THE TECHNIQUE OF RELIGIOUS PERSUASION: DIGITAL MEDIA,

EVANGELICALS, AND LITURGICAL DESIGN

A Dissertation

by

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ABSTRACT

This dissertation examines the orchestrated use of hot and cool media in support of religious rhetoric by independent evangelical churches as part of an organizational template of persuasion and propaganda. Specifically, the dissertation focuses on how and why evangelicals use these media to amplify their rhetoric and how this rhetoric is strategically designed to align mass audiences with the linguistic terms of order of a specific value system that is said to facilitate their moral and spiritual salvation via the formation of a binding covenant. The dissertation also examines a rhetorical cycle of guilt and redemption employed by evangelicals to re-align mass individuals with these terms of order when they fail to honor or live up to them.

Accordingly, I argue that the operational template resulting from this persuasive combination of media and rhetoric indicates a consistent, pragmatic response by evangelicals to a series of unfavorable socio-technical conditions stemming from a technological society and, significantly, the influence of technique that diminishes the agency of mass individuals, causing them to withdraw their participation from civic organizations, including churches. I also argue that the organizational template and its principal components representing the evangelical response to these conditions are common across multiple evangelical organizations and transcend any major demographic differences between congregants, indicating the suitability of this template for mass persuasion in multiple contexts.

To complete this research project, I utilized a mixed-method ethnographic approach at four independent evangelical churches in the state of Texas. This methodology combined participant-observation, in-depth qualitative interviews with church pastors and staff, a visual-content analysis of photographs of church architecture and equipment, and the rhetorical analysis of a sample of sermon transcripts corresponding with dates and times of my field work. The major findings of this dissertation are that unsupported rhetoric is often ineffective at proselytizing groups of religious mass individuals and that effective religious persuasion requires the strategic orchestration of media to amplify this rhetoric and make it more appealing to mass audiences in multiple organizational contexts.

DEDICATION

To my parents, for their love, support, and boundless optimism for me. It has been quite the journey to this point, and I am eternally grateful to have had you both with me along the way.

To JB, you came into my life at the right time and the journey just wouldn't have been the same without you. Here's to seeing what the next chapter looks like!

To Gary McCarron, for steadfast belief and good humor.

And to TsN for words of wisdom: "if you get confused listen to the music play."

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What makes a church a church? In simplistic terms a church is a gathering of like-minded people who have agreed to come together as a group, in a building, to conduct a ritual. But in a spiritual sense a church can also be something greater: a place in which people who feel compelled by God come to congregate and worship and experience both the highs and the lows of religious ecstasy. But regardless of which view one takes of a church, nevertheless a common thread binds these views together: the people who attend them. These people come from all walks of life and are in fact mass individuals who are part of a greater church community. The question, then, is how they got there and more importantly, what keeps them coming back for more. Investigating what "makes" a church thus leads to questions not just of faith but of media and rhetoric—how do evangelicals connect with churchgoers through media technology and then actively persuade mass individuals to align themselves with specific terms of order that bind them together in a church community?

Studying the liturgical and operational template characterizing this wholly unique religious enterprise is the subject and focus of this dissertation. Due to the potency of this enterprise at proselytizing mass individuals with relative ease and efficiency, I label it the evangelical propaganda enterprise or evangelical operational template and use these terms interchangeably. Accordingly, I argue in this dissertation that the creation of

the evangelical propaganda enterprise and its template of persuasion is a reflexive, adaptive orientation by religious organizations to a series of unfavorable socio-technical conditions existing outside their purview that currently affect their religious vitality and public visibility.

The socio-technical conditions affecting religious organizations are products of modernism and an electronic age and emphasize efficiency in all facets of human existence: including the rapid transmission of easily accessible information and the diminished agency of the individual. The force or technique of these conditions, I believe, is such that they have come to be valued over the habits of the heart of human community and the pious contemplation of learned material for one's own betterment. I argue that when experienced by mass individuals, these socio-technical conditions of absolute efficiency inevitably result in the individual's manifest failure to adhere to them. Significantly, when this failure occurs en masse, it results in a general disenchantment with society and individuals' withdrawal in participation from civic organizations such as religious groups. This in turn leads to a widespread decline in both the public visibility and the vitality of religious organizations, which are left to contemplate growing numbers of empty pews and the whispered rumors of congregant discontent.

Meeting this decline head on, religious organizations come to face to face with a series of socio-technical challenges that are antithetical to their history and tradition. I argue that these conditions inevitably cause churches to reflexively adapt to maintain their diminishing public visibility and declining religious vitality. However, not all

churches exhibit this adaptability; those that do adapt experience varying degrees of success and failure. Significantly, it is largely the independent, non-denominational evangelical churches that exemplify the flexibility and adaptability needed to prosper in the midst of these unfavorable socio-technical conditions, leaving their more mainline counterparts to wrestle with balancing the rigidity of their tradition against contemporary audiences whose worldview is frequently at odds with these traditions.

In adapting themselves to these conditions to stem the tide of decline, evangelical churches create a unique liturgical and operational style that transcends demographic and denominational differences between churches. This style or template, I argue, is characterized by the seamless orchestration of various media forms in worship and a rhetorical style structured around the terms of order of a specific world view, coupled with an endless cycle of guilt and redemption in mass audiences. But what does this template look like? How are the order of service and rhetoric at evangelical churches different from those of their mainline counterparts? What is the role of media in facilitating evangelical rhetoric? Finally, how are mass audiences persuaded by evangelical rhetors-as-pastors to continually submit themselves to a rhetorical cycle of guilt and redemption as a pathway to salvation?

It is these questions I answer with this dissertation. But before we go any further down this path of exploration and investigation and discuss the motivations, mechanics, and constraints of the orchestrated evangelical template of persuasion, I must situate the present study in a specific time and place and discuss the various components (both human and material) involved in it. To do so, I offer up a simple exploratory narrative

explaining in very basic terms how pastors plant or start a church and, significantly, what is involved in developing one.

Starting and Developing an Independent Evangelical Church

For those lacking in a religious background and who may be curious as to what is involved in starting and developing an independent church, a quick Google search reveals the following: thousands of sources appear with each listing various books, guides, resources, and checklists for the entrepreneurial minded Christian. Many of these sources are blessed with rather inspirational and sometimes heady titles such as Starting a New Church: The Church Planter's Guide to Success by Ralph Moore (2002), The Nuts and Bolts of Church Planting: A Guide for Starting Any Kind of Church by Aubrey Malphurs (2011), or The Honest Guide to Church Planting: What No One Ever Tells You about Planting and Leading a New Church by Tom Bennardo (2019).

Titles aside, however, for those individuals who decide to walk the difficult path of building a church and growing it into a successful faith-based operation, the odds are against them. Lifeway Research (2020), a religious non-profit organization and member of the Southern Baptist Convention based in Nashville Tennessee, lists a sobering statistic: 6 in 10 churches in the United States are either in decline or have financially plateaued. The Pew Research Center, a non-partisan think tank, says that the number of Americans who describe themselves as religious is down 12% in the last decade alone and currently sits at around 65% of the general population (In U.S., Decline of Christianity Continues at Rapid Pace, 2019). In addition, the Barna Group says that just one in four Americans today is a practicing Christian, a share that has dropped in half

since the year 2000 (Signs of Decline & Hope Among Key Metrics of Faith, 2020). But while these statistics may deter some from starting a church of their own, for others hope reigns supreme; each year thousands of people get together, pool their available capital, and put their faith behind a pastor who decides to start a church somewhere in their local community and grow this church to make a difference in people's lives. Many of these churches begin in the simplest of ways: a local personality feels compelled, perhaps by God, to start preaching and spread the Good News. In time he gathers followers and they congregate together, sometimes in a living room or a school gymnasium or even a movie theatre. Hopefully the pastor gains enough followers and enough capital to start looking elsewhere for a building large enough to fit the needs of a growing congregation. But here at this juncture, when local living rooms are too small and movie theaters too constrained by scheduling and rental fees, the practical considerations of growing and running a successful church arguably begin to take precedence over the more theological concerns of pastors and their followers.

As someone previously employed in the marketing industry and raised by extension in something resembling a semi-religious family, I have always maintained an interest in understanding how churches work and what makes them successful. In this sense I think and act more like a communication consultant than scholar. While this instrumental, means-to-an-end outlook does tend to rub some people the wrong way at times, at the root of it is an honest desire to understand how to build, grow, and maintain a successful church. And while I myself do not believe in any higher power, I do maintain a healthy respect for the belief system of organized religion, for this system is

at the very foundation of Western society. It is the basis for our Western morality, our ethics, our legal system, and our various governments. So what then is involved in running a successful religious enterprise—and of equal importance, why does the present study focus on evangelicals in particular?

The fact of the matter is that evangelicals are a bit better at maintaining the attention and participation of the religious populace in the United States (and by extension Canada) than other religious groups. This is by no means an exaggerated statement, for the statistics on religion and church in the US support my warranted assertion: while the Pew Research Center lists a drop in 12 percentage points of Americans who identify as religious, evangelical Christians are for the most part standing strong and just over a quarter of Americans calling themselves Christians today also call themselves evangelical (Pew Research Center, 2015).

Defining evangelicalism is important as the term is by no means homogenous. While I discuss the numerous iterations and complexities of the term in Chapter Two, if the various forms of evangelical Christianity in the US were combined, they would represent the third largest cluster of congregations, following the Roman Catholic Church and Southern Baptist convention (Nondenominational Congregations Study, 2015). And while larger religious groups such as the Catholics and mainline Protestants are seeing a rapid decline in membership, visibility, and public influence, evangelicals are generally holding on to their flocks and in many cases growing them.

Many evangelical congregations are made up of independent, start-up churches of limited size (~70-100 people in regular attendance each week) according to the

National Congregations Study of Duke University. However, an additional statistic is arguably the most significant to the present study: the next highest group of regularly attending congregants is between 100 and 500 each week. The reason this statistic is so significant is that with churches of this size, nearly 40% report using projection equipment during services of the type used in commercial entertainment venues. Over 65% of these same churches regularly record their sermons so congregants can download them, and 90% of these churches report using musical instruments during worship services.

In addition, 30% of congregants at these churches report watching video clips during sermons, while 40% report utilizing paid staff to sing and perform for congregants during worship. As someone whose worldview is rooted in complications of power and influence, I find taking all of these statistics together demonstrates one thing in particular: the method of evangelization for many churches is similar to, and in many cases identical to, the methods of mass persuasion I learned to employ during my time as a marketing consultant. But why is this? Why are more and more churches looking to contemporary entertainment culture for inspiration on how to reach the unreached? And more importantly, how do they go about doing so in a manner that appeals to and resonates with the very people they're trying to reach?

Scholars and theologians alike have asked themselves these same questions for decades. Many, such as church specialist and raconteur Tex Sample (1998), argue that contemporary mass audiences are "conditioned" by the culture around them to see the world in a particular way, and that churches desiring to reach and resonate with these

audiences must learn to speak a new language, march to a different beat, and broadcast themselves to these audiences in new and interesting visual ways. Other scholars, such as Heather Hendershot (2004), look to evangelical media culture from the vantage point of mass media consumption and "assume that [these] media are designed to provide something of spiritual value to believers" through the commodification of conservative Christianity.

Other scholars still, such as Shayne Lee and Phillip Silitiere (2009), cast a critical eye in the direction of popular evangelical preachers: the so-called Holy Mavericks of contemporary Christian culture who have learned to embrace the world outside of churches, contradictions and all, and use it to their advantage by crafting a preaching style all their own that appeals to large numbers of religious consumers. Regarding religious consumerism, some scholars such as Rodney Stark and Roger Finke (2005) adopt an economic approach in the study of religion in the US, arguing that in a heterogenous religious landscape of winners and losers, organizations and churches that capture the largest share of the religious consumer market are the most successful, while those that fail to do so end up as just another statistic of the type I cited earlier.

But what if these scholars and theologians have it wrong? What if—in their push to categorize, sort, and diagnose the religious landscape in the US—they overlook the obvious and focus on the big picture at the expense of the small? From my vantage point as a relative outsider to this world, my aim with this dissertation is to shed some light on what makes independent evangelical churches so successful and to pull back the curtain on their operation to show that regardless of what they believe, their success is

contingent on some very basic principles of persuasion: using whatever means necessary to reach people and keep them coming back for more. In a sense, then, contemporary religious organizations such as the independent, evangelical churches on which this study focuses are no different than any other product, brand, or item in the consumer marketplace. So what exactly is involved in creating this religious product and marketing it to the public? And once this occurs, how does the brand ensure its longevity?

In practical terms, while not all religious organizations are oriented toward proselytizing the masses, evangelicals typically are. But in order to do so, they must first build a brand, and it is a basic marketing principle that good brands require good spokespeople. This is why evangelical pastors tend to be so charismatic with their rhetoric; creating and fostering a cult of personality is typically the best approach to resonate with people and ensure liquidity in the marketplace (Christensen, 2020). In addition, the pastor himself can also be thought of as a brand, and more importantly, one that should cater to a specific demographic. As I will make clear in Chapters Four and Five, successful churches home in on specific target demographics with their evangelization, and once the attention of this demographic has been captured, it can be successfully retained by crafting a worship style or operational template that appeals to those consumer preferences and tastes. As I will also clarify in Chapters Four and Five, identifying these target demographics involves a combination of reading the tea leaves of contemporary culture as well as understanding the practical considerations of location, timing, and available capital.

Secondly, successful pastors build successful churches by differentiating their brand from others, as will be discussed in Chapter Five. But for example, differentiating one church from the another is less about actual difference than it is the appearance of difference, and this is why many evangelical churches utilize the same or similar operational template even though this template (brand) is oriented toward very different demographics. This is yet another practical consideration faced by evangelical pastors seeking to proselytize large numbers of mass individuals in a crowded religious marketplace with often limited budgets.

Thirdly, and perhaps most overlooked by scholars, is the actual method of persuasion. This involves looking not simply at the rhetoric of successful evangelical pastors but also what equipment and techniques are involved in supporting it. This represents yet another practical consideration—and constraint—faced by many pastors today and for a great many others has proved their undoing. Looking at the complex operation involved in implementing and orchestrating a weekend worship service at a small to medium-sized independent evangelical church is the focus of Chapter Five, and as will be discussed, the success of this operation involves a number of material and human constraints.

On the material side of this operation is the need to design a physical building environment conducive to mass audience persuasion. This building must be cost-effective, as capital expenditures are largely at the whims of congregant tithing and designed in such a manner that visitors are effectively isolated from the outside world to maximize their exposure to what is essentially religious propaganda. That in itself is

designed to align them with a belief system said to secure their spiritual and moral salvation. At the same time, however, the method for disseminating this propaganda must be highly efficient and maximize audience persuasion with the minimum expenditure of material resources. These resources include a variety of entertainment media of the type seen in bars, nightclubs, and concert halls, and each represents a constituent component of the machinery of evangelical persuasion.

On the human side of this operation are a number of other constraints, each of which only adds to the pressure faced by evangelical pastors as celebrity figureheads of independent churches. The first and arguably most important of these constraints is the real difficulty in making scripture feel and seem relevant to contemporary mass audiences. This is largely an issue of rhetoric; as Chapter Four will demonstrate, successful evangelical pastors learn to rely upon a specific style or format of preaching that, as with their operational template of persuasion, is largely consistent across multiple churches regardless of the actual demographics of these churches. In addition, this rhetoric must not only be accessible to mass audiences, but more importantly it must be simple and easy to follow for these audiences, many of whom may lack deeply religious backgrounds.

But this need to make religious rhetoric both appealing and easy to follow creates yet another issue for pastors: maintaining a consistent interpretation of scripture that does not sacrifice the underlying spiritual message. This too will be discussed in Chapters Four and Five as a very real constraint faced by evangelicals. Underlying all of these constraints then, is a singular and unifying principle that churches must adhere to

regardless of race, orientation, or theological outlook: bringing the Gospel of Christ to mass audiences in a manner that satisfies a very real spiritual and moral requirement and that guarantees the success of churches as independent religious brands. This dissertation, therefore, seeks to investigate the success of evangelical churches in terms of the tools, techniques, and persuasion used by pastors and staff to successfully market themselves to contemporary mass audiences and maintain their vitality in a highly competitive religious marketplace. To accomplish this, the research in this dissertation is guided by two questions:

> **RQ1: How is the rhetoric of evangelical leaders used to align mass audiences with the Christian worldview in order to facilitate the spiritual salvation of these audiences?**

> **RQ2: How do evangelicals use media to construct an atmosphere and environment in churches that supports the effective facilitation of persuasive religious rhetoric as propaganda?**

In answering these questions, I demonstrate that the measure of success for evangelical churches in the religious free market is found in the creation of an appealing and easily digestible product for the novice religious consumer: a product defined by a carefully crafted and strategic combination of entertaining media orchestration and persuasive, guilt-inducing rhetoric. Notably, this product—which I label the evangelical template of persuasion—is common across each church I studied during the field work for this dissertation and spans demographic differences among congregants, church leaders, and newly minted followers. In addition, the rhetoric employed by pastors within this template proves itself remarkably efficient at proselytizing large numbers of mass individuals by speaking directly to their universal lived experiences.

My research also demonstrates that the socio-technical conditions governing the

operationalization of the evangelical propaganda enterprise are an important element of contemporary religiosity often unconsidered in current scholarship. Such scholarship, I believe, overlooks the adaptive responses of religious organizations to these unfavorable socio-technical conditions, rather emphasizing the agency of individual religious organizations in making proactive rather than reactive decisions to combat their declining visibility and vitality. Contrary to popular belief in the academy, I demonstrate that the agency of contemporary evangelical organizations is much less influential than previously thought.

Theoretical Approach and Chapter Outline

My approach to this dissertation is twofold. First, I adopt the perspective of the mass individual—the target of the evangelical propaganda enterprise—in order to understand how these mass individuals are so easily persuaded by religious propaganda. Second and more importantly, I analyze this perspective by integrating a combination of media and rhetorical analysis. The media analysis I undertake in this dissertation is not media studies in the contemporary sense in that I do not systematically categorize and examine every media form operated by independent evangelical churches. Rather, I examine evangelical media use from the vantage point of a cohesive propagandistic enterprise in which large numbers of mass individuals are proselytized with relative ease and efficiency into long-term membership via repeat participation in this enterprise.

I also examine the evangelical rhetoric of salvation, or more specifically the content and style of rhetoric used by pastors in their weekly sermons. Supported by orchestrated media designed to simplify this rhetoric for mass audiences, evangelical

rhetoric is unique; the terms of order underlying it work to provide salvation through an addictive cycle of guilt and redemption to which, tragically, mass audiences inevitably fail to live up. This failure to honor their covenant with the evangelical terms of order is what keeps mass audiences returning, time and time again, to their church of choice. Significantly, none of this would occur if not for the persuasive combination of an expressive, orchestrated media program in support of highly persuasive religious rhetoric. Therefore, my two-tailed methodological design gives the present study a unique focus among contemporary studies of religious organizations—a focus that I believe is underdeveloped in current scholarship due to the idiosyncratic structure of its methodological approach.

Following this brief introductory chapter, in Chapter Two I present a thorough literature review of the relevant scholarship and theories required to answer the dissertation's research questions. This includes a history of the evangelical movement in the United States as well as a thorough analysis of the work of media ecologists Jacques Ellul and Marshall McLuhan, whose theories of technique and hot and cool media proved instrumental in my analysis of the liturgical template of evangelical churches. In this chapter, I also outline the work of literary scholar and rhetorician Kenneth Burke, whose theories of order and disorder and the guilt-redemption cycle grounded my analysis of the rhetoric of evangelical sermons.

In Chapter Three, I provide a detailed explanation of the methodology for my field work, including my method of analysis, observation criteria, and a description of the four field sites featured in this dissertation. Chapter Four focuses on the logology of

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evangelical rhetoric and examines the linguistic techniques employed by evangelical

pastors in sermons to proselytize mass audiences. Rather than attempt to make claims

about the theology of this rhetoric, I instead look to the use of this rhetoric as a

propagandistic tool to symbolically adhere mass audiences to the evangelical terms of

order or value system. Such rhetoric facilitates audiences' supposed salvation with God

through a consubstantial joining of their essence with his via the formation of a symbolic

covenant or binding agreement with this value system.

