God and religion, country, family, racism, welfare, immigration, homosexuality, work, and liberal and conservative politics.

identified as important to Americans were topics of news stories in the sample, and the goals and values of society were sometimes explicitly expressed through religion news. In many cases, however, values inherent in the story were not only *not* clarified, but in some cases omitted entirely.

One news article that presented an excellent examination of traditional "American" values was the story about tobacco farming in North Carolina. The story presented the moral and ethical struggles of Christian farmers, who were concerned about their livelihood, which was based on tobacco. The story, "Where There's Smoke," published February 3, 1996, especially explored one of the societal roles of the church, to provide public space where citizens can talk. As one minister said: "We're trying to create a safe place to say dangerous things."

The lead paragraphs provided the moral framework of the story, as the writer described one tobacco farmer. She wrote: "As a man, he lived according to the values of his Christian faith. He and his wife raised three children, attended their church, helped out their neighbors, and lived off the land, raising sweet potatoes, soybeans, and wheat along with tobacco, their major cash crop."

The picture painted by the writer is one of Americana, and the long-standing values of a "Christian," democratic nation – hard work, belief in God, church, and community, love of family, and roots in the land. The writer follows this idyllic lead with a dose of present-day reality. "Tobacco is under siege in Washington, where the federal government plans to regulate nicotine as a drug. . . . And it is under siege in the hearts and minds of Americans and their churches who, more and more, are distancing themselves from tobacco."

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The article uses multiple sources – from farmers to pastors and government documents – to examine the tensions and values that are "under siege." The writer explores the conflicting values in the story as churches and farmers attempt to reconcile tobacco farming – a livelihood, that had been quite acceptable, promoted, and rewarded for generations – with its current, negative connotations of drugs, death, and addiction. Churches take a strong institutional stance against tobacco, but on the personal and individual level pastors must show compassion to the farmers. As a former tobacco farmer put it: "A church is the place where we connect our values with the community. And we are dealing with values here. This is not simply a job; it is a job mixed up with family history, community history, and cultural traditions."

This story illustrates how well religion news is able to examine public issues from within a framework of moral values. Because of the multiple sources used, the historical background provided, the explicit discussion of basic American values, as well as the boldness in directly confronting and clarifying the ethical conflicts, this story serves as an excellent example of religion news' ability to present and clarify the values and goals of society.

In contrast, an enterprise story published October 26, 1996, about the increased popularity of religious trading cards of saints and martyrs, failed to ask – or answer for that matter – a pivotal question. What values do these religious notables represent to children? What values should they impart? The story, "Holy Heroes," written by a free-lancer, skirted around this question several times in the story, providing superficial comments such as: "The cards . . . bring home a positive message," or "They have a value as a teaching tool." The primary value implicitly expressed in the article was that of money and business acumen. This story had great potential to explore such values as justice, truth, honesty, freedom, and courage. Instead, the writer trivialized the religious values inherent in the story and focused on the business element, writing that the cards of martyrs and saints have found a religious "niche" in the "$1.7 billion" a year trading card market.

Although the topics of these two stories are very different, they illustrate in which ways religion news does, and does not, meet the fourth Hutchins' requirement on clarifying societal values. The story about tobacco farming not only tackled an important, and very public, topic, but also provided sufficient sources, context, and depth to enable it to explore values as well as present and clarify societal goals. The trading cards story was, in the subject matter itself, more of a "soft" feature that was not related to public policy issues. Nevertheless, the article had numerous opportunities to provide new insights into the values represented by the cards. Had more sources been added, such as parents, religious studies professors, or those of the children who collect the cards, it might have been possible to examine the values. Or, if the writer had included the historical background of specific martyrs and saints, the values *they* represented could have been examined. The writer, however, framed the story as a business one, so did not appear to probe very deeply about what values were operating in this story or what the religious cards said about society's hopes or goals for children. Nor did it examine any tensions in conflicting values.

In addition to adding a deeper discussion about character traits considered valuable by our society, the inclusion of these elements would have made the story better journalistically. By providing more balance and more voices, as well as history and context, the story would have been more "whole" and might have addressed issues of concern about children growing up in today's world.

A few of the stories in the sample promoted, or at least mentioned, some of the basic values of democracy, particularly that of freedom and freedom to choose one's religion. Other stories emphasized traditional democratic values such as unity. A news story in the July 22, 1995, issue examined the importance of English as a common language by reporting on an Asian faith community that had purposely chosen to unite Asian cultures in Dallas by celebrating church services in the English language. The article promoted the advantages of national unity through the English language by focusing on what Asian church members – Chinese, Japanese, Korean, Laotian, and Thai – shared in common in their new country. While retaining appreciation of cultural diversity, this story promoted cultural assimilation through the sharing of a common language, a subject that has been debated numerous times in other news reports, and a value that can be traced back to the beginning of our country.