As well as providing a 'treatise' on the inner workings or ratios of the

evangelical terms of order and covenant, Chapter Four examines the rhetorical cycle of

guilt and redemption employed by evangelical pastors to re-adhere mass audiences to

their terms of order when they inevitably and predictably fall into states of disorder or

are tempted by what Kenneth Burke describes as the counter-covenant. Significantly, it

is this endless cycle of guilt and redemption that allows pastors to maintain their

congregant base and ensure a visible audience each week as mass individuals seek solace

from their sins in the recitation of scripture and performative presentation of the

evangelical terms of order.

Chapter Five focuses on what I deem the 'evangelical propaganda enterprise' or

more specifically, the operational and liturgical template employed by churches to

efficiently funnel mass individuals off the street and into an enclosed and isolated

environment. Once inside this environment, mass individuals are exposed to a strategic

presentation of various hot and cool media forms designed to captivate their attention

and direct it toward a center stage used by pastors to deliver their persuasive religious message or sermon.

In Chapter Six I offer the principal conclusions of my study, its limitations, and my recommendations for future research. In making these recommendations, I emphasize the necessity for further studying the evangelical propaganda enterprise and examining the role of media more closely in terms of how it facilitates persuasive religious rhetoric. Finally, I discuss the growing relationship between contemporary evangelicals and White nationalism and how future studies would do well to examine the potential role of evangelical propaganda in facilitating this trend.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF RELEVANT LITERATURE

As I will argue in this dissertation, the evangelical mentality of salvation through any means necessary, combined with a set of unfavorable social conditions produced by a technological society, inevitably results in the strategic use of rhetoric, media, and persuasion practices by religious organizations: practices orchestrated in the form of a template highly similar across a number of churches. Using ethnographic data to support this argument, I will demonstrate that the relative popularity of contemporary evangelical churches in comparison to their more mainline counterparts is the result of the strategic, opportunistic creation of a highly persuasive propaganda enterprise that efficiently facilitates both moral and spiritual salvation in mass audiences to maximum effect and with a minimum expenditure of human and material resources.

First, however, I will explicate competing theories used by sociologists and religious study scholars to explain the plurality of evangelical churches in contemporary society and their ongoing vitality or popularity with younger audiences and multiple demographics, and will critique the relevance of these theories to the present study. I will then argue that the socio-technical constraints of contemporary society under modernity produce a set of unfavorable social conditions for evangelical religious organizations and that these conditions foster individual isolation and withdrawal from participation in civic society. When these conditions and isolation occur, they complicate the ability of evangelical religious organizations to effectively persuade or proselytize mass individuals to accept the terms of order of their worldview and how an alignment

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with these terms order produces stable patterns of learned experience. I will support this position with the work of Robert Bellah (1927–2013), who argues that the inescapable effects of rampant individualism in America foster apathy in the individual and lead to isolation and withdrawal from civil society and civic organizations such as churches. Next, I will utilize two theories of French philosopher and theologian Jacques Ellul (1912–1994), technique and the technological society, as well as Ellul's work on propaganda in the formation of attitudes. These theories will support my argument that the structured response by evangelicals to the complex socio-technical conditions of modernity result from the pervasive efficiencies of technique and that the resulting use of propaganda is a soft-determinist, pragmatic response by evangelicals to these efficiencies—a response oriented toward attaining spiritual and moral salvation by any means necessary.

I will then draw on the work of Marshall McLuhan (1911–1980) to argue that these responses are further understood by differentiating hot and cool media, specifically in how the orchestration of these media by evangelicals is the most pragmatic and efficient way to regain religious vitality. This analysis will be grounded in McLuhan's (1964) ecological explication that 'the medium is the message,' specifically in his emphasis on media form as a determining factor in media effects. From this, I will argue that the effectiveness of evangelical propaganda is due to its strategic and orchestrated use of hot and cool media in liturgy to produce various psychological and physiological responses in audiences and in so doing, induce their cooperation and participation with religious organizations.

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Following a thorough description of McLuhan's primary contributions to the study of media and society, I will present an overview of an organizational communication theory of potential relevance to this study: Adaptive Structuration Theory. Frequently abbreviated by the acronym AST, the theory offers a cohesive guide to studying how organizations integrate ICT (information and communications technology) into their structures by way of what DeSanctis and Poole (1994) and Poole and McPhee (2005) label as appropriation. Significantly, AST's conceptualization of appropriation may enable future studies of this kind to gain greater understanding of how religious organizations come to appropriate media originally designed for secular purposes into their structures, only to orchestrate these media for religious or faith-based purposes which they were not originally designed for.

Finally, and most importantly, I will draw upon the rhetorical scholarship of Kenneth Burke (1897–1993), specifically how his conceptualization of identification and consubstantiality stresses the importance of form over content in inducing audience cooperation and the role of the rhetor in establishing credibility when delivering strategic messaging. The chapter will conclude by arguing that evangelical responses to the afore-mentioned socio-technical constraints of modernity result in a template of church operation shared and exhibited by multiple churches and that supports the strategic dissemination of religious rhetoric—whose pentadic ratios and terms of order are also highly similar across multiple churches. First, however, a question must be answered: who exactly are evangelicals and what is it they believe?

Evangelicalism Defined

As the single largest group of Christians in the US outside of Roman Catholics, evangelicals and the movement of evangelicalism are notoriously difficult to define. Smith (1998) argues that due to their fragmented organization and interdenominational beliefs, evangelicals are best defined through their push for an "engaged orthodoxy" of collective identity in which aspects of Conservative Protestantism (fundamentalism) are combined with an agenda of intellectualism, public engagement, and political affiliation. In practice, evangelical engaged orthodoxy overlooks the disparate views of many Christian sub-groups in favor of a mainstream push toward wider acceptance of what beliefs these groups can collectively agree on and prioritize.

These beliefs include what Hankins (2009) labels the "four essentials" of Evangelical Christianity: biblicism, crucicentrism, conversionism, and activism. With biblicism, the Christian bible is viewed as the ultimate authority for all human matters, including gender, race, and politics. Crucicentrism refers to the belief that Christ died for all of mankind's sins and that as a symbol, Jesus represents the ultimate atonement. Conversionism refers to the evangelical push toward converting the unchurched into the churched where they are born again and set on a righteous path toward spiritual and moral salvation.

At the heart of conversionism is activism; this is seen in the evangelical push to bring fundamentalist beliefs to the mainstream in an open, engaging, and intellectual way, frequently through political and social organization. According to Hankins (2009), the empowered contemporary evangelical engages in an active and holy life of service to

the betterment of mankind, but ultimately under the authority of Jesus and the Holy Father, the inerrant words of which are inscribed in the Bible and are to be obeyed.

Regarding the core beliefs of evangelicals, the present study surveys four individual, non-denominational churches in the state of Texas: Brazos Fellowship, UNION, City Life Church, and UNION. Each of these churches operates as an independent owner-operator entity, and each is branded in a quantifiably different manner. However, they have a number of similar characteristics, most importantly that each shares some or all of the four essential characteristics of evangelicalism as identified by Hankins (2008). For example, a close reading of the About Page of the website each church reveals the following information:

Brazos Fellowship is the most mainstream of the four and believes strongly that Jesus Christ is the Savior of the World and died for the sins of mankind, that Scripture is truly God's word and is to be obeyed, and that the only true salvation is found in Christ. UNION's message on its website is less concrete but nevertheless focused on personal transformation through Christ and the notion that obedience to Christ is the path to inner change as His death serves as an example of the ultimate sacrifice. Sermons at UNION round out the remaining tenet of Hankins' four essentials of evangelicalism, indicating that the church is very activist-focused with community outreach, predominantly in Houston's poorest areas, as a strategic push for conversionism.

As with Brazos Fellowship, City Life Church is largely mainstream in its core beliefs, reflected in its stated mission: "We value the fact that God chose to love us and die for us while we were sinners" and that "we say…follow me as I follow Christ

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because He is the truth." Conversionism is also stressed in City Life's About pages; the church emphasizes that "our passion [is] not to be ashamed of preaching the gospel and pointing people to Jesus as Lord and Savior in all we do." Diversity is also stressed at City Life: the website states unequivocally that no matter the color, gender, age, or income, "God has broken down the walls of hostility and comparison."

This emphasis on diversity is also shared by Ecclesia, the most left-of-center of the four churches surveyed in this study. Unlike Brazos Fellowship, UNION, or City Life, Ecclesia's executive pastor Chris Seay is considered a leader in an emerging church movement that stresses a post-modern understanding of Christianity in which community and creative, experience-focused worship is favored over doctrinal traditions. A glance at Ecclesia's Statement of Beliefs webpage reveals that the church adheres to a holistic and missional worldview in which all are welcome and none are judged for their sins. However, a closer reading of Ecclesia's core beliefs reveals that while the church may be branded as quantifiably different than others, it nevertheless shares in Hankins' four essentials of evangelicalism: an extended verse poem at the end of the page reveals that Ecclesia believes strongly in biblicism, crucicentrism, conversionism, and activism.

While Hankins' central tenets of evangelicalism are exhibited in various shapes and guises by the four churches featured in this dissertation, making extended claims about their theology is not the purpose of the present study. Rather than seek to explain the perspectivity, worldview, or doctrinal positions of Brazos Fellowship, UNION, City Life and Ecclesia, the present study is instead concerned with the methods of their

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persuasion. I say this because each of the four churches utilizes a highly similar operational template and understanding the complexities of this template is the primary focus of this study. From time to time in this dissertation I may make brief points of clarification about the theological position of these churches but, I must stress, only to support my analysis of their logology. Similarly, my use of 'evangelical' in this dissertation should be understood as a blanket term to encompass religious organizations that share in the four essential characteristics or tenets of evangelical Christianity in its multitude of forms.

Now that I have described the core beliefs of evangelicals and defined my use of the term 'evangelical' in this dissertation, a thorough discussion is required on several terms of considerable importance to the present study: religious plurality and religious vitality, and religious nones or religiously unaffiliated. Following an explication of these terms, I will compare and contrast four competing sociological theories of religious plurality and vitality and argue for their relevance and importance to the present study. I will then move to a thorough description of the technological society that evangelicals inhabit and illustrate the socio-technical constraints of the contemporary religious landscape in which evangelicals co-exist and compete with one another.

Religious Plurality and Religious Vitality

Compared to the declining influence of their mainline counterparts, the relative success of evangelicals in catering to the varied preferences of religious consumers can in part be explained by the relationship between religious plurality and religious vitality. In previous decades, sociology of religion scholars such as Peter Berger (1990) argued

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that increased religious plurality—the peaceful coexistence of various religions—would have a detrimental effect on religious vitality or religious participation. At the basis of Berger's claims is the notion that the more religious worldviews there are, the less plausible each seems and the less religious belief and activity there will be (Chaves & Gorski, 2011, p. 261).

In recent years, this wisdom has been challenged: most notably by Finke and Starke (2005), who adopt a religious economy or 'supply chain' model of vitality, arguing that increased religious consumer choice inevitably results in increased participation. However, participation numbers alone do not necessarily equate with vitality or strength; they may provide only half an answer to the question of the relationship between religious plurality and vitality. Part of the problem with equating religious participation with religious vitality is that participation numbers alone do not provide an adequate representation of religious belief, participation, or frequency of participation. For example, Krech et al. (2013) argue that assuming the relationship between religious plurality and vitality implies that the percentage of a given population identifying with a religious group will be equal to the percentage of the population of the group actively participating in it. However, sociological survey data indicates that religious group membership does not necessarily equate with personal religious identity. This was discovered by Hout and Fischer (2002, 2014), who surveyed GSS (General Social Survey) survey data and discovered that the rise in religious non-affiliation in America does not correlate with a decline in religious identity.

Chaves (2017) also utilized GSS data in a survey of contemporary American religion and found that the proportion of Americans who claim no affiliation has increased dramatically: but again, this is not matched by a decline in religious belief. Significantly, Chaves also discovered that religious service participation is declining across the US and that the number of individuals surveyed who report never having attended church is also increasing. For sociology of religion scholars, this presents a problem of attempting to quantify what cannot be quantified.

The issue presently facing scholars is how to adequately measure the success of religious organizations at maintaining their vitality when participation numbers alone do not provide an adequate explanation of this success since they cannot accurately account for religious belief. But this issue is not insurmountable, and in the present study I suggest an alternate strategy: as many evangelical churches exist as private owner-operator businesses, their financial and membership records are not publicly accessible. Because of these privacy concerns, I am unable to make claims from my study as to the vitality (or the theological worldview) of the four churches where I conducted field work (UNION, City Life, Ecclesia, and Brazos Fellowship). Nor am I able to make substantive claims regarding the percentage of congregants who identify as religious unaffiliated and who may simply be visiting churches as a casual religious consumer.

However, I believe that defining religious vitality as a strength in belief or in terms of church population numbers is less important than defining it purely in terms of mass individuals attending a religious service consistently. For example, each of the four churches I visited appear to have relatively stable weekend audience numbers; I

observed that each sees several hundred attendees spread out amongst their three scheduled Sunday services on a consistent week-to-week basis. Because of this stability (or at least the appearance of stability), I believe it is cogent to argue that religious vitality can be quantified in terms of raw masses of church visitors, regardless of their religious beliefs, identities, or long-term participation.

Unlike Chaves, Gorski, or Hout and Fischer, I posit that mass individuals are relatively interchangeable and that as long as a church is able to maintain a consistent weekend visitor base, that alone should suffice as a measure of religious vitality, even if it means bypassing or in some cases overlooking certain more theoretical questions of the sociology of religion raised by scholars. Given that the present study views contemporary evangelical churches from the perspective of a mass consumer product, then viewing church attendees from the same vantage point will suffice as a warranted assertion.

Religious Unaffiliated or Religious 'Nones'

As the religious landscape in the US continues to change, increasing numbers of mass individuals report having no religious affiliation. Scholars believe that this rise in religious 'nones' is a significant factor in the declining Christian share of the population. Hout and Fischer (2002, 2014) argue there are two reasons behind the rise in religious nones: generational decline and a rising political backlash against the religious right, resulting in a disaffiliation with organized religion. Using a multi-variate statistical analysis of longitudinal survey data from the GSS, which polls Americans on a number of political and social issues, Hout and Fischer discovered that the number of citizens

who report an identification with organized religion declined by 20% points in the past 25 years, compared to 7% in 1987.

Significantly, however, Hout and Fischer also discovered that religious belief had not substantially declined during this period and contrary to popular opinion, was instead holding steady. The relative stability of religious belief among growing numbers of religious unaffiliated calls into question the secularization thesis, which argues that as society modernizes, an overall decline in both organized religion and religious belief will occur. Referencing the phenomenon of increased disaffiliated yet stability of belief, Hout and Fischer argue that if secularization were indeed occurring, then the decline in religious identification would be met by an equally significant decline in religious belief.

Contrary to this logic, however, religious belief remained relatively unchanged during the years indicated by GSS survey data and has continued to do so in the years since Hout and Fischer's revelation of the socio-political reasons behind the rise in religious 'nones' (Chaves, 2017). Data also indicate that the growing share of the population reporting no religious affiliation is most prominently reported by those individuals with liberal political views and already loose religious affiliations, giving way to the hypothesis that a generational decline is a likely factor in the growth of the religious unaffiliated. However, both Hout and Fischer (2002, 2014) and Chaves (2017), believe that generational decline only partly explains the rise in religious disaffiliation among religious believers.

Rather than attribute the rise in religious disaffiliation to a growing dissatisfaction with religious belief or the inevitable generational decline brought upon

by increased autonomy of the offspring of baby boomers, however, Hout and Fischer (2002, 2014) and Chaves (2017) argue instead that this rise indicates a growing dissatisfaction with the political agendas of churches which alienate those with already tentative religious affiliation. This is seen in a similar study by the Pew Institute (2018), which polled a representative sample of religious nones and discovered a surprising heterogeneity of belief among the religious unaffiliated: while the reasons given by atheists for their lack of affiliation was a lack of belief, among those who do report a religious belief, their reasons include questioning church teachings, not liking religious leaders, and disliking the position that churches take on certain political issues (Why America's 'Nones' Don't Identify with a Religion, Pew Research, 2018).

These politically infused responses by the religious unaffiliated in the US support the hypothesis that a growing backlash to Conservative-Christian politics is behind the rise in the religious unaffiliated as well as why a large number of religious nones retain their faith, even with their lack of participation in religious services. Both the Pew and Hout and Fischer studies round out their discussions by suggesting that if religious organizations wish to reach these growing numbers of religious unaffiliated and maintain their participation in church, they must learn to diversify their message and move beyond the abject sexual and social politics that alienate religious liberals in the US.

However, since my study focuses on how evangelicals orchestrate media to persuade mass individuals to align themselves with Christian propaganda and not the heterogeneity of belief of these individuals, entertaining the various sociological reasons behind the rise in America's religious unaffiliated is outside the scope of the present

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discussion (although it may make for an interesting future study of the current state of evangelicals in the US). But within the scope of the present study is how sociologists evaluate theories of religious plurality and vitality and how one is more relevant to this study than the others.

Competing Theories of Religious Vitality

Sheltered Enclave Theory

The first theory of religious vitality to warrant consideration is the sheltered enclave theory. Developed in part by James Davison Hunter (1983) and Peter Berger (1990), sheltered enclave theory views religion as a relatively cohesive moral order that is socially and culturally distinct from the varied moral orders of non-believers. Religion, therefore, exists as a "sacred canopy" in a changing world that shields believers from the more corrosive effects of modernism. Pragmatically speaking, the strongest religions are the ones whose traditions and moral order offer the stability, meaning, and significance to make adhering to their worldview worthwhile for followers (Smith, 1998).

However, the notion of a sacred canopy or umbrella is a social construct and as such, is at risk from outside influence. According to Hunter (1983), of particular concern to religious organizations are many of the social forces that accompany modernism: functional rationality, cultural and structural pluralism, and perhaps most importantly, mass media. This emphasis on mass media as a particularly corrosive threat to the sacred umbrella of religiosity is owing to the fact that media presents the most easily accessible alternative world views and moral order for Christians and can easily be taken as gospel

by the uninformed or the uninitiated (Smith, 1998). This then begs the question of how, in a modern media society, evangelicals are able to prosper. Hunter (1983) argues that the answer to this is rooted in evangelical demographics: specifically, how this demographic is predominantly rural, older, less educated, and with relatively low incomes. These factors, it is argued, serve to insulate, and inoculate evangelicals from the threatening attributes of modernity, even if these attributes are gradually chipping away at their sacred canopy of protectiveness (Smith, 1998, p. 69).

A significant issue with the sacred canopy, however, is that it assumes American evangelicals are a comparatively un-modern demographic, which protects them from the social and cultural threats of modernism and the immorality of media. But as the present study's data indicates, the evangelical demographic is in fact the opposite: predominantly urban, educated, in a relatively high-income bracket, and consumes media at a significant rate (Sharing Religious Faith Online, Pew Research, 2014). For this reason, while the sacred canopy theory does well to explain how the moral and social order of religion can insulate religious communities from the perceived sins of modernity, it arguably overemphasizes the influence of demographics. While this will become clear with data presented in Chapter Four, aspects of the theory that overemphasize the role of demographics in maintaining evangelical market share make it somewhat unsuitable for this study.

Status Discontent Theory

In comparison with the protective sacred canopy approach, status discontent theory focuses on the social status of religious groups within larger society and why

some groups decline in status while others do not. Originally developed to understand the rise of right-wing extremism in contemporary American politics, status discontent theory argues that a decline in traditional Conservative Protestant values, real or perceived, fosters a mobilization of these values and consequently, a resurgence in their popularity in select groups (Smith, 1998). For proponents of this theory, the relative stability and vitality of evangelicals is explained in how these groups perceive a decline in their social status and counteract this decline with increased public presence through social and political activism (Lorentzen, 1980; Wald et al., 1989).

This theory may explain why the public presence of evangelicals, predominantly seen in their online and social media presence, is a defining factor in their socio-cultural religious identity. However, the theory is not without its drawbacks, predominantly in the assumption that religious groups which do not perceive a threat in status decline will remain static or become otherwise complacent (Smith, 1998). As the present study will demonstrate, evangelical leadership is less concerned with perceived status decline than it is with reaching the largest possible audience with its messaging. This lack of complacence means the theory also lacks applicability.

Strictness Theory

While status discontent theory is concerned with how threats to religious vitality are reified through the increased mobilization of religious organizations, strictness theory argues that religions requiring a deep commitment from adherents tend to thrive in a modernist society while those that are more lenient do not (Kelley, 1986). This view of deep commitment to and belief in the moral order of a religious organization is

historically shared with the Christian fundamentalist movement and may help to explain why the Social Gospel and liberal Christianity fell by the wayside during the early 20th century. Given that religions are involved in the spiritual meaning-making business, meaning is produced when religions demand that their adherents respond to their worldview and commit their time, energy, reputations, and ultimately their very selves to a cause greater than themselves (Smith, 1998, p. 71). As with the sacred enclave or umbrella theory, strictness theory sees religious belief as providing a protective barrier from modernity, with the caveat that full participation and commitment to this belief through strictness correlates with increased vitality.

Evangelicals, however, do not generally fit this description. In fact the very organizational structure of evangelical communities is purpose-built to actually reduce the level of strictness that more fundamentalist communities require of their members (Smith, 1998). Thus, while evangelical organizations do typically require a high level of commitment by community members, these commitments are far more group-cohesion oriented than theologically restrictive. This is a significant weakness of the theory that some scholars have seen fit to rectify. Notably, Lawrence Iannaccone (1994) argues that religions thrive in a modernist society not by promoting strictness but by filtering out 'free-riders' who prefer to enjoy the benefits of being part of a larger community without contributing to any of the aforementioned meaning-making offers.

This move to cull free riders from the ranks, Iannaccone argues, is typical of evangelicals who, while not being fundamentalist in theological outlook or world view, nevertheless require a high degree of commitment from their members. When this commitment is repeated by large numbers, it fosters stable community operation and increased religious vitality. In this sense, strictness theory explains something of the decline in mainline denominations, for when these denominations no longer provide the necessary collective benefits to warrant deep commitment, their vitality decreases, and community members gradually remove themselves. The perceived lack of relevance of mainline religions to congregants becomes a "downwardly spiraling atmosphere of apathy," which furthers a decline in public visibility and ultimately, religious vitality through lack of interest (Smith, 1998, p. 72).

Competitive Marketing

When discussing theories of religious vitality, it is pertinent to emphasize that all religions in America operate within a free-market capitalist society. This free society emphasizes the virtue of the individual and the non-interference in religious matters by government. Accordingly, proponents of competitive marketing theory argue that the lack of government-led restrictions in a free society leads to increased religious vitality through religious pluralism or choice, and that this occurs for two reasons (Smith, 1998). First is the fact that in this free society, some religions thrive while others do not, and this can be measured through surveys and other quantitative methods. Given the lack of restrictions in society, then, what explains the vitality of some religious groups and the decline of others?

Scholars argue that the answer is consumer choice or the availability of religious options as a defining feature of a free-market economy (Smith, 1998). Simply put, individuals in a society that does not hinder religion or religious access are able to pick and choose freely from a variety of religions. However, the notion of freedom of religious choice still does not fully explain why, in a free society, mainline religious organizations are declining much more rapidly than their evangelical counterparts when such organizations offer considerable benefits for congregants: most notable of which is a deep historical tradition (Astley & Francis, 2013).

The second salient feature of competitive marketing theory in the context of religious vitality is the capitalist, entrepreneurial spirit of free-market religious activists (Finke & Stark, 2005). Sociologists argue that this spirit is more commonly found among evangelicals, which partly explains their relative stability compared to mainline religious organizations. Smith (1998), for example, argues that the superior organizational structures of evangelical organizations that stress fluidity and reactivity to changing social conditions through sales representatives (religious leaders), products (religious messaging), and marketing techniques (evangelist outreach) are more competitive in a free market and therefore more appealing to the religious consumer (p. 73).

As Finke and Stark (2005) note, the independent organizational structure of evangelical churches tends to promote entrepreneurial leaders who, unburdened by denominational ties, are free to incorporate a wide variety of religious traditions into their structures to appeal to a wide-ranging audience. As data from the present study

indicates, this is apparent in both the organizational structure and liturgical presentations of the field sites, each of which uses a wide variety of religious traditions to appeal to the religious consumer.

Thus, the relative stability and success of evangelicals in the US compared to mainline organizations can be seen as a product of both religious consumer choice and a reflexive organizational structure headed by entrepreneurial leaders who are able to market these organizations successfully, often through innovative techniques that frequently include consumer-entertainment media (Smith, 1998). In comparison to theories involving sheltered enclaves, status discontent, and organizational strictness, a competitive marketing approach to religious vitality emphasizes the influence of a free-market economy that is welcomed by religious leaders rather than shunned.

Evaluating Theories of Religious Vitality: The (Absent) Influence of Technology

In discussing the decline in religious vitality in American Christians and the relative stability of evangelicals and comparison to their more mainline counterparts, each of the four theories described has merit; however, none adequately explains the evangelical proclivity toward using technology to reclaim plurality and vitality. For example, sheltered enclave theory emphasizes the protective role of religious organizations in shielding their adherents from the more corrosive effects of modernity. Protecting adherents from these effects, the theory argues, saves them from a life of sin and ruin. However, contemporary demographic information on American evangelicals shows that evangelicals are actually more exposed to the damaging effects of modernity than other religious adherents, exemplified in their heavy use of entertainment and

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consumer media (Schultze & Woods, 2008). For example, evangelical demographic data indicates that evangelicals are comparatively more educated and have higher wages and therefore higher amounts of disposable income than other religious demographics (America's Changing Religious Landscape, Pew Research, 2015). Evangelicals are also typically urbanite and embrace aspects of popular culture such as consumer entertainment media (Woods, 2013). For this reason, while sheltered enclave theory demonstrates, in part at least, the collective strength through unity of religious communities in a changing world, it fails to explain the relative strength of evangelicals, given their proclivity to embrace what adherents of sheltered enclave theory see as the more problematic aspects of modernity: consumer culture and media.

Status discontent theory emphasizes that threats to the social status and vitality of religious organizations cause these organizations to close ranks and fortify their conservative world views by buttressing them against the dangers of modernity, including the damaging effects of new media and new media culture. But while this notion of strategic withdrawal as a protective strategy does apply to political extremists and religious fundamentalists, it does not support the relatively open and engaged worldview of evangelicals, who tend to see the world outside of churches as corrupt and damaging but not necessarily a dire threat to their future (Smith, 1998).

As with critiques of the sheltered enclave theory, demographic data indicates that evangelicals are in fact more likely to embrace the modern world and use it to their advantage rather than retreating from it: demonstrating that unlike Christian fundamentalists, they typically do not feel threatened by, or at odds with, the changing

world around them due to their relatively tolerant mindset (Woodberry & Smith, 1998).

As well, given that evangelical church culture typically embraces new media, this too is

 perhaps an indication that they do not perceive a threat to their status in society, even

though this still does not explain their proclivity toward media use (Woods, 2013).

Strictness theory argues that religions requiring a deep commitment to the

community at large and to their faith tend to be more prosperous, while those with a

more lackadaisical approach do not. There is considerable merit to this theory, and

something of the evangelical stability in contemporary society speaks to this; however, it

also does not adequately explain the widespread use of new media in worship by

evangelicals. Granted, evangelical leaders have known for decades that in order to do

good in the world, they must go forth and interact with it and that doing so involves

understanding a changing world landscape rather than building walls against it (Smith,

1998).

Regarding the influence of new media technologies on religious organizations,

strictness theory may indicate that adopting media into evangelical structures speaks to a

desire to interact with the modern world and its digitally mediated consumer culture.

And yet, aspects of this culture are well known to be problematic for religious

communities, significantly in the use of entertainment media in liturgy, a method of

church operation which evangelicals have overwhelmingly embraced (Phillips, 2012;

Richardson & Pardun, 2015). Paradoxically then, strictness theory indicates that the high

degree of commitment to the community, a requirement of evangelicals, produces

religious vitality. Yet the ready embrace of technologies deemed problematic also puts

them at risk of losing this vitality. Because of this unresolved paradox, strictness theory is also somewhat problematic to the study at hand.

Of the four theories of religious vitality discussed in this chapter, competitive marketing theory is the most suitable to this study. For example, evangelical churches predominantly operate as non-denominational organizations independent from the oversight and rigidity of denominations and diocese: an operational aspect not shared by their mainline counterparts. Similarly, the freedom of religious expression that is a hallmark of American socio-political identity produces a relatively unencumbered religious consumer landscape in which entrepreneurial evangelical leaders are free to market their religious 'product' to consumers in a free market. This freedom of operation gives evangelicals a significant advantage over their mainline counterparts that sociologists such as Finke and Stark (2005) believes directly explains their religious vitality.

As with the other three theories of religious vitality, however, competitive marketing theory does not adequately explain why evangelicals are more likely to incorporate new media technologies into their structures and use these technologies for mission-work, outreach, and the proselytization of new members when media has proven to be so damaging to the Christian moral order (Horsfield et al., 2004). Simply put, the free market conditions of the consumer religious landscape give evangelicals the option to use these technologies, but these conditions do not explain why they do so. Competitive marketing theory also does not explain why evangelical media use fosters religious vitality at a level not shared with other religious groups. I argue, however, that

this issue is resolved by examining the structures and imperatives of contemporary technological society, which forces a number of socio-technical constraints on religious organizations, causing them to reflexively orient themselves to these constraints and work within them to effectively conduct mission work. But while not all religious organizations conduct mission work, evangelicals typically do, and the manner in which they go about doing this is highly contingent on the features and constraints of the technological society they inhabit.

The Technological (Religious) Society

The complex landscape of modernity has led to a number of social constraints for the individual. Accordingly, these constraints inhibit the ability of the individual to prosper in a free-market society that emphasizes the virtue of success and equates failure with a lack of virtue. It is notable, therefore, that religious organizations also exist within this landscape and that they too face similar social constraints that threaten their public visibility and therefore their vitality. This is because the strength or influence of religious organizations is contingent on their ability to deliver mass audiences to salvation, either through outright conversion or, alternatively, by conducting outreach or mission work. However, their ability to conduct these tasks effectively is arguably dependent on the capacity of these organizations to adapt to changing social and economic conditions (Moberg, 2017). For this reason, organizations that do not adapt are more likely to suffer a decline in vitality as members choose to leave the church or outright ignore it (Finke & Stark, 2005).

The ability to adapt to changing social conditions in a free market is therefore the basis of the economics of religious organizations. For those that operate independently of any overseeing governing body or denomination, their very survival rests on their ability to market themselves to new members to facilitate community involvement and ultimately, conversion through evangelization and mission work. This ability is especially prevalent among evangelical organizations who typically operate as independent, non-denominational enterprises and face these social and economic constraints unaided. And while such constraints are also faced by mainline denominations, the collective structure of these churches breeds a level of financial security and stability not shared by their evangelical counterparts (Evangelical Pastor Study: National Association of Evangelicals, 2015).

This stability, some scholars argue, is contingent on whether or not religious organizations are deemed useful or not in public discourse (Hjelm, 2014). This is because religious organizations that the public does not deem useful are unlikely to attract new members and therefore unlikely to remain financially stable; this in turn causes a decrease in religious vitality. Therefore, it is it is paramount that independent religious organizations foster and maintain a positive public visibility. The various methods employed these organizations to maintain this visibility, and therefore their vitality, is the subject of many studies, including the present. However, overlooked in scholarship until now is how the complexities of a technological society decrease the agency of individuals, foster their isolation, and hinder not only the ability of religious

organizations to reach these individuals through mission work but ultimately, to solicit or proselytize their community involvement through exposure to religious messaging.

Social Conditions of Modernity and Individual Apathy

The complex social conditions of modernity—including mass industrialization, displacement, wage disparity, scientism, and the rise of secularism—place considerable pressure on the individual who wishes to navigate this world and prosper within it. For churches, this pressure exerts itself through a decline in religious vitality as increasing numbers of disaffiliated individuals with already tenuous connections to organized religion decrease their involvement in religious community (Hout & Fischer, 2002, 2014). For Bellah et al. (2008), a significant factor in this decline is the decreased ability of the individual to climb the proverbial social ladder due to what they deem as ambiguities of modernism.

These ambiguities are rooted in a Protestant-capitalist work ethic that defines contemporary American culture and equates individual success and virtue with hard work, personal initiative, and competence while attributing a failure to attain this success to a perceived lack of these qualities (Weber, 2013). Paradoxically, however, the very structures emphasizing this success also increasingly place it beyond the reach of the individual which, in many cases, inhibits their ability to transcend their social situation by improving their lot in life (Bellah et al., 2008).

Accordingly, when individual efforts to attain a desired level of success promised to them as a reward for their fortitude by this Protestant-capitalist work ethic are met with a failure to improve one's social stature by 'climbing upward,' ambiguities and

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confusion tend to result. When this occurs, frustration and apathy are reified through a withdrawal of the individual from civic society, ultimately leading to isolation from and apathy toward organized civic society (Bellah et al., 2008). The significance of this to the study at hand is that isolation and feelings of apathy, which Bellah et al. see as part and parcel of modernity, also extend to a withdrawal from participation in organized religion, leading in turn to a decrease in religious vitality. For example, Bellah et al. (2008) argue that in addition to required hard work, personal initiative, and competence on the part of the individual, the successful navigation of this world also requires a high degree of social and technical knowledge. However, this is often not attainable through personal initiative alone and therefore requires a commitment to organized, civic society through community participation or the forming of habits of the heart. In addition, Bellah et al. (2008) argue that the presence of a Protestant-capitalist work ethic tends to motivate an individual's desire to prosper by their personal initiative alone. However, when personal initiative results in an inability to 'climb the social ladder,' as the American mythos promises the individual as a reward for their hard work, initiative, and competence, the net result is feelings of frustration, bewilderment, and confusion. When this occurs, Bellah et al. (2008) argue, these feelings become magnified and culminate in an apathetic withdrawal from participation in civic society and a decline in "habits of the heart."

For organized civic communities such as religious organizations, this withdrawal is particularly acute because it translates into a lack of interest in the very communities that have historically promised individual peace and salvation through their communal

involvement in a greater good as individuals. I argue that this also results in a decline in religious vitality because a lack of interest in participating in civic communities inevitably translates into a lack of participation. In the case of organized religion, a decline in participation is equated with a lack of tithing; this diminishes the ability of these organizations to effectively conduct outreach or mission work and effect social change by constraining the agency of the organization.

While not all religious organizations conduct mission work, many Christian organizations are oriented toward spiritual outreach of some kind, typically through the evangelization or recruitment of new members. Therefore, these constraints are keenly felt by evangelical religious organizations which, in accordance with competitive marketing theory, tend to present themselves to potential new followers as being modern, up to date, and above all, relevant (Casidy, 2013; Daniel, 1983).

However, it is not only the complex social conditions of modernity that combine to create an unfavorable situation for religious organizations. Of equal importance to the study at hand are the technological conditions which are the impetus for their complex, often ambiguous social counterparts. Regarding religious vitality, the technique of these conditions diminishes the agency of the individual, inhibiting their ability to use free will to exist in what Jacques Ellul (1912–1994) believes is man's natural state of being: with God. When combined with the widespread apathy characterizing the social conditions of modernity, the result is the previously described withdrawal and isolation from civic societies, leading to a decline in religious vitality.

Technique and the Isolation of the Individual

The complex social conditions of modernity characterized by a rise in increasingly isolated and socially withdrawn individuals are especially poignant when considering that the rise of religious 'nones' runs in parallel with it. This is because while Bellah et al.'s (2008) theory of discontent is valuable in articulating how the complexities of this society foster ambiguity and apathy in the individual, the theory does not adequately explain what these complexities are, other than simply attributing them to symptoms of modernism resulting in a withdrawal from participation in civic society. While Bellah et al. are likely accurate in their observation that the mythic virtues of individualism fostered by a Protestant-capitalist work ethic in contemporary society are increasingly being met with failure to attain success through prosperity, they are unable to provide an explanation for the role of technology in instigating these complexities. This is significant, for these very technologies give rise to the complexities that inhibit the ability of the virtuous individual to prosper accordingly.

The work of Jacques Ellul, however, does provide such an explanation. Specifically, Ellul's (1964) conceptualization of what he labels technique as a hallmark of a technological society provides the missing link to Bellah et al.'s (2008) sociological argument that modernism breeds individual discontent and a withdrawal from civic society. Paradoxically, however, while this withdrawal occurs alongside of declining religious vitality through a widespread withdrawal from participation in civic society, it is the evangelicals who have stemmed this decline to a remarkable degree by orienting themselves to the very thing which arguably caused their decline in the first place:

technology. This is because, as Ellul (1973) argues, although technology isolates the individual from civic society, it can also bring them back.

 Before deconstructing the nuances of Ellul's conceptualization of a technological society and the role of technology in both isolating and reaching the individual, I will first explicate his theory of technique. Originally written in French, Ellul's explication of the term technique can be roughly translated and defined as "the totality of methods rationally arrived at and having absolute efficiency (for a given stage of development) in every field of human activity" (Ellul, 1964, p. xxv). This is to say that society has developed to such a degree—as have the technologies within it—that every aspect proceeds with machine-like efficiency, giving rise to what Ellul deems a technological society. For Ellul, contemporary (mass) society is ruled by technique and humans have, over time, adapted to it; as a result, every facet of human activity also proceeds along with machine-like efficiency. Referencing the machine-like efficiencies of a technological society, Fasching (1981) points out that Ellul is deliberately vague in his use of the term efficiency and that he never provides a concrete definition of the term, other than giving the open-ended criterion of "one best means" (p. 175).

But while vague, Ellul's description of efficiency as one best means is suited to the present study, for the vagaries of Ellul's use of the term allow it to be extended to a limitless number of scenarios, tasks, and contexts. Fasching (1981) supports this notion, arguing that "if one takes efficiency to entail the achieving of maximum output with a minimum of time, energy, and cost" then it becomes clear that efficiency as "one best means" is simply the acknowledgement of fixed resources, whatever these resources

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may be, as well as the careful expenditure of these resources to attain a desired end, whatever and wherever that end may be (p. 175).

In formulating his view of technology as an instigator for social change, however, Ellul (1964) is careful to note that the efficiencies of technique are not limited solely to the realm of technology. Rather, Ellul believes that technique has developed to such a degree that it now exists quite apart from technology, and its pervasiveness is felt in every aspect and activity in human life. In this sense technique is both rational and artificial: absolute efficiency is rational and at the same time wholly artificial. It subjugates the individual in an inexorable push for absolute efficiency, destroying their nature and the very thing that makes them human: their capacity to perceive God and progress as He intends for them.

For Ellul, then, removing humans from their natural state of being and subsuming them to the inhuman efficiencies of technique inevitably results in diminished agency as humans are no longer able to utilize free will to choose the righteous path laid out for them by God in His Divine Plan. In this sense, technology is both the savior of humanity and its harbinger of destruction. It has brought forth mankind from a pitiful existence in pre-industrial times and raised their standard of living to untold degrees but has also brought forth technique. Technique has therefore become the driving force of human socio-technical development in mass society, but for Ellul, its omnipresence has come at the cost of mankind's relationship with God.

The Technique of Propaganda

In addition to destroying mankind's relationship with God, the technique of mass society also produces feelings of isolation and apathy in mass individuals which, as Bellah et al. (2008) note, only heightens their desire to withdraw from civic society and isolate themselves from the world. More importantly, however, this withdrawal places religious organizations in an unfavorable situation whereby their stated goal of evangelization is made all the more difficult: they must now attempt to reach individuals who are not only withdrawn and isolated but also increasingly apathetic toward organized religion as they feel its value has been diminished through the brutal efficiencies of technique (Bellah et al., 2008). Technique has therefore put religious organizations at a crossroads. For Ellul (1964), a further consequence of the pervasive power of technique is that it dictates the efficient dissemination of information in brief, easily consumable snippets or bites as to not so do would not be efficient in a technological society.