Discussion

It was apparent from the beginning of the analysis that religion news reports in the sample tended to promote values of diversity, pluralism, tolerance, and respect. But that begged the question. If any section of the newspaper should be able to reflect the values of society *and* connect those to public issues, it should be the religion section. The stories had difficulties in achieving this, often skirting around the core values of the issue, and failing to probe deep enough to identify what *really* was at issue in the particular story; what core value or values were *really* important to the people involved? Part of journalism's difficulty in addressing "values" could stem from the concept of objectivity as well as basic journalism practices and conventions, which are more accustomed to approaching news as information and education rather than from a moral, ethical, or "values" frame. As Glasser argued, journalists tend to focus on objective facts, which can disconnect them from values.[40] Journalism scholar Stewart Hoover suggests that religion news' "forays into values" is only just emerging, and it remains to be seen how well journalism can address the cultural crisis over "values." He adds that this will not be an easy task.[41]

A pattern seemed to emerge when analyzing the sample under the criteria established for the fourth Hutchins' requirement. The stories that appeared to originate through the staff – in contrast to hard news or breaking stories – tended to be weak in "presenting the goals and values of society." These staff-generated stories – specifically the lead story, staff-written columns, "A Helping Hand," and "Living Faith" – presented values and society's goals primarily in implicit ways. Stories that reported on news events that were generated by community activities or events tended to focus more on values and societal concerns.

This pattern relates to other studies' findings that readers tend to create moral frameworks in news reports. Iorio and Huxman found that readers' responses to news stories were "permeated with value-laden appraisals."[42] Media audience studies on perceptions and framing show that readers humanize the news, relate it to personal experiences, insert moral issues, and make value judgments about news reports.[43]

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[40] Ettema and Glasser, *Custodians of Conscience: Investigative Journalism and Public Virtue.*

[41] Stewart M. Hoover. Religion in the News: Faith and Journalism in American Public Discourse (Thousand Oaks: Sage, 1998).

[42] Iorio and Huxman, "Media Coverage of Political Issues and the Framing of personal Concerns."

[43] Doris A. Graber, in , 2nd ed. New York: Longman, 1988, identified six schema in which readers processed the news. Among these are human behavior and person judgments, institution judgments, cultural norms, human interest and empathy. Neuman et al. found five interpretative

If, as these studies indicate, readers insert meaning and values into news reports they *read*, then it seems reasonable to assume that readers would insert these same perspectives into the news stories they *generate*. It suggests that, when hard news reports occur in the area of religion, citizens will insert the value-laden and moral framework themselves either through the subject matter of the news story itself, or through the comments made to the reporter.

In the Page 1A sample, a slightly different pattern emerged. Many of these articles were written by regular staff or bureau reporters – non-religion specialists – who tended to focus strongly on social issues rather than faith or religious perspectives. The articles that were written by religion staff members tended to be the opposite. They focused more on faith issues than on social issues of concern. Although there were some exceptions, reporters seem less likely to approach religion enterprise stories or features this way. Reporters seemed hesitant to deliberately and explicitly link religious beliefs and actions to specific societal issues.

It became readily apparent that, if the stories failed to tap a wide array of sources with differing perspectives, they also experienced trouble meeting the fourth Hutchins Commission requirement. Without differing perspectives, claims go unchallenged, and the competing values operating are rarely brought out in the open for deeper exploration. Thus, multiple and diverse sources are of critical importance in helping to meet the fourth Hutchins Commission requirement.

Those stories that met the fourth Hutchins' requirement also showed evidence of strong journalistic values. In order to "present and clarify" societal values "toward which a community

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frames by which readers understood news. These were conflict, moral values, economics, powerlessness and human impact. See W. Russell Neuman, Marion R. Just and Ann N. Crigler, (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1992).

must strive," stories need to provide depth and context, which promotes better understanding. In addition, these stories tended to use several sources that presented a diversity of perspectives and revealed the tensions in the competing values that were operating.[44]

The concept of "values" can be sentimentalized and made meaningless. As one source said in a story about interfaith groups, "*All* religions support family values." For example, the story on the religious trading cards tended toward meaningless comments about values. Simply by mentioning values or getting a superficial quote from a source does *not* clarify the value or the goals of society. To meet this Hutchins' requirement means that reporters must adhere to the traditional values of journalism itself. They must "know what questions to ask" and how to create a fair and complete report. The stories in the sample that appeared to do this were written primarily by specialist writers – contributors with some expertise in the topic or religion news specialists.

Many of the religion stories were challenged by this fourth requirement. Some of the difficulties appeared to be in "knowing what questions to ask," which would have helped to identify the values operating in the story and provided an entrance into deeper exploration. Specialist religion writers fared best in this regard, while regular journalists often failed to ask probing questions on the core values in the story.

A related problem was the failure to include a sufficient number of pertinent sources, which might have helped reveal the tensions and conflicting values in the subject matter.

[44] The Kettering Foundation and the National Issues Forums (NIF) suggest that, unless the conflicting values and the tensions are revealed, true deliberation about important issues cannot take place.

Many of the stories used only sources from within one faith tradition or group (i.e., the Muslim teenagers' story). In these instances, reporters not only fail to meet the Hutchins Commission's requirement, but also fail to meet journalistic value standards.

Nevertheless, the sample analysis revealed myriad ways in which religion news "presents," if not "clarifies," the values and goals of a democratic society. Many of the stories focused on the values and issues of freedom, pluralism, family life, equality, and education. Many of the briefs such as "Word and Deed," presented a variety of traditional American values. Buddenbaum argues that the "little stories" – the briefs and announcements – are considered the least important in the conventional news sense, yet it is these stories that help create a religiously diverse picture of society.[45]

Although these short notices did not provide depth or context, the sheer number of them did allow readers to obtain a broader picture of society's concerns and issues that are deemed important by religious congregations. The same held true for the standing features, "A Helping Hand" and "Living Faith," which, in and of themselves, promoted the values of generosity and volunteerism. Despite the lack of depth, the briefs and standing features, as a whole, gave readers a glimpse of how religion news can promote the values and goals "toward which a community must strive."

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[45] Buddenbaum, *Reporting News about Religion,* 138-140.

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