However, the efficient dissemination of information to mass audiences arguably runs counter to Christian theology, which prioritizes the pious contemplation of scripture over time. Referencing this in a later work titled Propaganda: The Formation of Men's Attitudes, Ellul (1964) equates the efficient transmission of information in society with the transmission of what he terms 'propaganda. For Ellul, harnessing the power of information is the key to social control, for information has the potential to alter public opinion. But information alone is often not enough to galvanize the masses to adopt a perspective and worldview that is not their own. For this, Ellul argues that we must rely on orchestrated propaganda as a tool of mass persuasion. But what is propaganda? How

does one define it and more importantly, how does one evaluate its ethical and psychological effectiveness?

To its supporters, propaganda is a weapon to be wielded before mass audiences as a method of social and psychological control. To its detractors, the presence of propaganda in a democratic society heralds the breakdown of the democratic process and the loss of individuality of the masses. In this dissertation, I draw upon the work of three scholars in the school of mass persuasion and propaganda to formulate a concrete definition of propaganda suitable for the study at hand: Garth Jowett & Victoria O'Donnell (2011), Anthony Pratkanis and Elliot Aronson (1992), and, significantly, Jacques Ellul (1964, 1972). But before I provide a detailed definition of propaganda, the term must be differentiated from persuasion; while the two are often viewed as synonymous, they are in fact substantively different and this difference is important to the present study.

Persuasion is, broadly speaking, an interactive form of communication that attempts to satisfy the needs of both the persuader and the individual or group of individuals being persuaded (Jowett & O'Donnell, 2011). In a religious context, a pastor as rhetor attempts to persuade a congregation that scripture provides the best option for moral and spiritual guidance when mass individuals are faced with commonly experienced and easily identifiable empirical situations. To persuade mass individuals to react to these situations in a specific way, however, the pastor may resort to propagandistic methods as a means to an end as part of his overall persuasive process.

This brings us to a suitable definition of propaganda that I borrow from Jowett and

O'Donnell (2011), who define the term as "the deliberate, systematic attempt to shape

perceptions, manipulate cognitions, and direct behavior to achieve a response that

furthers the desired intent of the propagandist" (p. 7).

Taking this definition into account, we see that the difference between persuasion

and propaganda is that propaganda is a functional tool or method for attaining

persuasion, one that involves a deliberate and systematic attempt on the part of the rhetor

(propagandist) to gain compliance with his or her worldview. According to Pratkanis and

Aronson (1992), propaganda also differs from mere persuasion in that it frequently

involves the strategic, coordinated, and orchestrated efforts of a number of actors and

technologies to persuade large numbers of mass individuals to adopt the worldview and

opinions of the propagandist.

Echoing both Jowett and O'Donnell (2011) and Pratkanis and Aronson's (1992)

definitions of propaganda, Chapters Four and Five show that evangelical persuasion

involves a number of propagandistic elements, including rhetoric and the orchestrated

use of media in support of this rhetoric. At the root of these elements, however, is a

singular principle: a purposive, strategic motivation on the part of evangelical pastors to

further their desired intent and gain compliance with their worldview. This brings us to

Jacques Ellul (1964, 1973) who, unlike Jowett and O'Donnell and Pratkanis and

Aronson, was less concerned with providing a definition of propaganda than he was with

giving a taxonomy of the pervasiveness of its effects.

Citing communication theorist Harold Lasswell (1927) who sees propaganda as "the expression of opinions or actions carried out deliberately by individuals or groups with a view to influencing the opinions or actions of other individuals or groups for predetermined ends and through psychological manipulations" (pp. xi-xii), Ellul (1973) argues that propaganda is an all-encompassing, inevitable function of a technological society that is oriented toward instigating mass action or activity on a sociological level. Significantly, Ellul sees propaganda as being highly influenced by technique in that propagandistic methods will inevitably be governed by the logical, pragmatic necessity of attaining the desired ends of the propagandist in the most efficient manner possible and with a minimum expenditure of available resources as "one best means" (Fasching, 1981).

But while Ellul's (1973) definition of propaganda is arguably cynical, his sociological understanding of it as a necessary, inevitable function and consequence of a technical society is highly relevant to the present study. The reason for this relevance is that Ellul sees propaganda as so pervasive in mass society that religious organizations have little choice but to align themselves with it and the totality of its methods in order to secure their futures. In fact, Ellul argues that in a technological society, religious organizations are faced with two choices when confronted with propaganda: to not make propaganda, in which case the mass media will mobilize the masses and leave churches on the fringes of society with no influence, or to actively align themselves with propaganda for the sake of their own survival, even at the risk of losing themselves as the spiritual center of organized society (p. 229).

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According to Ellul (1973), this choice is in actuality no choice at all as churches will inevitably align themselves with propaganda and use its techniques as a means to attain a desired end: their continued operation as spiritual organizations. Regarding this desired end we see also that effective propaganda, in both religious and non-religious contexts, hinges on action. In fact, Ellul argues that "only action is of concern to modern propaganda, for its aim is to precipitate an individual's action with maximum effectiveness and economy" (p. 25). Only action can facilitate the actual persuasion of mass individuals as they must actively align themselves with the specific worldview of rhetors as propagandists.

At the root of action, however, is speech and as all speech or rhetoric is persuasive, then persuasion must inevitably be oriented toward action as a means to an end. In the present study, this end is the active, strategic alignment of mass individuals with Christian values in order to facilitate their salvation via the mobilization or action of mass audiences. As discussed in Chapters Four and Five, action in propaganda is as synonymous with performance as it is with persuasion, for it includes the orchestrated manipulation of both physical and psychological states in mass audiences in order to satisfy the needs and motivations of pastors as rhetors.

Regarding the three scholars whose work I have delineated here and from which I will continue to draw throughout the present study, Jowett and O'Donnell's (2011) definition of propaganda builds upon Ellul's emphasis on action in propaganda as a means to an end, while concurrently I consider Pratkanis and Aronson's view of propaganda as involving the strategic, coordinated, and orchestrated efforts of a number

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of actors and technologies as a means to an end which furthers the desires of the propagandist. More importantly, both definitions of propaganda include a nod to Ellul's technique in that the strategic, coordinated, orchestrated efforts of actors and technologies to persuade large numbers of mass individuals to adopt the worldview and opinions of the propagandist speaks to some of the more performative aspects of propaganda, which Ellul sees as part and parcel of a much wider sociological push toward efficiency as an end in itself.

Referencing propaganda as a means to an end, Ellul (1973) argues that propaganda is so pervasive in mass society that it is present everywhere and in all things as part of the greater system which mass individuals inhabit. Significantly, religious organizations are one element within this system; as I previously described, their use of propaganda as a means to an end is less of a choice than a dire necessity. But what does religious propaganda look like? To understand this, we must look to how the performance of different propaganda styles is reflective of dominant cultures and their communicative preferences because all propaganda is tailored to the needs and preferences of various audiences.

Referencing the relationship between dominant cultures and communicative styles, Tex Sample (1998) argues that mass individuals who have grown up in this electronic age have been conditioned by the propaganda of the culture surrounding them to view the world in a particular manner. This statement is less original than it may seem at first glance, for McLuhan (1964) makes a similar argument in his treatise on medium theory, but the sentiment is nevertheless the same: the communicative preferences of

mass audiences are a function of the propaganda styles of mass society. Alluding to McLuhan's work, Sample (1998) argues that many religious organizations often fail to recognize that people are conditioned by the propaganda of the culture around them and lose the interest and attention of religious mass audiences as a result. However, Sample (1998) does suggest a viable and workable solution to this problem: religious organizations that make a concerted effort to cater their propaganda to the communicative preferences of mass audiences of the electronic age will regain the attention, interest, and most importantly the trust of these audiences, while those that do not will find themselves slipping into irrelevancy.

Basing his solution in the performative, electronically mediated aspects of popular culture, Sample (1998) argues for the integrated visual, aural, and kinesthetic presentation of religious materials as performative ritual. In a visual sense, Sample (1998) believes that churches must cater to the desire of contemporary mass audiences toward spectacle and reproduce the mosaics of words and images that invoke feeling in mass audiences. For students of popular culture, reproducing this mosaic is most efficiently and successfully accomplished with the high-definition, visual presentation of religious material rather than the unsupported, naked recitation of scripture.

With sound, conversely, Sample (1998) argues that the relationship of mass audiences to the aural world is affected by the technological developments and practices associated with them; mass audiences born in and growing up in the electronic age have been conditioned to expect the presentation of information in a manner reflective of these developments. As with the visual presentation of religious material, churches that

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learn to integrate both secular and Christian music into their liturgy will be more adept at resonating their message with younger audiences.

Finally, in the kinesthetic realm, Sample (1998) echoes McLuhan (1964) in arguing that the combination of sound as beat and image as mosaic produces a highly kinesthetic, retribalized style of communication that encodes the electronic generation, helping them to find meaning through experience rather than truth. When churches learn to recognize this generational difference in congregants and integrate sound, image, and body into a performative mosaic of feeling in their liturgy or order of service, they fulfill their God-given mission of providing salvation through grace, one lost soul at a time. While Sample does not explicitly use the term propaganda in his work, his emphasis on spectacle in worship is nevertheless akin to using the performance of orchestrated propaganda to induce action in mass audiences as a means to an end.

Echoing Sample's (1998) concerns about the message of churches failing to resonate in contemporary mass audiences, Heather Hendershot (2004) looked at evangelical media culture with the explicit assumption that these media in their various forms and guises are specifically designed to provide something of spiritual value to believers in order to resonate with them. While she does not go so far as to label evangelical media as outright propaganda, Hendershot nevertheless argues that those who consume Christian (evangelical) media do so to safeguard against the contaminating effects of secular culture. For Hendershot (and Sample), whether Christian media takes the form of live or recorded music, films, or faith-based self-help books, the success of these media at catering to the fears, concerns, and desires of the religious consumer

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speaks to their value as delivery vehicles for the Christian message: a message of salvation provided of course that consumers align themselves with the core beliefs and tenets of this message. But both Sample and Hendershot warn that in their rush to market themselves to the religious consumer, evangelicals risk losing touch with the essence of these beliefs by watering them down for mass consumption.

Taken together, each of these examples and definitions demonstrates the connection between technique and propaganda to no small degree. In contemporary society, technique exists as an all-encompassing state of socio-technical existence to which all individuals in a society must conform, even at the cost of their own agency and free will to commune with God. In order for this to occur, however, individuals must be proselytized by the powers that be so that they conform to technique and its machine-like efficiencies. For Ellul (1973), the fact that this inevitably results in their isolation is all the more beneficial, for propaganda is at its most efficient when directed toward the isolated individual.

This, however, creates an untenable position for religious organizations seeking to evangelize the masses. Do they choose to adopt propaganda and tailor their evangelistic techniques to a technological society and the brief, easily consumable snippets of information that are a hallmark of modern society? Or do they choose not to adopt propaganda and continue to disseminate and interpret scripture using outdated, inefficient methods that technique has long since relegated to history? For Ellul (1973), when faced with this situation churches have but two options: to not make propaganda—in which case the mass media will mobilize large numbers of religiously disaffiliated

individuals and conform them to the rational efficiencies of technique after which

churches will gain the reputation of being out of touch and lose their vitality; or to make

propaganda and in adapting themselves entirely to its conforming totality, risk losing

their spirituality to the false-idol of technique (p. 231). This untenable choice was

alluded to by both Sample (1998) and Hendershot (2004), who express concerns that in

aligning themselves with the techniques and trappings of mass consumer culture,

churches risk opening themselves up to criticism of watering down the Gospel in favor

of mass consumption.

Risk aside, however, Ellul (1973) argues when faced with this situation, churches

will inevitably choose to make propaganda and continue their work of evangelism, even

if it means sacrificing their agency and therefore their core beliefs to technique by

altering their message for mass consumption. Making this inevitable choice is by no

means unique to evangelicals, for while the operationalization of most Christian

organizations bears at least some of the hallmarks of technique, it is evangelicals who

have reflexively oriented themselves to technique to the greatest degree. In relation to

the present study, this is seen in how both the orchestrated performance of evangelical

propaganda and the design of their churches is defined by a seamless integration of

various digital technologies into both their structure and their operationalization in order

to make the dissemination of Christian rhetoric more efficient.

As will be detailed in Chapter Five, many of technologies are of the commercial,

off-the-shelf type specifically designed for entertainment purposes such as performances

occurring in bars, nightclubs, and concert halls. But does the orchestrated performance

of these technologies work in a religious context? What factors, both human and material, are involved in it? How is it evaluated by audiences and church staff? And finally, how can scholars analyze it? For this we must look to the scholarship of Marshall McLuhan and look closely at his conceptualization of 'hot' and 'cool' media.

Propaganda: Hot and Cool Media

In the previous sections of this chapter, I outlined the presence of technique as a symptom of a technological society wherein religious organizations, evangelical organizations specifically, use media and therefore propaganda to proselytize mass individuals through the efficient, performative dissemination of religious messaging (information). Significantly, it is these individuals who, as a result of the ambiguities of modernity and a Protestant-capitalist work ethic, are increasingly withdrawn and isolated from society and in the eyes of evangelicals, in dire need of saving. But while it is technique that dictates the evangelical approach to proselytizing these individuals through the orchestrated performance of religious propaganda, it is the work of Marshall McLuhan (1911–1980) that enables an understanding of its operationalization.

Specifically, McLuhan's differentiation between 'hot' and 'cool' media helps to explain how evangelical churches effectively use media to disseminate religious messaging to specific target demographics for facilitating proselytization and eventual conversion. As per the constraints of Ellul's technique, this strategic, media-supported propaganda has proven itself the most efficient and practical way to evangelize large groups of disaffected, often isolated individuals, thus giving rise to McLuhan's (1964)

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maxim 'the medium is the message' and his emphasis on form over content. Indeed, as McLuhan wrote in Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man: "[f]or the 'content' of a medium is like the juicy piece of meat carried by the burglar to distract the watchdog of the mind" indicating that our susceptibility to media is owing to the form it is delivered, rather than simply its content (p. 18). As McLuhan argues, however, this susceptibility is contingent on whether such media are 'hot' or 'cool' as the temperature of these media invokes different psychological and physiological responses in the individual, which in turn influences their ability to be persuaded by the content of these media.

McLuhan argues not only that media can be characterized as being 'hot' or 'cool,' but that this differentiation is responsible for the varied audience reactions to exposure to them. Hot media are relatively high in definition and require little cognitive involvement on the part of the receiver for the content of these media to be understood. Because of their high definition, hot media are particularly valuable in propaganda due to their ability to reach large masses of individuals with relative ease, disseminating their content in a powerful and persuasive manner, often affecting only one bodily sense.

Radio is perhaps the most stereotypical form of hot media whose persuasive power was explicated by Ellul (1973) in Propaganda because of its ability to invoke and reinforce ideas in the masses that are greater than the individual but nevertheless resonate with them. Indeed, the sinister reputation of radio as a tool of mass persuasion was earned in no small part by Reich Ministry of Propaganda Joseph Goebbels and other such notorious figures of inflammatory rhetoric (Rybicki, 2014). But it is not only

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fascistic organizations that utilize the persuasive power of radio, nor is radio always used for the dissemination of hateful rhetoric. Indeed, religious organizations have used the medium for decades for precisely the same reason: its ability to efficiently evangelize large groups of disaffected individuals. In earlier times, this was seen (or heard, rather) in such radio personalities as Sister Aimee Semple and Bishop Fulton Sheen; today this tradition continues with the use of multi-piece worship bands in churches to bookend services as well as contemporary Christian radio (Epstein, 1993; Reeves, 2002).

Whereas hot media are effective tools for the dissemination of propaganda due to their high definition and lack of cognitive involvement on the part of the individual, cool media are equally effective but for different reasons. According to McLuhan (1964), cool media are comparatively much lower in definition than hot media and require considerably more audience participation through cognitive involvement to facilitate an understanding of their content. Cool media also tend to affect multiple bodily senses simultaneously and to a lesser degree than their hot media counterparts (Strate, 2017). Naked speech is the ultimate cool media; in its unaltered, un-amplified form, interpreting it requires that the listener decipher such variables as volume, tone, cadence, body language, and the possibility of interference from environmental factors such as noise (McLuhan, 1964). It is for this reason the religious sermon delivered by a priest or pastor is such a potent tool in evangelization: the act of naked speech before an audience requires their attention and involvement to cognitively work through the content of this speech.

Television is also a comparatively cool medium when compared to radio.

Beginning in the middle years of the 20th century, evangelical preachers made considerable use of the coolness of the medium by combining strategic set design and props simulating sacred space with an expository style of preaching that fostered audience involvement (Denson, 2011; Ward, 2018). These efforts continue today with contemporary evangelical preachers who use specific set design in low-lit, cool environments to induce audience attention when delivering religious sermons. This strategic combination of hot and cool media gives evangelicals a decided advantage when disseminating religious messaging to an audience that is frequently uninformed and uninitiated. Hot media is therefore used to amplify the audio-visual and kinesthetic aspects of religious sermons and incite participation, while comparatively cooler media are used for the dissemination of religious messaging (scripture) during the sermon component of worship services.

This strategic orchestration of hot and cool media in a manner that transcends demographic differences gives rise to McLuhan's most famous contribution to media theory: the oft-misunderstood maxim 'the medium is the message'. With respect to this maxim, McLuhan (1964) refers to what he calls figure and ground, with figure being a particular media form and ground being the ecological environment it is imbedded in. McLuhan argues that if we wish to truly understand the socio-technical effects of a particular media form (figure) we must observe it in its natural context (ground). In this sense, the content of a media form is less important than its ecological impact.

In the case of hot media such as radio, regardless of whether a radio broadcasts religious or political propaganda, the fact that this medium is able to pinpoint and directly affect the individual as part of a large crowd is what is truly significant. Conversely, for cool media such as the solitary pastor speaking on stage before a congregation, McLuhan's maxim the medium is the message tells us that the active cognitive involvement required by congregants to understand the pastor's message is more important than whether he is reciting from the Book of John, Paul, or Luke.

But while useful to the study at hand, McLuhan's work is not without its criticisms, the most pertinent of which is that he overemphasizes form and underemphasizes content. In a religious context, this criticism is especially prevalent as it is the content or terms of order of religious propaganda (messaging) that induces evangelization rather than its form. Significantly, this evangelization would not occur if congregants were not first exposed to a message form or style that they find appealing. This is further contextualized via the rhetorical strategies of literary theorist Kenneth Burke.

The Rhetorical Form of Religious Persuasion as Propaganda

To better understand how religious persuasion occurs, it is important to consider the work of Kenneth Burke, specifically his conceptualization of identification and consubstantiality. For Burke (1966), all language (rhetoric) is persuasive and involves a positioning between a speaker and an audience. This audience can be a single individual or a group of disparate individuals gathered together as part of a loose-knit community. In a religious context, persuasion (evangelization) occurs when audience members are

positioned as congregants in relation to a pastor as rhetor. By virtue of their positioning, these audiences receive religious messaging disseminated from the pastor and come to identify (agree) with the content of this messaging; in so doing they alter their positioning so as to be in aligned with the worldview of the rhetor. Significantly, it is this identification that is so crucial in persuasion, for audiences that do not identify (agree) with a message are unlikely to be persuaded by it.

Burke (1966) notes, however, that audience identification with the content of a message, religious or otherwise, would not occur if the message were not presented to the audience in a form they are likely to find appealing. This notion relates to McLuhan's (1964) the medium is the message as well as Ellul's conceptualization of the efficiencies of technique and its impact on propaganda, in that form precedes content. But mere form is often not enough to induce identification. Indeed, form can anticipate identification but will not guarantee it; many empty messages are presented to audiences in an appealing form that fail to resonate with them (Burke, 1989). Be that as it may, what in fact will guarantee identification? What rhetorical strategies facilitate the symbiosis or identification between message form and message content in audiences, religious or otherwise?

Burke (1989) argues that it is attitude that induces identification with message content because it is attitude that determines receptivity and susceptibility to persuasion. Burke asserts that humans are symbol using animals and that language is merely a system of symbols with a set of values attached. Accordingly, the positioning of mass audiences in relation to these symbols determines their likely course of action in a

rhetorical situation. In this sense there is a grammar of motives to mass audiences

responses to persuasion, and this grammar is determined by how they identify with the

speaker's position in relation to theirs. Burke argues, for example, that when a rhetor

(speaker) makes an utterance, they are by default positioning themselves in relation to

the receiver or audience of this utterance.

Given that all speech is persuasive, the receiver of this utterance must respond to

the positioning of the rhetor by either agreeing (identifying) or disagreeing (not

identifying) with the terms of order or symbolic worldview of their utterance. When

audience attitudes are favorable toward a rhetor, they are more likely to favor the

rhetor's positioning and in so doing, be induced to identify with the terms of order of the

rhetoric. One way to increase the odds of positive attitudes in an audience is to present

the message in an appealing form, and evangelical organizations do this very effectively

by integrating consumer entertainment media into their rhetoric. However, an appealing

form is often not enough to guarantee that a persuasive message will resonate by

inducing identification. This raises the question of what is likely to determine whether

identification will occur and when it will not. In addition, given that audiences typically

comprise a disparate collection of individuals with very different attitudes, what

determines the likelihood of their agreement with one another?

For Burke (1989), the effective rhetor uses their positioning and rhetorical power

to induce audience identification through consubstantiality. In religious rhetoric, a pastor

speaking on stage serves as a persuader whose job is to amplify religious messaging

(propaganda) rooted in the dialectical worldview of scripture, which reduces universal

human experiences into terms of good versus evil. The overarching motivation or goal of pastoral rhetoric is therefore to persuade mass audiences to identify with this worldview and to consubstantiate or act together as one and in alignment with favorable or good patterns of lived experience.

Significantly, to aid in motivating mass audiences to accept the terms of order of this rhetoric and to alter their habits of behavior, pastors use their position of authority in relation to their audience to heighten their source credibility. Echoing Burke, Pratkanis and Aronson (1992) argue that positioning is a fundamental aspect of effective persuasion because source credibility increases the likelihood that persuasive speech will be believed by an audience. In a religious context, a pastor's source credibility is coupled with his ability to deliver a persuasive argument by disseminating scripture; in an evangelical context specifically, the persuasive effect of religious messaging is heightened by being presented in an appealing and entertaining form via the orchestration of various hot and cool media. Evangelical sermons are therefore strategically delivered to a disparate audiences of mass individuals to persuade them to identify with both the performative style of these sermons and the terms of order of their sacred covenant.

Together, the performance and rhetoric of evangelical sermons accomplish two distinct goals: first, evangelical pastors use the orchestrated performance of their rhetoric to induce identification among mass individuals and by extension their immediate group or congregation. According to Burke (1989), when individuals are made to identify with one another as being part of the same group, they are much easier to persuade.

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Identification through rhetoric, however, represents only half of the evangelical

persuasive process; the other involves leveraging group identity with group action.

According to Ellul (1973), the use of propaganda to align mass individuals together

induces a group mindset that for Burke (1973) leads to the second goal of effective

rhetoric: a consubstantiality or acting together. The phenomenon of consubstantiality is

best understood through the lens of shared patterns of experience or habits of behavior.

Burke (1989) argues that the overarching goal of rhetoric is to persuade mass audiences

to alter their patterns of behavior by creating new patterns that align with those desired

by the rhetor or propagandist. Evangelical pastors as propagandists are therefore

motivated to persuade mass individuals to align their patterns of behavior to match

desirable, Christ-like patterns of behavior as outlined in scripture.

However, Burke (1989) is not alone in arguing for rhetoric as being behavior-

oriented. Ellul (1973) also argues that the overarching goal of propaganda is to induce

action in mass audiences. But unlike Burke, Ellul sees action as motivated by technology

rather than rhetoric alone. In the context of evangelical propaganda, for example, we see

that effective persuasion requires the strategic use of various hot and cool media forms

in support of persuasive, action-oriented rhetoric. When these media forms are combined

in an orchestrated performance, they produce different psychological and physiological

effects in mass audiences that help induce identification and consubstantiality: ultimately

leading to salvation through altered patterns of experience.

Accordingly, the target audiences for this persuasive, propagandistic enterprise

are religious unaffiliated mass individuals who, due to the influence of technique, may

not be aware that they need Christ in their lives but, following exposure to evangelical rhetoric and propaganda, are persuaded to believe so. As with all forms of communication, however, effective persuasion is contingent on available resources, both human and material. But what do some of these constraints look like and more importantly, how do evangelicals work within them?

The Material and Human Constraints of Persuasion

Regardless of their theological orientation, the overarching goal of many religious organizations is the evangelization and salvation of mass individuals. But as with all organizations, their routine operation involves a number of material and human constraints. With mainline religious organizations, for example, churches are able to draw upon a variety of resources distributed through their denominations and between parishes. With evangelical organizations, however, churches predominantly operate as independent owner-operator organizations without the rigid oversight of denominational governing bodies (FitzGerald, 2018). These churches are therefore at the whim of the free market as they do not have the advantages of resource security frequently afforded to larger and more mainline churches. These resources include but are not limited to human, such as church staff and technicians; technical, such as audio-visual and computer equipment; informational, such as scripture; and monetary, used for the purchase and maintenance of equipment and the building in which it is housed. It must be emphasized, however, that the efficient use of these resources in the orchestrated performance or technique of religious propaganda is done solely in support of religious rhetoric.

As David Christensen (2020) points out, preaching is all about the message of Christ, and pastors must not forget this in their desire to persuade. Rhetorical tools, especially when supported by entertainment resources, must be moderated by Christian ethics, lest the persuasive preacher fall into the trap of sophistry. Successful religious propaganda, then, entails the expenditure of various material and human resources to align mass individuals with religious power and knowledge structures in the most efficient manner possible, while at the same time moderating this expenditure and efficiency with Christian ethics.

However, Christian ethics cannot make up for a budget or personnel shortage. For churches trying to adapt themselves to the confines of a technological society and the efficiencies of technique, the ability of these churches to evangelize by any means necessary is heavily dependent on their operating budgets. For instance, public data culled from financial self-reporting of religious organizations indicates that the annual operating budget for independent evangelical churches today is typically in the $100,000 range; of this, pastor and staff salaries must be taken into account and deducted before mission budgets can be created (Evangelical Pastor Study: National Association of Evangelicals, 2015). These financial considerations place considerable constraint on churches who must balance their overhead with their need to reach the religious disengaged and disaffiliated—the byproducts of technique in a technological society. In addition, the physical operation of these media by evangelicals frequently requires the use of paid professionals because of the complexity of their operation. This too

diminishes church operating budgets. While I tried but was ultimately unable to secure

copies of the financial and staffing records at Brazos Fellowship, UNION, City Life, and

Ecclesia, it is logical to assume that the routine operation of these churches week in and

week out represents a considerable expenditure.[1]

Because of these material and human constraints, I believe it is cogent to argue

that the need for churches to engage in propaganda to evangelize their target

demographics is constrained by 1) the equipment (media) they are able to purchase and

2) the cost of operate and staff it in the long term. More importantly, the need for

churches to engage in propaganda is also constrained by the ability of these media to do

their intended task as tools for the propagation and dissemination of strategic religious

messaging. In order for the orchestration and operationalization of this propaganda to

occur, however, churches must actually move through an organizational process of

adoption and adaptation. One method for understanding the intricacies of this process

may be to look at the organizational theory of communication known as Adaptive

Structuration Theory or AST.

Adaptive Structuration Theory (AST)

While the component of faith lends a unique feature to the structure of religious

organizations, churches and other faith-based groups nevertheless share in many of the

overarching features of other organizations in that each is constructed as a social system

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[1] 1 In fact, during one of my interviews at City Life my subject left the room, and I was left alone sitting
before a whiteboard with financial figures written all over it. I attempted to take a photo using my mobile
phone, but the subject entered before I was able to. He had not noticed my attempt to photograph the
whiteboard, but I distinctly remember seeing words such as "target" and "budget."

of actors and resources working in concert toward attaining a goal. Referencing these features in organizations, Giddens (1984) argues that a distinction must be made between system and structure, with the former being an observable pattern of interactions within a group of social actors and the latter being the available rules and resources used to generate and sustain the system. A key component of Giddens' theory is structuration, which outlines the processes by which social systems are produced and reproduced through members' appropriation of rules and resources—giving rise to a duality of structure in which the system itself is reproduced as are the structures contained within it (Scott Poole & A. Dobosh, 2010). Because of its flexibility, structuration theory's primary contribution to social science is found in its ability to bridge the gap between macro and micro systems in society and provide a systematic explanation of how the continual interactions between actors, resources, and groups on the micro level serve to reproduce the social systems existing at the macro level.

Social systems cannot be reproduced without resources, however, and this is why Giddens' (1984) view of structuration also includes the concept of appropriation, in which actors call upon various rules and resources to satisfy group and system requirements, whatever these requirements may be. In recent years, Giddens' structuration theory was taken up by organizational communication scholars DeSanctis and Poole (1994) to include the appropriation of ICT's (information and communications technologies) by groups as parts of systems to better understand the role of these technologies in fostering organizational development. Known as Adaptive Structuration Theory or AST, the theory adds a significant component to Giddens'

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structuration theory, arguing that technologies provide additional structure to

overarching social systems and aid in the continual reproduction of these systems

through their use and appropriation by actors. Because of the primacy of the role of

ICT's in organizations as structures, AST places these technologies on equal footing to

the actors who appropriate them and outlines their use as GDSS or Group Decision

Support Systems that serve as "silent partners" in organizations, facilitating the

formulation and solution of unstructured problems by groups of actors (Shen & Chung,

2002, p. 247).

However, not all technologies serve as Group Decision Support Systems; some

are appropriated for very different purposes. Distinguishing between faithful and ironic

appropriation in AST, DeSanctis and Poole argue that faithful appropriation of ICT's

constitutes group or organizational use of technologies in a manner consistent with their

structural features while ironic appropriation occurs when technologies are used in a

manner that is inconsistent with their structural features.

In order to quantify the substantive ways which organizations appropriate the

structures of technologies, AST relies on the somewhat vague concept of spirit which

DeSanctis & Poole (1994) describe as the general values, goals, and attitudes that a

particular technology promotes (Poole & McPhee, 2005, p. 184). By way of example,

spirit in AST may be thought of as the generally accepted objectives or attitudes of a

technological structure that are purpose-built into its design (Lethbridge, 2003).

Typically, the structural features of a technology support its spirit, and spirit is therefore

best understood as non-material intent. Given the focus of my dissertation on religious organizational use of entertainment media as propaganda, AST could prove useful in helping to map or track the appropriation of these media by religious organizations, either faithfully or ironically in terms of their spirit.

Looking, for example, at the use of high-definition digital video and sound systems in evangelical churches, it may be possible to argue that the spirit of these media as conceptualized by AST scholars can be extended to McLuhan's view of media as being hot or cool. Taking the temperature (as it were) of these media would allow scholars to better understand the ways in which religious organizations appropriate media and for what reason. Given that religious organizations as systems operate with efficiency as a means to an end goal in mind, it is clear that appropriating entertainment media into their structures aids in efficiency by making the content of scripture more readily accessible and digestible by mass audiences.

Similarly, due to the constraints of technique, it is logical that this appropriation be done faithfully in accordance with the spirit of these media, as to do so ironically (against the spirit) would no doubt heighten the probability of organizational inefficiency and hinder the ability of these organizations to deliver religious-themed content to mass audiences accustomed to the efficiencies of the communication culture of the electronic age. For this reason, ironic appropriation of entertainment media by religious organizations is arguably not in the organization's best interest as that would be defiance of the all-encompassing structures of technique.

But while the McLuhan-esque example of how AST might be used in future studies of religious organizational media, the application is largely rooted in the philosophy of technology rather than organizational specifics. Other scholars, however, have successfully used (and critiqued) AST in a variety of novel and unusual ways that extends beyond the aforementioned philosophy of technology. For example, Adaptive Structuration Theory is typically viewed as an ongoing process in which actors make a series of structuring moves culminating in appropriation; Conrad (1993) uses this to make an interesting critique of the more root aspects of the theory.

Essentially, Conrad argues that structurational rules of communication as outlined by Giddens (and borrowed by Poole) are typically viewed as being based on linguistic models rather than social pragmatics that are partially embedded in contexts and therefore frequently outside the control of actors (Poole & McPhee, 2005, p. 191). According to Conrad, the issue this creates is that reducing the scope of AST to a linguistic process neglects the fact that actors are frequently at the whim of rules and resources outside of their locus of control, and that an uneven distribution of these resources among social groups limits the adaptive processes of appropriation. For example, while deciding to alter the format of the order of service in an evangelical church by replacing outdated audio-visual technology with new models is ultimately a communicative process involving the executive pastor of a church and his immediate senior leadership staff, this decision depends on what resources, both monetary and material (human), are available to implement it. In addition, the theological context of the organization may also inhibit the process of appropriation (similar to how Orthodox

Jewish sects continue to wrestle with the complex implications of modern communicative devices such as mobile phones) in a manner that extends well beyond the mere linguistic discussion of whether the use of such devices within these sects should be considered acceptable or not.

These brief critiques serve to illustrate some of the limitations of Adaptive Structuration Theory. The theory certainly provides a multitude of avenues to explore that could be used in future studies when looking at religious organizational use of media. However, it is of less value to the present study because it is primarily concerned with how evangelicals strategically combine media with rhetoric to persuade mass audiences as a means to an end, rather than the structured, organizational moves governing media appropriation in churches. That being said, however, AST may one day provide a useful theoretical platform for additional studies looking at the complexities of religious organizational media use.

Conclusion

This dissertation argues that, to fulfill their mission of proselytizing mass individuals to alter their patterns of experience and align themselves with specific terms of order as a path to salvation, evangelicals strategically create a template of propaganda to reach and appeal to these mass individuals. Significantly, this template reflects the trappings and efficiencies of technique in contemporary mass society, reified in the orchestration of various hot and cool media forms in evangelical worship. Together, these media forms amplify the strategic performance of religious rhetoric in a manner

that transcends demographic differences between congregants and reflects a purposive motivation to appeal to the religious unaffiliated.

At the foundation of this unique performance and template is a pragmatic, instrumental response by evangelicals to increasingly unfavorable social conditions that, if left unchecked, threaten their religious plurality and vitality. But while I cannot pretend to make any substantive claims about the relative strength or vitality of evangelical churches (as I do not have access to congregant data or the financial reporting of these organizations), I nevertheless argue throughout this dissertation that the socio-technical conditions of contemporary society, which emphasize the rapid transmission of information in an appealing, entertaining, and easily consumable manner, make it increasingly difficult for evangelicals to reach mass individuals and appeal to their communicative sensibilities.

This difficulty in turn impacts the ability of evangelicals to successfully evangelize the religious unaffiliated and, colloquially speaking, save them from living a life unfulfilled. But in making the purposive decision to conform to the technique of contemporary society and its pervasive efficiencies that so often run counter to the pious and contemplative worldview of Christianity, evangelicals arguably regain a measure of both their plurality and their vitality by successfully marketing themselves to the religious unaffiliated as a desirable moral and spiritual destination.

Scholars have crafted a number of theories to explain the unexplained and looking at the relative success of evangelicals in marketing themselves and their churches as a better option than their more historical mainline counterparts is no

different. Much of this success has to do with the heterogenous makeup of evangelicals who constitute the single largest group of Christians in the US, outside of Roman Catholics. But while the theological orientation and worldview of evangelicals is as disparate as their congregations, they tend to exhibit certain shared characteristics which Hankins (2009) summarizes as biblicism, crucicentrism, conversionism, and activism. These "four essentials" of evangelicalism, as Smith (2008) labels them, grant a certain flexibility of approach to evangelicals who are, colloquially speaking, all things to all people. More importantly, this flexibility of approach allows evangelicals to craft an operational and liturgical template that appeals to the widest possible target demographic or audience.

However, contemporary scholars tend to overlook the significance of this template in favor of sociological theories focusing on the religious plurality and vitality of evangelicals. For example, Berger (1990) and Hunter (1983) posit a sheltered enclave approach to religious vitality and argue that religious organizations provide a 'sacred canopy' of protection from the damaging effects of a corrosive world. Smith (1998) argues that while Berger has since recanted his theory, it nevertheless has some merit as the strongest religions tend to be those whose sacred canopy offers the requisite stability, meaning, and significance to make adhering to its central tenets worthwhile.

For scholars who adhere to status discontent theory, it is argued that a perceived decline in traditional, conservative-Protestant values fosters a mobilization of these values and a resurgence in their popularity among certain social groups (Smith, 1998).

However, status discontent theory is frequently attributed to White American nationalists, and while studying the intersection of White nationalism with contemporary evangelicalism and its effects on religious diversity would make for a promising future study, it is outside the focus and interest of the present study (Wuthnow, 2008, 2018).

Whereas status discontent theory argues that a perceived decline in social status fosters a 'closing up the ranks' mentality in predominantly White evangelicals, strictness theory argues that religions requiring a deep commitment from adherents tend to thrive in a modernist society while those that are more lenient do not (Kelley, 1986). Put simply, the theory argues that successful, thriving churches tend to filter out those individuals who are not fully committed to their cause; for those that are, organized religion presents an attractive and protective barrier from some of the more questionable characteristics of contemporary society (Iannaccone, 1994). However, as the present study focuses on the persuasion of mass individuals by evangelicals and not the commitment of these individuals to their churches, strictness theory is not particularly relevant.

The sociological theory most closely complementing the study at hand is competitive marketing theory. Formulated by Finke and Stark (2005), competitive marketing theory argues that a plurality of religious choice for religious consumers fosters religious vitality as per the structures of a free-market, capitalist society. In relation to the present study, evangelical churches tend to operate as independent owner-operator business entities; as Smith (1998) notes, this allows these organizations to market themselves as they see fit to heterogenous audiences of mass individuals.

Echoing this, Finke and Stark (2005) argue that as evangelicals are typically unburdened by denominational ties, they are free to incorporate a wide variety of religious traditions into a one-size-fits all template that appeals to the widest possible religious consumer audience.

Regarding competitive marketing theory, its relationship to the present study is clear: evangelicals are successful because they create and offer a product that appeals to a heterogenous audience. However, even a one-size-fits-all approach to religion will not appeal to everyone, and this may explain the ever-increasing numbers of what Hout and Fischer (2002, 2014) and Chavez (2017) label as religious unaffiliated or religious none. Examining longitudinal survey data from the General Social Survey (GSS), Hout and Fischer as well as Chavez identified two important characteristics of the religious unaffiliated: generational decline and dissatisfaction with religious politics. However, while I did not survey congregant data during my field work, I cannot make any claims as to whether or not Brazos Fellowship, UNION, City Life, or Ecclesia are successfully recruiting religiously disaffiliated mass individuals. As interview excerpts in Chapter Five will demonstrate, these churches do make a concerted effort to tailor their approach to the unchurched; presumably, religious unaffiliated mass individuals are included in this approach although I cannot be entirely certain. What I can be certain of, however, is the relationship between the performative aspects of evangelical persuasion and how the form or template of this persuasion is influenced by the socio-technical conditions of contemporary society and reified as strategically oriented religious propaganda. As Bellah et al. (2008) note, the ambiguities of modernism that prevent mass individuals

from climbing the proverbial social ladder and attaining a level of individual success

they believe they are destined to achieve frequently result in the withdrawal of their

participation from civic society and civic organizations and an overall decline in 'habits

of the heart.' When these habits of the heart decline, I argue, the vitality of religious

organizations suffer.

Much of this ongoing withdrawal from participation in civic organizations (of

which churches are an example) has to do with the pervasive effects of technique in

which the inexorable push for efficiency in all facets of daily life diminishes the agency

of mass individuals. Significantly, technique also alienates mass individuals from their

natural state of being which is, according to Ellul (1964, 1973), to be with God. For

religious organizations, this creates a problem of how to reach and appeal to these mass

individuals, many of whom have no religious affiliation. Echoing Ellul, I argue that the

solution to this problem is for religious organizations to align themselves with the

efficiencies and with technique and to alter their methods of evangelization by creating

an operational template that appeals to the sensibilities and communicative preferences

of contemporary mass individuals.

As I will demonstrate in Chapters Four and Five, the response by evangelicals to

the aforementioned constraints and conditions of technique that so greatly affect mass

individuals results in the creation of a unique operational template. I will also

demonstrate that the influence and reach of this template extends into the realm of

propaganda as it serves to direct the behavior of mass individuals in a manner that

reflects the aims of church pastors as propagandists (Jowett & O'Donnell, 2011). As

sermon excerpts in Chapter Four will show, the underlying motivation or aim of evangelical pastors is to persuade mass individuals to alter their patterns of experience or habits of being and align themselves with the terms of order of evangelical propaganda by way of forming a covenant or binding agreement. Similarly, a dramatistic reading of the performance of evangelical rhetoric will illustrate that regardless of any theological difference in orientation, the Burkeian ratios of evangelical rhetoric are highly similar across the board, as is evangelicals' use of Burke's cycle of victimage through guilt and redemption, which is representative of a strategic system of linguistic control.

Finally, underlying the rhetorical aspects of evangelical propaganda is its performative dissemination or more specifically, the orchestrated amplification of this rhetoric by way of commercial entertainment media of the type typically found in bars, nightclubs, and concert halls. As I will demonstrate in Chapter Five, while the success of evangelical propaganda is contingent on the ability of pastors to persuade mass audiences with their rhetoric, their methods of persuasion hinge on their ability to create an environment and atmosphere that draws mass individuals into evangelical churches and gives them a reason to sit and listen to a sermon.

Using participant-observation and interview data from my repeat site visits to Brazos Fellowship, UNION, City Life, and Ecclesia to support my claims, I will demonstrate that just as technique can isolate mass individuals and cause them to withdraw their participation from civic society, it can also bring them back through the orchestrated and amplified performance of evangelical propaganda. But before this can occur, I must outline the methodology of my study and justification for its approach.

CHAPTER III METHODOLOGY

What explains the proclivity of independent evangelical organizations to use commercial and consumer entertainment media? Why are evangelicals so much more likely to integrate these media into their liturgy than mainline religious institutions? And why is this approach so popular across the board in the US? I argue in this dissertation that a technological society and the deterministic influence of technique have created a set of socio-technical conditions under modernity that are unfavorable for religious organizations and constrain their ability to effectively conduct mission work. In addition, I argue that the ambiguities of modernity make it increasingly difficult for individuals today to prosper in accordance with the ubiquitous Protestant-capitalist work ethic that characterizes the American mythos. When this occurs, individuals isolate themselves and withdraw from participating in civic society.

In a religious context, this withdrawal and isolation affects the vitality of religious organizations and diminishes their societal influence, constraining their ability to evangelize the uninitiated and the uninformed. I argue that in an effort to regain a measure of this diminished vitality and societal influence, evangelical churches reflexively adhere themselves to the constraints of technique and in so doing, utilize propaganda as an efficient method of strategically disseminating religious messaging to isolated and withdrawn individuals. To theorize this, I have used the work of Jacques Ellul, Marshall McLuhan, and Kenneth Burke as well as that of sociologists such as Robert Bellah, Christian Smith, and others. Scholarship and theory aside, however, what

explains my own interest in this subject? What is about evangelical media use that intrigues me so, and how do I justify my argument with empirical data?

Before answering these questions, it is important to emphasize that while the present study focuses on religion and media, it is less about religion per se than it is about what religious organizations do to remain relevant. Regarding my own interest in the subject, my immediate family is predominantly Roman Catholic; however, I was raised in an atheistic household. This juxtaposition between belief and non-belief and tradition and modernity was a prime influence in shaping my desire to understand how evangelicals, as predominantly independent religious organizations lacking the long-term history of Roman Catholics, maintain their vitality while other religious groups have not. And while an argument can be made that the comparatve lack of history of evangelicals hinders their social influence, I see it as advantageous because it grants them a freedom of approach and flexibility that would be otherwise constrained in more traditional religious organizations bound by their own history.

But it is not only the lack of tradition with evangelicals that intrigues me; it is their use of media for evangelization: media predominantly designed for entertainment rather than religious purposes. Having worked in public relations and advertising before entering academia, I could not help but notice that many of the media and techniques employed by evangelicals to proselytize the public are similar, and in some cases identical, to what are used in the consumer entertainment industry. This observation and a desire to understand the reasons and motivations behind it gives the present study its

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raison d'etre. As with all studies, however, a thorough methodology is first required in order to prove a point.

Justification of Method

Since I intend to study how independent evangelical organizations use media for the proselytization of new members by strategically exposing them to religious messaging via the orchestration of media, I have chosen a mixed method approach for the study's research design. This approach includes structured participant-observation of sermons at four independent evangelical churches, a rhetorical analysis of a sample of sermons corresponding to the dates of site visits, 18 qualitative interviews with pastors and technology team members at these churches, and a visual-content analysis of the design and type of media present within the worship space or sanctuary at each church. This mixed method approach was chosen because of its suitability for the task at hand and is similar to the methodology in other studies that have also focused on media use in religious organizations and religious rhetoric.

For example, Campbell's When Religion Meets New Media (2010) describes research in three different religious communities (Christian, Orthodox Jewish, Muslim) to map how these communities negotiate their relationship with media. Focusing on how the unique histories and traditions of these organizations shape their adoption and use of media, that study observed how community members of these three religions interacted with various forms of media and justified this interaction. The study also included in-depth, structured interviews with religious community leaders and their followers. Similarly, Campbell and DeLashmutt (2014) conducted an ethnographic survey of media

use in multi-site religious communities using participant-observation and in-depth

interviews, while Hutchings (2017) conducted a longitudinal study of five online

religious communities via participant-observation in virtual (simulated) rituals,

combined with over 100 interviews with community members and leaders. I myself

conducted previous ethnographic research at a non-denominational, evangelical church

in Vancouver, Canada using a combination of participant-observation and in-depth

interviews (Bajan, 2015). This consistency of methodological approach across multiple

studies demonstrates both the applicability and suitability of combining participant-

observation and in-depth interviews with religious community members and in addition,

produces an extremely rich data set not found with other approaches (Berg, 2001).

Where the present study differs from others, however, is with the addition of a

visual content analysis component and a rhetorical analysis of evangelical rhetoric.

Given that the study focuses on evangelical media orchestration in support of strategic

religious rhetoric whose end goal is salvation through alignment with specific terms of

order, it is logical to focus on the design of the spaces in which this rhetoric is

disseminated, the rhetoric itself, and the technology which amplifies it. This was done in

accordance with a visual content analysis guide for photographing church media,

compiled by Dr. Nesserine Mansour with input from me and using Kenneth Burke's

dramatism and logology. This visual content analysis guide is included in Appendix A

and lists a structured series of photographs taken to map the layout of church worship

spaces (sanctuaries) and the placement of media within these spaces. And while the

visual content analysis component of the study played a smaller role in the study than the

rhetorical analysis of sermons and interviews with church leadership and staff, the photographs enabled me to frame the content of my interviews in actual church operation and more fully understand the role that media and set design play in the evangelization of new community members.

Regarding my rhetorical analysis of a sample of religious sermons corresponding with dates of my field work, I take inspiration from scholars such as David Christensen, author of The Persuasive Preacher (2020) and Tex Sample's Spectacle of Worship in a Wired World (1998). While neither Christensen nor Sample specifically conducted rhetorical analyses of religious sermons, both authors devote a considerable amount of effort to try and understand how contemporary evangelicals draw inspiration from the world around them to hone both their persuasive skillset and method of reaching and appealing to mass audiences. Because of the need to understand the significance of evangelical rhetoric, an analysis of the structure, tone, and content of evangelical sermons allowed me to understand how pastors use language as drama to persuade mass audiences to align themselves with their particular worldview and change their habits of behavior accordingly.

In combination, this mixed-method research design of participant-observation, in-depth qualitative interviews, visual content analysis, and rhetorical analysis allows me to effectively answer my research questions and demonstrate how evangelicals, constrained by the deterministic influence of a technological society and the constraints of technique, effectively construct an efficient and appealing persuasive propaganda enterprise, seamlessly blending rhetoric and orchestrated media amplification of this

rhetoric to evangelize mass individuals into salvation through conversion to Christianity. The next section will provide a detailed overview of the study's methodology as well as its sampling and data analysis methods. This will include a detailed explanation of each of the principal research components of the study: participant-observation, in-depth interviews, visual content analysis, and Kenneth Burke's dramatism and logology.

Methods of Analysis

Ethnography and Participant Observation

The ethnographic data set rendered in the present study was particularly rich and included photographs, videos, and field notes: none of which would exist if not for the presence of a research guide for conducting ethnography at religious field sites, developed by Dr. Heidi Campbell with aid from Dr. Nesserine Mansour and me. This guide is constructed around a semi-standardized list of observations that should be made when conducting ethnography at churches. This list includes specific attention paid to church architecture, sound, light, media present, audience demographics, and interactions with religious authority figures and media. While this guide is not yet published, its working form enabled me to streamline my field work by providing me with a measure of ethnographic consistency that can be applied to each field site in turn (see Appendix A).

As a research method, ethnography is reflexive rather than linear. This gives ethnography a great deal of flexibility and makes it applicable in a wide variety of empirical situations. In practice, ethnography means that researchers enter a field site with a blueprint or guide of what they intend to study. These environments are typically

unstructured, uncontrolled, and fluid in terms of dynamics; thus, an ethnographic

researcher must make a conscious effort to be creative, flexible, and above all, adaptive

to prepare for unforeseen circumstances and eventualities (Scarduzio et al., 2011). Doing

so means that ethnographic researchers allow themselves to become fully immersed in a

foreign environment and understand how their presence impacts the behavior of others.

The presence of a researcher in ethnography gives the method a human-centered focus

that would otherwise be controlled in more clinical research situations (Atkinson, 2001).

However, in close knit communities the presence of a researcher as a stranger or

outsider means participants are often unwilling to fully open themselves up, which in

turn can make the data collection process arduous. Conversely, too much involvement

from a researcher can cause participants to have a desire to please, which can result in

skewed observations (Fine, 1993). Being flexible within the ethnographic context is

therefore crucial; flexible researchers understand the significance of their presence in the

field and work to balance this presence with the desire to collect meaningful

observations in real time. This constant balancing act between ethnographic researchers

and their subjects requires that researchers be vigilant about their presence and the

possibilities of disruption. When this is done well, ethnography produces a rich

qualitative data set not possible with other approaches (Berg, 2001)

Regarding the popularity of ethnography as a research method, its repeat use in

social science demonstrates both the versatility and usefulness of adopting a human-

centered approach to data collection. This is not to say that valuable data cannot be

gleaned from quantitative research methods such as using surveys and questionnaires,

rather that the inductive, open-ended approach of ethnography leans more toward particular understandings of phenomena rather than isolated, numerical generalizations (Maxwell, 2012, p. viii). Similarly, the 'thick description' that rendered by participant observation is well suited to the textual analysis methods that are hallmarks of qualitative research (McKee, 2003).

Interviews and Critical Discourse Analysis

In addition to participant-observation during worship services, I conducted a series of semi-structured qualitative interviews with members of the pastoral and tech teams at each of the study's field sites. Audio recordings of these interviews were transcribed using Rev.com, a reputable transcription firm routinely utilized by ethnographers. These transcriptions provided the textual data that was analyzed using critical discourse analysis (CDA). This process allowed me to extract from the transcripts key relevant themes used to answer the study's research questions.

Interviews were primarily held on-site at the location of each church.[2] Following general introductions, I provided participants with an informed consent document (see Appendix C), and participants were given a general briefing of the research project. They were then given the opportunity to ask any questions they may have had about the project or the interview process. After the participants and I signed the consent documents, participants were asked if they would like to retain a copy of the document.

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[2] The final interview of the study was done via a Skype call due to logistical constraints.

This concluded the informed consent portion of interviews; at this point I switched on a digital voice recorder and began the interview.

In terms of questions, a semi-standardized list was utilized (see Appendix C). Questions for pastors and tech team members were largely identical; however, additional questions were posed to tech team members regarding the operation and usability of various media forms that were relevant. Similarly, questions involving pastoral motivations for liturgical design not relevant to tech teams were posed only to pastors. Barring these role-specific differences, questions were designed to be as open ended as possible to give participants the freedom to provide unhindered responses.

Questions were, however, deliberately structured around the study's research questions, specifically in terms of what assumptions underlie media use in liturgy, how media are evaluated in terms of effectiveness for the task they are assigned to, and how audience responses to media use are measured. Interviews ranged in length from approximately 40 to 60 minutes and occurred either one-on-one or in small groups of twos and threes, depending on the scheduling and availability of participants. Interviews were concluded when the list of questions was exhausted, or when I felt the conversation was no longer providing useable data.

The focus of these research questions necessitated the need for thematic, qualitative data; for this reason, interviews were a critical component of the dissertation. Not only is the potential range of topics that can be covered in interviews limitless, but interviews are an invaluable research tool in understanding the experiences and perspectives of social actors embedded in their natural environment (Lindlof & Taylor,

2010). The experiential knowledge gleaned through interviews typically takes on one of

three forms of discourse: stories, accounts, and explanations (Lindlof & Taylor, 2010).

 For example, the narrative of storytelling is useful to a researcher trying to understand

the life world of another, and the specificity of the rich narratives produced makes

storytelling a highly valued and popular ethnographic research tool. Personal accounts

are another form of interview discourse, but in comparison to stories, accounts are

focused more on excuses or justifications for social conduct (Scott & Lyman, 1968).

This is because personal accounts, while subjective, are typically factual and lack the

embellishment or flourish of storytelling (Lindlof & Taylor, 2010). For this reason,

personal accounts are useful for enabling researchers to uncover motivations that might

otherwise remain hidden during story-based interviews. Explanations, the third form of

interview discourses, are considered a blend of narrative and personal accounts. For a

researcher, explanations are useful in providing information on the individual,

interpersonal, and cultural logics that people employ in their communicative

performances and behaviors (Lindlof & Taylor, 2010, p. 174).

Due to the nature of this study, the research intentionally sought out experiential

discourse in interviews. I made this decision because I wished to understand not simply

the decisions and rationale behind religious digital media use but also the underlying

assumptions that pastors and tech teams have about media that drive these decisions.

Accordingly, study interviews produced discursive threads of deep, experiential

description that, when used in conjunction with participant-observation and a visual

content analysis, provided a rich data set to answer the study's research questions. (See Appendix C for list of sample interview questions).

The identities of study participants were protected by assigning each interviewee a code name. While complete anonymity was not possible due to the names of the churches serving as field sites remaining public, the use of code names to de-identify participants offers them a reasonable degree of anonymity. As noted, interview transcripts were analyzed using a form of textual analysis known as critical discourse analysis, or CDA. Rooted in social constructionism, CDA views discourse (language) as a social practice in which multiple discursive threads of dialogue are dialectically related to larger social situations and cultures which frame these threads (Wodak & Meyer, 2001). At the root of these discursive threads are influences of power and ideology; by isolating these threads, CDA provides a very clear interpretation on human interaction through dialogue (Wodak & Meyer, 2001).

Practically speaking, CDA is accomplished through a close reading of text (in this case, transcription data) with specific attention paid to key words and phrases and how and where these words and phrases appear within the text. It must be emphasized, however, that CDA does not examine texts in isolation. Rather, it does so with the understanding that texts are related to larger social and power structures and that the two cannot be separated (Wodak & Meyer, 2001). By viewing these texts as imbedded forms of discourse, CDA provides researchers with remarkable insight into the nuances of human communication, relationships, and social practices.

Visual Content Analysis of Media and Church Layout

The final methodological component for the present study was a visual content analysis of digital media present in worship spaces, as well as the layout of these spaces and the surrounding church premises. As a qualitative methodological approach, visual content analysis is a basic way of finding meaning about media and using this meaning to construct generalized statements about aspects of its representation (Margolis & Pauwels, 2011). As with all methods, it begins with research questions; in this case the questions focused on understanding the assumptions that pastors and tech teams have about media and how media is used to increase attendance in worship and maintain religious community participation.

The next step in visual content analysis is to select a text to analyze as a variable. This occurs when each text is assigned a categorical label or value which is both mutually exclusive and exhaustive (Margolis & Pauwels, 2011). For example, a soundboard used in the audio-visual booth of a church differs from a digital projector and therefore has a quantifiably different value. Once the necessary variables have been assigned values (in this case, when media present in the worship spaces has been photographed and catalogued), these values are analyzed via a visual compare and contrast. This analysis was grounded in a coding scheme developed by Dr. Heidi Campbell in conjunction with Dr. Nesserine Mansour and input from me. This scheme suggests a set of standardized images to be recorded before and during church services to create a comparative document of church worship spaces (see Appendix A).

Using this guide and coding scheme allowed me to better frame the content of interviews. Creating a visual document of the various media forms present in worship

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spaces and the layout of these spaces allowed responses by interviewees involving

media, organizational responses to media development, and consumer entertainment

culture to be more easily quantified. When photographing, specific attention was paid to

mapping how media are integrated into the visual design elements of the worship spaces

and audience reactions to the orchestration of various media forms present in the space.

Photographs taken included cameras, teleprompters, lights, sound boards, and audio-

visual rigging as well as traditional building elements such as foyers, lobbies,

entranceways, and stages (see Appendix B). Both static and action photographs were

taken over the course of multiple site visits.

Initial photographs were taken before worship services so as not to interfere with

the flow of these services, and these were used to capture the overall layout of the space

and surrounding premises. I then photographed the placement of these media in relation

to audience line of site with the main stage to compare how each church designs its

worship space in relation to media placement and arranges audience seating around these

media to maximize exposure to these media. For example, the placement of overhead

digital projection screens in one church may differ from the placement of screens in

another church, and this is indicative of purposeful design differences. Comparing and

contrasting this difference allowed me to better understand how the functionality and

placement of these media relate to their use for specific purposes by pastors and tech

team members.

During subsequent visits, additional photographs and videos were surreptitiously

recorded during services in order to capture congregant reactivity to media orchestration,

specifically with regard to the different ways that hot and cool media were used by pastors and tech team members to induce message receptivity. Photographs and videos were also taken from the vantage point of the audio-visual control both in each church, except for Brazos Fellowship where permission was not granted. Booths are located at the rear of the worship space of each church with surround-sound speakers positioned in front of them. Audience seating, however, was in front of these speakers to maximize exposure to sound. This allowed me to converse freely with members of the audio-visual team of the churches and actively inquire what they were doing and what equipment present in the booth was for. As well, without creating a distraction I was able to capture a series of videos of congregants reacting to the hot and cool media orchestration controlled from the booth.

Dramatistic and Logological Analysis

While not a social science research method in the same vein of participant-observation, interviews, or visual content analysis, Kenneth Burke's dramatism and logology are nevertheless suitable tools for enabling scholars to better understand how the process of religious persuasion occurs and what the motivations of religious rhetors may be. An autodidactic literary theorist and rhetorician, Burke is primarily concerned with understanding how human persuasion occurs and what the underlying motivations of those responsible for enabling this persuasion are. To that end, Burke's dramatism views any endeavor, institution, or practice through the lens of drama and literature. For Burke, evangelical sermons and worship services can be likened to a type of stage play

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in which the principal 'actors' (pastors, staff, and congregants) are its chief players and interact with one another in a dramatistic situation.

Specifically, evangelical pastors and staff are responsible for creating a dramatic 'scene' in which audience members are made to feel they are part of a larger whole, greater than themselves. Bound together by the collective action of worship, audiences in an evangelical 'play' come to identify with certain properties that Burke calls terms of order, which provide codes or guides for conduct and action. For rhetoricians such as Burke, analyzing the various ratios of linguistic emphasis in a dramatistic situation allows them to understand the motivations of rhetors and what action they desire in mass audiences. Similarly, by paying attention to the specific codes or terms of order of rhetoric embedded in language—a process Burke labels logology—scholars are able to discern how the process of persuasion occurs and how mass audiences are subjugated to a system of linguistic control.

In the present study, my use of Burke's dramatism and logology in analyzing a selection of sermon excerpts corresponding with dates and times of my field work allowed me to understand how evangelical pastors use language to create a dramatic scene and then persuade mass audiences to alter their habits of being or learned behaviors into desirable, Christ-like patterns of experience (behavior), said to facilitate their moral and spiritual salvation. As will be discussed in Chapter Five, when evangelical rhetoric is supported—and amplified—by orchestrated hot and cool media, the result is a highly appealing and persuasive propagandistic template that allows

evangelical pastors to effectively proselytize large numbers of mass individuals with relative ease and efficiency.

Summary of Research Design

Data produced for this study resulted from a mixed method, qualitative research design combining participant observation in four evangelical churches, in-depth qualitative interviews with pastors and tech team members, a visual content analysis of photographs of media in worship spaces, and a rhetorical analysis of evangelical sermons. This research design enabled me to understand how evangelical pastors use rhetoric to align mass individuals with a specific value system (terms of order) and persuade them to change their habits of being or patterns of experience into new habits desired by pastors as rhetors. In addition, this mixed-method research design also enabled me to understand how and why evangelical pastors use an orchestrated, performative presentation of media to amplify their rhetoric and make it more appealing and more easily consumable by mass audiences on a repeat-visit basis.

Accomplishing this involved a series of visits to a sample of evangelical churches in the East Central region of Texas, where I observed how media is used during worship services and how congregation members interact with these media. I also spent time in the audio-visual booth of these churches and observed how church tech-team members operate the various media forms present in the worship space of each church. Following participant-observation protocols, I conducted 18 in-depth interviews with a sample of pastors and tech team members at these churches. Questions asked during

interviews focused on pastors' and tech team members' assumptions about media and how these assumptions influence the orchestration of the forms of media in worship spaces for the purposes of increasing attendance and maintaining community participation.

In addition, participant-observation and in-depth interviews were combined with a visual content analysis of photographs of media present in worship spaces, such as digital video cameras, projection screens, teleprompters, overhead projectors, and stage lights. Photographs were coded with a qualitative variable to differentiate the various media forms used by each church. This allowed me to compare and contrast the various design and design strategies of the worship spaces at each field site that I witnessed during participant observation and discussed with participants during interviews. As well, a series of videos was recorded to evaluate congregant reactivity to the orchestration of the various and hot and cool media forms used by each church. I also conducted a structured rhetorical analysis of a sample of evangelical sermons on dates and times corresponding with my site visits. This allowed me to understand the motivations of evangelical pastors as rhetors and how they strategically use language to persuade mass audiences to align themselves with specific terms of order and, in turn, alter their behavior to match specific behaviors desired by pastors that are said to facilitate moral and spiritual salvation.

Observation Criteria

Observation criteria in the present study are based on several parameters. These include participant-observation during worship services at four field sites, the

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photographing of media used in these services, and a series of in-depth, qualitative interviews with church leadership and staff. Criteria for participant-observation include specific attention paid to the spatial construction of technology: specifically, observing the physical design of the worship space and media placement within it, the presence of religious symbolism, and the nature of interactions between congregants, staff, and media. High-definition digital photographs and videos of media and congregant reactivity to these media are recorded for visual content analysis.

Recording and cataloging the forms of media present in worship spaces at field sites and how they are spatially oriented allows me to better frame interviews and gain a detailed understanding of how evangelicals strategically orchestrate and operationalize media during worship. Similarly, cataloguing the types of media used to facilitate this and their physical layout in relation to the design of worship spaces and surrounding premises of each church allows me to better understand the design considerations of these spaces and how they are used to facilitate exposure to religious messaging.

Interviews conducted with a sampling of pastors and tech team members at each church enable me to understand the core assumptions evangelicals have about media and how these assumptions influence the strategic orchestration of these media in worship. This process involves asking participants a series of in-depth questions designed to probe their thoughts, feelings, and assumptions about media and the role of media in the evangelization of new members: questions such as "*can you tell me a little about your approach to new media in worship", "what influences your decision to integrate certain forms of media into the community at [name of church]?*" and "*tell me about how you*

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operate digital media during worship. What goes into the synchronization between the audio-visual booth and the on-stage performance?" (see Appendix C). These observation criteria are identical at each field site, and a detailed description of these field sites follows.

Selection Criteria and Sampling

Field sites in the study include four independent, non-denominational churches located in East-Central Texas. One, Brazos Fellowship, is in the Bryan College Station area, with the remaining three roughly 80 miles away in the Greater Houston area. The rationale for selecting these particular field sites is based on the propensity for evangelical Protestant churches to utilize digital media and the popularity of this approach in other churches throughout the country. For example, Campbell (2013) notes that regarding the internet and other forms of digital media, "Christians . . . have readily embraced the internet to re-envision traditional forms of practice and to utilize technology for religious purposes" (p. 281). It must be emphasized, however, that evangelical use of the internet and digital media is not linked to any central institution or authority; rather, it represents a very diverse group of Christians with diverse voices (Campbell, 2013, p. 284). One group in particular comprises non-denominational evangelicals.

Scholars have noted that in comparison to other sects of Christianity such as Catholicism, it is the evangelicals who continue to be enthusiastic adopters of digital media (Schultze & Woods, 2008). Arguably, by embracing emerging media technologies evangelicals are able to "create [worship] experiences that are ever more full-blooded in

their sensuality and emotionality" than their less mediated counterparts (Horst & Miller, 2012). For these reasons, case studies have focused exclusively on non-denominational, evangelical Protestant churches. The method of selection for these field sites is convenience sampling based on five distinguishing characteristics. These characteristics are used to construct a list of potential suitable field sites via a Google search of the terms 'evangelical churches in East Central Texas.' Churches on this list are evaluated in terms of their suitability for the study by viewing the website of each church and their social media presence and by reviewing a selection of sermon videos and podcasts. Following evaluation, the list of churches is ranked and the first four selected as field sites. The selection criteria are as follows:

1) *Type*. Because not all non-denominational churches are evangelical and not all evangelical churches are non-denominational, only independent churches not linked to any overseeing body or organization were sampled. The reason for selecting only independent churches is that because they lack a denominational oversight committee, they are more likely to have freedom to make their own decisions regarding media selection, use, and the integration of these media into the design of their liturgy.

2) *Size*. Only small- to medium-sized churches (500 or fewer regularly attending congregants) were selected. According to data gathered by Duke University's *National Congregations Study*, roughly 20% of churches in the United States report having congregations of at least 250, while roughly 10% report having congregations of at least 500. While surveying smaller congregations (50 or fewer people in regular attendance) and larger ones (1000 or above) on their media use in support of rhetoric would make for

an interesting study, to date few surveys of the type used in the present study have focused on small- to medium- sized churches.

3) *Media Use*. The *National Congregations Study* also reports that of churches with at least 500 people in regular weekly attendance, nearly 40% report using projection equipment during services while approximately 45% of churches with at least 500 people in regular attendance also report using projection equipment. Over 65% regularly record their sermons so congregants can download them, and 90% of these same churches report using musical instruments during worship services. Of congregants at these churches, 30% report watching video clips during sermons, while 40% of these churches report utilizing paid staff to sing and perform during worship. Given the present study's focus on orchestrated media presentations in support of religious rhetoric, sampling churches of a consistent size and with consistent media use is important.

4) *Architecture*. Only churches with cinema-style auditoriums and a minimum of religious paraphernalia present were sampled. Cinema-style seating was emphasized because churches meeting this criterion are more likely to utilize maximize audience exposure to orchestrated media in an enclosed visual-acoustic space free of outside influences (Shin & Miller, 2014). Similarly, churches with a minimum of religious paraphernalia are likely to be less off-putting for potential congregants lacking a deeply theological background, therefore increasingly the probability of repeat visits.

Based on the above criteria, four churches were selected from the list: Brazos Fellowship (http://www.brazosfellowship.com) in Bryan-College Station, and UNION

(https://www.unionhouston.com), City Life Church (https://clchouston.com), and Ecclesia (https://ecclesiahouston.org/), all in the Houston metropolitan area. Following the selection of these four churches, I visited each church (Brazos Fellowship had previously been visited in 2016) and introduced myself to the head pastor. After explaining the focus of my study, I requested and received their consent to conduct my study and visited each church in turn, starting with UNION in June 2019 and concluding with Ecclesia in late August. I then re-visited Brazos Fellowship in early September, after which the field work component of this study was completed.

Field Sites

Brazos Fellowship

Located near the Southwest Parkway in College Station, Brazos Fellowship is a non-denominational evangelical church headed by Pastor Will Lewis with a regular congregant attendance of about 400–500 during each service. Founded in 2004, the church held its earliest worship services in local living rooms of congregants. In 2005, services were moved to the gymnasium of a local middle school. By 2006, Brazos Fellowship's congregant body had grown to such a degree that new facilities were found near the Southwest Parkway in a building that had previously been a nightclub. Extensive renovations of the premises were conducted and Advanced Lighting and Sound, a media consultation firm, was brought in to redesign the existing facilities and improve its audio-visual setup.

This redesign included a complete upgrade of the former nightclub's public address (PA) systems as well as the construction of a new stage with multi-color

overhead lights on steel girders, LCD projection screens, teleprompters, surround sound speakers, and a dual-HDTV camera setup. Owing to the size of the building and that it previously contained a nightclub, Brazos Fellowship has second-level balcony seating overlooking the stage and accessible through a small stairwell. Currently, Brazos Fellowship hosts three weekly sermons on Sundays at 8:30 a.m., 10 a.m., and 11:30 a.m. All sermons are digitally recorded and edited in the church's in-house audio-visual suite and then uploaded to the church website for later viewing. Brazos Fellowship also has a regularly updated social media presence on Facebook and Twitter.

I previously conducted a field study at Brazos Fellowship in the fall of 2016 using a framework identical to the present study and used this data as the first of the four case studies in this dissertation. This data included a series of interviews and participant-observation centered around the decisions, motivations, and assumptions the church's pastoral and tech team have about media. In total, five interviews were conducted with Brazos Fellowship pastors and staff. Photographs of media and congregant reactivity to these media were not taken in 2016; however, I re-visited the church in the summer of 2019 and took and cataloged photographs during this time. No alterations to the architecture of the worship space were observed at this time.

In terms of demographics, Brazos Fellowship appears to be primarily a middle-class, White church of young families and university students (20–35 years of age). Given the proximity of the church to a major university, these demographics are not surprising as the church is a popular destination for students, many of whom go on to marry and have families while attending. The overall dress and deportment of

congregants at Brazos Fellowship is casual, with many attendees wearing t-shirts, shorts, and khakis. There is little in the way of tattoos or flashy jewelry, and vehicles in the church parking lot are of average make and model (Honda, Toyota, Ford). In summation, Brazos Fellowship describes itself as a "community of followers of Jesus Christ." While I cannot be certain of its orientation, data gathered during site visits points to the church as likely being "generic" non-denominational evangelical with mainline Protestant characteristics (Reimer, 2003).

UNION Houston

Located in the Memorial Park area of Houston, UNION is an independent, non-denominational church that is also outreach-focused. The church is a startup led by husband-and-wife team Matthias and Mara Valderas. Early gatherings were in the Houston Heights, an upscale area located in Northwest Houston. The church moved to its present location in the Antoine Drive area of Houston in September 2016, and gatherings are held in facilities located next to the headquarters of a large trucking company. The building itself is owned by a Pentecostal church named Launch (https://launchhouston.org/) which rents its facilities and equipment to UNION. Launch holds services weekly on Saturday evenings, and UNION hosts its own services on Sundays at 9:30 a.m. and 11:15 a.m. But while Launch is a Pentecostal church, UNION is, in the words of its executive pastor, a "radical, spirit-filled non-denominational church" in which all are welcome "including gay people."[3] This statement and the

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[3]This was discussed in an informal phone call between me and UNION's executive pastor on April 15, 2021.

general tone of sermons leads me to believe that UNION is likely a third-wave, neo-charismatic church. However, Pastor Matthias was quick to point out that while speaking in tongues is considered acceptable by church leadership, it is not encouraged. For example, comparing and contrasting UNION with Launch, I was told by Pastor Matthias during my April 15 phone call that:

> *We do talk [to congregants] about speaking in tongues in our classes and worship nights, but we don't encourage it. Speaking in tongues is a gift from God that edifies the church, but we ask that people who feel called to do it cover their mouths and speak quietly so they don't discourage people who aren't anointed with that gift.*

Regarding attendance, UNION typically sees about 200 visitors in its weekend morning services although this number can climb as high as 400 during evening services, which are oriented primarily toward committed community members rather than new and first-time visitors.

While the operation of UNION is quite small in comparison with Brazos Fellowship, City Life, and Ecclesia, UNION nevertheless has a significant social media presence. This includes regular updates on Facebook, Instagram, and YouTube: the influence or reach of which became a frequent discussion point during interviews. UNION's website does not currently have podcasts or video sermons; however, edited clips of sermons are available on YouTube, and these are regularly updated. Sermons are occasionally audio-recorded by UNION's tech team to check decibel levels and audio quality, but full-length podcasts are not available at the time of this writing.

Architecturally speaking, the worship space at Launch/UNION is quite small and arranged in a wide, rectangular fashion with a small stage in the foreground and an

audio-visual booth at the rear. In lieu of large screen television screens hanging from the wall behind the stage such as with Brazos Fellowship, the church uses a series of smaller screens suspended from the rafters. This befits the oblong shape of the worship space and the seating arrangements, which are organized around wide but not deep rows. Overhead lights are intermingled throughout the rafters with large portable speakers to the rear.

Because UNION is located in one of the lower income areas of Houston, its mission emphasizes outreach work to the homeless community and sex trafficking victims. Pastor Matthias' website lists a lengthy story of his own battles with addiction and finding salvation in God. As interviews revealed, outreach and addiction are pillars of UNION's presence in the community, and social media is heavily relied upon to coordinate and facilitate these efforts. Regarding demographics, UNION is an ethnic church, and its congregation is predominantly made up of people of color. For example, I was one of the very few White people in attendance during my site visits, and while I did not at any time feel uncomfortable, I was certainly an outlier. Because UNION is on the outskirts of an impoverished area of Houston, the congregation appears to be generally on the lower end of the city's socio-economic bracket. Many people in attendance looked disheveled and wore inexpensive, sometimes dirty clothes. There was often a strong smell of body odor in the worship space, and I observed many tattoos and piercings worn by congregants.

Similarly, many congregants were observed to walk to and from the church rather than drive; of the small number of cars in the parking lot, many were older models

with varying degrees of neglect. All told, UNION was the poorest of the four churches featured in the present study, but also the one I felt the most comfortable visiting. All told, I conducted participant-observation at three of UNION's Sunday services as well as a special 5 p.m. worship night service for long-standing community members. Interviews were conducted with three members of UNION's tech team, including its creative director as well as with head pastor Matthias and his wife Mara.

City Life Church

Located in the Grand Boulevard area of Houston near the Texas Medical Center Park, City Life Church is a small to medium-sized church founded in 2010 by husband-and-wife pastors Chris Pontus and wife Kim. Calling itself a "Protestant non-denominational" but also "full gospel church" depending on who is asked,[4] City Life appears to uphold the four essentials of evangelicalism as described by Hankins (2008) but with a mainline Protestant orientation. For example, while the church operates as an independent, non-denominational startup, it is also associated with Every Nation, a collection of similar independent churches throughout the United States that focus their mission work on college campuses and impoverished, sex-trafficked areas. The current iteration of City Life Church (CLC) was founded when Pastor John took over executive pastoral duties from a predecessor following a split in leadership. During these early days, services were held in the Edwards Greenway Palace Cinema in Eastern Houston

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[4] As with Pastor Matthias at UNION, this deliberately vague orientation was confirmed to me by staff at City Life during a follow up-mail in April 2021.

near the downtown city proper. In the mid 2000's, City Life purchased property near the

Grand Boulevard area of Houston. This property was previously an architectural firm;

after extensive renovation, the space was transformed into its present-day look. This

includes a children's and youth day care, a suite of staff offices and meeting rooms, and

storage rooms that can be repurposed to host community gatherings. On-premises audio-

visual recordings of pre-sermon videos and community advertisements are also held in

these rooms. In addition, the church website boasts a trifecta of social media including

Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram, and the website also lists profiles of the 14-member

staff, which includes six women at the time of this writing.

City Life hosts three weekly services on Sundays at 8:30 a.m., 10 a.m., and 11:30

a.m. The worship space is similar to that of Brazos Fellowship in that it makes use of

large overhead screens and lights atop a small stage for musicians and pastoral

addresses. Additional audio-visual equipment such as podiums and lecterns are wheeled

on stage, when necessary, by stagehands. Seating arrangements are arranged in three

sections of rows with two center aisles. A full suite of audio-visual equipment is located

at the back of the space and includes both sound and light equipment as well as

computers for in-house editing.

During the time in which field work was conducted, City Life did not video-

record sermons; only audio recordings were taken. Recordings are edited in house by the

church's audio-visual team for uploading in podcast format and are available through the

website as well as through City Life's proprietary mobile app. However, due to the

Covid-19 pandemic, City Life now records its sermons and uploads them to YouTube

each week, and this was confirmed via a website check in the spring of 2021. Regarding

demographics, City Life is similar to Brazos Fellowship in that congregants appear to be

predominantly young, and many with small children. However, I did observe there were

more minorities and people of color in attendance than at Brazos Fellowship, and this

likely because Houston is one of the largest, most racially diverse cities in the US.

Similarly, many congregants were quite well dressed in pressed shirts and khakis,

some with expensive jewelry and designer-brand handbags. This indication of a

relatively prosperous congregation was supported by the number of higher priced

vehicles in the church parking lot, including several Audis and BMWs, as well as more

moderately priced vehicles such as GMCs, Fords, and Toyotas. All told, I conducted

participant-observation at City Life at a total of six Sunday services spread out over all

three sermon times. In addition, interviews were conducted with six members of City

Life's pastoral and tech team staff, and photographs were taken in accordance with the

above-mentioned ethnography guide (see Appendix A).

Eccelsia

Larger than the preceding three churches, Ecclesia is a dual-campus church

founded in 1999 with locations in the downtown core of Houston as well as the Westside

district.[5] Led by executive pastor Caleb Sela, Ecclesia is an independent and liberal

church with a mission focus centered on family and outreach. Unlike Brazos Fellowship,

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[5] A warehouse in the Lindale district was chosen as an additional location but after a permit
denial is now rented out to external firms for production space.

UNION, or City Life Church, Pastor Sela describes Ecclesia as part of the progressive and emerging church movement rather than evangelical. Its website, for example, lists a "beliefs" section that emphasizes a left-of-center, holistic, and missional view of Christianity rather than the more streamlined mainline evangelical worldview of Brazos Fellowship. However, a closer reading of Ecclesia's core beliefs reveals that while they brand themselves as part of the emerging church movement, they nevertheless exhibit Hankins' (2008) essentials of evangelicalism, and for this reason the church warrants inclusion in the present study. For example, the church lists a series of terms on its website, including "we believe in God the Father," "we believe in Jesus Christ Our Lord" and that he "was crucified, died, and was buried." The church also states that it is "a missional community, serving our King [and] one another."

Due to Ecclesia's size and dual-location setup, its operations are headed by 10 executive pastors, two leadership (junior) pastors, six children and student coordinators as well as 16 support staff, including two technology directors, a music coordinator, and a filmmaker. Worship times at the downtown campus are Saturdays at 5:00 p.m. and Sundays at 9 a.m., 11a.m., and 5 p.m.; and at the smaller Westside campus, Sundays at 9 a.m. and 11 a.m. The church utilizes a full suite of social media including Vimeo and Apple iTunes in addition to the standard trifecta of Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram.

The worship space at Ecclesia is constructed inside a former art gallery with an adjoining fair-trade coffee shop, which uses a sliding scale for meal prices as a service to the local homeless community. The church space itself is a rectangular room with pews arranged in a hollow square format—a unique architectural feature differentiating

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Ecclesia from this study's other field sites. As with the preceding three churches, there is a stage in the front of the house with the audio-visual booth directly opposite. The unique hollow square seating arrangement exists because Ecclesia's worship space has a second and much smaller stage in the center of the room. This raised wooden platform is illuminated by two large, square flood lamps and a small glass table used for pastoral addresses. The adjacent stage is used only for musicians.

Services at Ecclesia are moderately mediatized with large LCD projectors, multi-colored lights, cameras, and a digital sound system. Only podcasts are available on the church website; however, video sermons are available through social media and are of high production value. Ecclesia is the largest of the four churches that I visited, and as interview insights will show, the moderately digitally mediated space is a conscious design strategy influenced by a number of instrumental factors, most pertinent of which is a need to brand the church as inclusive of all faiths and walks of life.

Regarding demographics, Ecclesia's congregants appear to vary widely in terms of age, race, dress, and deportment, likely reflecting the multi-faith applicability of its operational template. For example, I observed people of various ages in attendance, ranging from very young children and their parents to the elderly. Similarly, I observed a mixture of White, Black, Hispanic, and Asian congregants in attendance with great variation in dress and deportment. The mixture of vehicles in the parking lot also reflected the church's appeal to wide ranging ages and demographics. As with the previous three churches, the similarity of Ecclesia's operational template makes it a suitable location for inclusion in the present study.

While I did not visit Ecclesia's Westside campus due to time constraints with field work, I conducted participant observation at the church's main campus during two weekly services: one from the pews and the second from within the audio-visual booth. In addition to this participant observation, I also conducted interviews with three members of its pastoral and tech team: two of whom are paid staff and the third a volunteer. Two of these interviews were conducted on premises following participant observation, with the third conducted over Skype the following week with a member of the church's senior leadership board.

Summary of Methods

The field work component of this dissertation involved a series of ethnographic case studies using a sample of four non-denominational evangelical churches in Texas: one in the Bryan-College Station area and three in the Houston metropolitan area. Convenience sampling was used to select these churches, as each church has specific characteristics which make them ideal for answering the study's research questions. These characteristics are type (independent and with characteristics supporting Hankins' [2008] core tenets of evangelicalism), size (500 or fewer congregants in regular attendance each weekend), media use (each utilizes similar media in its worship services and orchestrates these media in a similar manner), and architecture (each church operates within a closed, cinema-style space with a minimum of religious paraphernalia and branding).

Observation criteria for this study were mandated by a desire to understand how and why pastors and tech team members orchestrate hot and cool media to amplify

religious rhetoric and propaganda, and how the logology of this rhetoric allows churches to proselytize large numbers of mass individuals with relative ease and efficiency. The study's research design involved repeat visits to each field site as a participant-observer, combined with in-depth interviews with members of the pastoral and tech teams at each church as well as a visual content analysis of media used by each church. Twenty-two interviews in total were conducted over a three-and-a-half-month period during the summer of 2019, and each interview ran for approximately 45 minutes to an hour.

Interviews were conducted on the premises of each church, save for the final interview conducted over Skype due to time and scheduling constraints. Interviews were audio recorded and then transcribed using Rev.com. Interview transcripts were subjected to critical discourse analysis (CDA) to reveal the motivations and intentions of church pastors and staff for using orchestrated media in support of their proselytization and persuasion efforts. In addition, sample sermons at each church corresponding to dates and times of site visits were also examined using Burke's Pentadic ratios and logology to extract key thematic elements supporting interview statements regarding mass audience persuasion.

Finally, a simple visual content analysis of the various media present in the worship space of each church was also conducted. This was accomplished by photographing these media and their layout, as well as video recording audience interactions to media orchestration. Photographs and videos were then coded using an identifying variable to differentiate the various media forms from one another.

Following coding, the photographs were analyzed to understand the spatial orientation of media forms in relation to one another and the worship space of each church. In conjunction with data gathered through participant-observation and interviews, a basic visual content analysis of church media allowed me to gain a better understanding of their operation, specifically, how they are strategically used to facilitate mass persuasion through the orchestration and amplification of religious rhetoric.

These methods allowed me to gain a more nuanced understanding of how the constraints of technique in mass society, which emphasize efficient information transfer as a means-to-an-end, are reified in the performance of evangelical persuasion as propaganda to align mass individuals with specific terms of order and facilitate their salvation. In addition, cataloguing the various hot and cool media forms that evangelical rely on to orchestrate this performance allowed me to discover that, regardless of any major theological differences between churches (which I cannot verify as I did not collect data of this nature), not only is their rhetoric highly similar but so is the makeup and structure of their operational template.

Now that the study's methodology has been described, the next chapter will provide a detailed rhetorical analysis of a sample of sermons from each church. Specifically, Chapter Four will examine how the rhetoric of these sermons is designed to facilitate an adherence to the evangelical terms of order or value system via a dramatism structure that is highly similar across Brazos Fellowship, UNION, City Life, and Ecclesia. Following a rhetorical analysis of sermons in Chapter Four, Chapter Five will examine the various technological and architectural elements of each church and how

the orchestration of these elements is designed to efficiently funnel congregants off the street and into the church; there, they are subjected to sermons (detailed in Chapter Four) designed to facilitate mass audience persuasion. Just as with sermons, the media orchestration and amplification at Brazos Fellowship, UNION, City Life, and Ecclesia are highly similar across the board and representative of a consistent operational template.

CHAPTER IV A DRAMATISTIC ANALYSIS OF THE EVANGELICAL CHURCH
EXPERIENCE

Throughout this dissertation, I have argued that the success of evangelicals in maintaining their public visibility and religious vitality, relative to their mainline counterparts, is owing to the technique of their propaganda enterprise and the efficiencies with which this enterprise leads to participants feeling identified with a particular church congregation so they continue to attend services. Part of this propaganda can be understood through what Kenneth Burke calls "dramatism," or the approach by which one looks at any endeavor, institution, or practice in terms of drama and literature. For Burke, one can appropriately view the evangelical service as a stage play in which the participants are also players. The role of the pastor and the institution is to create a dramatic stage on which people feel they are participants in a larger whole, that they belong to a community identified by common properties and aspiring to the achievement of common goals.

Rhetoric, for Burke, can be understood as a certain strategic telling of stories whereby people feel identified with one another in a common endeavor and divided against competing groups or interests. Using Burke as a theoretical framework, I examine the rhetoric of excerpts from evangelical sermons I attended as a participant-observer during field work and describe how these sermons facilitate the linguistic process of evangelical persuasion. The sermon excerpts I examine were found by

accessing and transcribing sermons from the digital archives of Brazos Fellowship, UNION, City Life, and Ecclesia on dates and times corresponding with my field work.[6] The most foundational aspect of dramatism is what Burke calls the "pentad," a way of looking at human action in the context of five essential terms—act, scene, agent, purpose, and agency. When narrating a drama, a storyteller must select only a few of these terms at a time, deemphasizing certain relationships and emphasizing others. The central tension in any story will be represented by one or more "ratios," which are two of these terms set in a causal or determining relationship. For example, a "scene-act" ratio will tell the story as if the scene in which an action takes place determines the quality of that action, whereas an "agent-act" ratio will explain the quality of the act based on the character of the agent. As we shall see, despite differences in their doctrine, evangelical churches have a remarkable convergence in terms of the preferred ratios they use to attract people to their congregations.

Complementary to Burke's dramatistic perspective is his method of "logology," an approach to the study of words (and, therefore, rhetoric and propaganda) that uses the study of "words about God" as its model. In other words, whereas theology is the study of words about God as a means of knowing its object—that is, God—logology looks at theology to learn lessons about how language itself works. For Burke, therefore,

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[6] Once exception to this is UNION, which does not archive each sermon. In this case, I made use of a social media blast delivered by the church's executive pastor.

theology is a kind of terminology or vocabulary that exemplifies the workings of language in its purest form. Consequently, Burke borrows terms and structures from religious language to study politics, journalism, science, morality, and many other disciplines. For him, any story we tell inevitably uses "God terms," binds us into "covenants," organizes us through "terms of order," sets us in opposition to "disorder" and "counter-covenants," motivates us to forms of "perfection," creates "guilt," imposes upon us the burden of "victimage," and promises "redemption." As with the pentad, therefore, we see in evangelical churches another convergence in terms of logology: which is to say the strategies of persuasion or rhetoric used to recruit and maintain members of their congregation. Even while their doctrines of faith or denominations may differ, they tend to use almost identical rhetorical persuasive strategies because they fit the techniques of their church design.

At the root of this rhetoric is evangelical pastors' strategic use of easily understood symbols to provide congregants with images of the moral satisfaction that comes from making adjustments to their learned behaviors or patterns of experience. However, while certain symbols may be universal, the way in which mass individuals identify with them is often not. Burke describes these differences as modes of experience and argues that it is the task of rhetors to unite these varied modes of experience under unifying titular headings so that mass audiences respond to these symbols in a consistent manner as universal patterns of experience. Significantly, the images of moral satisfaction experienced by congregants in making adjustments to their patterns of experience and successfully adhering to them are delivered in narrative form by pastors

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through a variety of linguistic techniques constructed around the use of positive, dialectic, and ultimate (or 'God') terms.

However, in utilizing these techniques and drawing upon easily understood symbols, evangelical pastors also create guilt in their congregants for inevitably failing to fully honor the terms of their commitment or covenant with God. It is this addictive cycle of guilt and redemption that compels mass audiences to repeatedly expose themselves to the evangelical propaganda enterprise in an endless quest for redemption. The human-centered rhetorical drama of evangelical churches, then, is a continual tale of hope and redemption, delivered in storybook form each week by pastors through the elaborate presentation of religious material with the aid of entertainment media.

Dramatism

Human existence, no matter how mundane, nevertheless contains significant elements of drama. For Burke, humans express their motivations through action and motion; by attending to the language (rhetoric) used to create this action, we are able to discern what these motives are, even if they are not immediately apparent. Action, then, refers to a human being in conscious, purposive motion, whereas mere motion occurring without prior motivation implies a lack of purpose and lack of morality and is therefore of least concern during a rhetorical analysis (Burke, 1969). What is of concern during a rhetorical analysis of purposive, human drama is Burke's "pentad" and its five unique elements, for it is the pentad that forms the basis of Burke's conceptualization of dramatism.

The pentad views human motion through the lens of a stage play, and like all plays, it has a number of identifiable constituent elements. Burke labels these elements as Act, Scene, Agent, Agency, and Purpose and groups them together in a way similar to how journalists group together the five elements of a story: who, what, why, when, and how. With Act, Burke asks us to analyze the action of a rhetorical situation: what exactly is occurring here? With Scene, we are asked to examine the setting of the overall story in which the act takes place. The Agents are the major players and Agency refers to the means or instruments utilized by Agents to commit their various acts. Purpose refers to the ulterior motivations of the major players who have committed themselves to action in a particular setting or scene via their agency.

According to Burke, each of the five elements of the pentad is present in any dramatistic situation. However, it is the combined influence or ratio of these elements that is of particular interest to Burke, for by listing the order and prevalence of pentadic ratios, a range of motivations or intentions of a rhetor can be discerned. Regarding the present study, the value of Burke's pentad becomes clear when applied to evangelical sermons: it is a valuable tool for analyzing the varied and complex behaviors of human beings engaged in action.

Accordingly, I examined the rhetoric of four evangelical sermons corresponding to the dates and times of my field work. After randomly selecting one sermon from each church to represent the dramatism of the evangelical worldview, I had these sermons transcribed using Rev.com, the same transcription service I used during my interviews with pastors and technology team members. Each of these sermons ran for

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approximately 35 to 45 minutes, save for that of UNION which took the form of a

seven-minute impromptu web address from executive pastor Matthias.[7]

Evangelical Ratios

Looking at evangelical sermons from the perspective of Burke's dramatism

reveals a number of interesting rhetorical elements. The sermons themselves can be

likened to a three-act play that begins and ends in less than an hour and in which the

pastor is the sole actor on stage. Sermons begin after the worship music has ended and

the band has left the stage, when the executive pastor of each church steps before a

microphone and begins his weekly address. Just as sermons follow a typical end-to-end

format and performance, they also exhibit common pentadic ratios. Significantly, these

ratios are consistent across each church, and their routine appearance in each sermon

follows a familiar pattern.

In the first act, the pastor begins his sermon with an innocuous story of an

empirical situation with which all those present in the congregation can identify as

having experienced for themselves. These dramatistic elements allow the pastor to lay

out an inside-outside dichotomy in which the world outside of the church is one of pain,

suffering, and disappointment while the world inside of the church is one of salvation.

The ratios present in this first act are typically Scene-Agent and Act-Agent. The Scene-

Agent ratio describes a type of person (Agent) feeling dissatisfied, stressed, and unhappy

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[7] The reason for this discrepancy in length at UNION is that, at the time of my field work, the church did not provide recordings of its weekly sermons; however, this has since been rectified due to the Covid-19 pandemic.

because of their day-to-day life in the secular world without God. In this world, people often find themselves sinning (Act), sometimes without conscious thought, in a way that over time constitutes a common type of everyday "sinner" (Agent), perhaps not a criminal or outwardly terrible person, but someone who has clearly gone down the wrong path.

An interesting example of Scene-Agent ratios is found in UNION's web address, which began with Pastor Matthias discussing an upcoming Fourth of July weekend:

> *Hey y'all, I wanted to share a few thoughts today. First and foremost, I wanted to get everybody ready. It's Fourth of July weekend and I know a lot of us are down in the dumps a little bit, going through different emotions. Let me tell you that if you're struggling with anger, if you're struggling with depression, with loneliness and isolation, you're not alone. You are not alone.*

While brief, Matthias' utterance is a clear indication of the ratios of Scene-Act for a number of reasons. By situating his address in the context of a familiar family weekend holiday, he makes use of Scene by distancing himself from outright theological discussions and instead presents himself as a sympathetic leader who knows that holidays are not always enjoyable for everyone and that, somewhere out there in his audience, mass individuals are going through hard times. The holiday weekend, supposed to be one of joy, is instead cause for loneliness, isolation, and anger: the common feelings of the Agent not active in the church. By stressing and repeating the words "you are not alone, you are not alone," Matthias's utterance also reveals they are simply part of a common group of people who suffer outside of Christ.

Another cause for suffering is the voluntary behavior of the people themselves. In the Act-Agent ratio, they are not passive victims of a secular culture but are victims of

their own conscious sin. At Brazos Fellowship, for example, Pastor Noah pointed out the

consequences of straying from the path outlined by the Apostle Paul:

> *Be careful where you step. In other words, your actions carry with them*
> *consequences. We live in a cause-and-effect universe. This is the way God made*
> *it, so pay attention. Don't be foolish about this. Don't deceive yourself into*
> *thinking you can cheat the system [because] your decisions have ramifications.*
> *So be very careful in the way that you live.*

In deliberately mentioning the Apostle Paul and then warning his congregation not to be

foolish in their decisions and to be "very careful in the way that you live" (Act), Noah

strategically invokes the Act-Agent ratio in a manner that cleverly transitions the tone of

his rhetoric toward a more philosophical reading of empirical situations that threaten the

moral and spiritual wellbeing of his congregants. Each sin we enact is a contributing

cause to the effect of a sinful, fallen character. We are in danger of destroying ourselves.

During my site visits to City Life Church, I discovered that Pastor John utilized

similar ratios in his rhetoric and in a consistent manner. And while I made multiple site

visits to City Life, one sermon stands out in particular because of the interesting story

told by Pastor John and how he strategically integrated Act-Agent ratios into it. Similar

to Matthias and his mentioning a Fourth of July cookout, John referenced another

universal experience his listeners can readily identify with—being a child and fearing

the wrath of one's parents as a consequence of an ill-thought-out decision, the

ramifications of which have caused hurt to others. Just like Pastor Matthias, John

distances himself, initially at least, from making any sort of theological connection in the

opening moments of his storytelling and instead situates his address in a childhood

experience that everyone present can attest to:

Do you remember growing up and hearing these words: wait until your Dad gets home? If you did not experience that I'm questioning your childhood a little bit…[because] there's something about that phrase that wreaks fear in the hearts of many children. I would say it's a good, healthy fear, a reverential fear, because there's something when you hear that phrase where you go "oh my gosh why did I do that?" I can't tell you how many times I remember hearing that after I popped off to my Mom and said or did something dumb.

In this case, the sinful Act is represented by "popping off" to his mom, a prideful and disrespectful behavior that, if left unchecked, would lead to a familiar sinful Agent disrespectful of God. Similar to Pastor Matthias' use of Scene-Agent, the purpose of these ratios in evangelical rhetoric is to set the scene for what is to come by calling upon a universal experience or emotion with which all agents present in the audience can identify, for it is likely that they themselves have experienced the act of feeling loneliness or anger or fear at some point in their lives.

In the second act of evangelical sermons, pastors frequently make use of a Purpose-Act ratio whereby people make a choice to pursue Christ (Act) because they realize, often through some event in their lives or some type of call, that God has a plan for their lives (Purpose). By way of a dramatistic narrative, congregants are told that God wants them to continually question why they are suffering and what they can do about it. Significantly, and as established in act one, the dramatism of evangelical sermons is built upon an outside-inside dichotomy in which the world outside the church is a world of pain, suffering, and disappointment while the world inside the church is one of salvation. God's purpose now draws them inside the church, removing them from the secular scene that causes loneliness and disappointment.

At Brazos Fellowship, for example, Pastor Noah called upon the Purpose-Act

ratio in the second act of his sermon by arguing for the importance of establishing moral

and spiritual guardrails to direct and protect against committing to sinful acts:

> *I want to just say to you that guard rails, the concept of them, isn't new or original. The Apostle Paul was talking about this a couple thousand years ago in the New Testament… he offers us some wisdom, some guidelines, some guardrails that could be very helpful to us. He says, and let's read the highlighted words here together, "be very careful then how you live."*

Noah's deliberate mentioning of the Apostle Paul talking about guardrails "a couple

thousand years ago" serves a valuable purpose in his rhetoric, for it provides congregants

with rules for living and acting. Taken on their own, the guardrails are part of the Scene

that keeps our lives on track (Act), but they are also signs of God's purpose for our lives.

We first have to realize God's purpose before we can follow the rules of the guardrails.

But how do we find that purpose? To answer this question, Pastor Silas at Ecclesia

references driving down the highway and ponders why there is so much pain, suffering,

and disappointment in the world and what it all means:

> *…as I was asking all of these questions, I realized that these weren't really the questions that I was asking at all. Because I never really doubted that there was a God. I knew that pain was just part of the world and for a lot of different reasons. The deeper question that I was asking was, if there is a world of pain and disappointment and suffering, what was my role in it? What was God calling me to do?*

In reciting this personal anecdote, Silas philosophically brings up the question of

purpose or more specifically, what God's purpose is for him and what he wants him to

do. For example, by mentioning that he never doubted there is a God, Silas confirms his

belief that God has placed him on this earth for a specific purpose but that he doesn't

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quite understand what this purpose is. Similarly, by referencing a world of pain and

disappointment and suffering, Silas calls upon Act through his questioning of "what [is]

God calling me to do?": another way of asking, "God, what sort of person do you want

me to be?"

In the third act of their sermons, evangelical pastors provide the dramatistic

answers to these questions. They invert the ratios from act one and draw upon Act-Agent

and Agent-Scene ratios to provide congregants with a roadmap away from all their

problems. This occurs when pastors introduce into their rhetoric specific textual

elements culled from scripture and highlight these elements as being morally and

spiritually significant. They then expand upon these elements, using them to illustrate

how the key to living a fulfilled life is making the choice to give oneself to God and

Jesus as Agents of Christ. Significantly, pastors emphasize that when this choice has

been made—when congregants have formed a sacred covenant with God and Jesus and

agreed to conduct themselves in a manner conducive to the laws of scripture—then

better days are ahead and suffering is behind them.

In evangelical sermons, setting up this roadmap involves the use of the Act-

Agent ratio to stress the importance of choosing Christ in order to become a renewed

individual. For example, the final moments of Pastor John's sermon at City Life calls

upon both ratios by saying:

> *One day, man, we're going to be looking forward to renewal and it's going to be*
> *amazing. We're going to be working and serving God and doing things and*
> *enjoying life. It's going to be amazing, but all for the Glory of God and in the*
> *presence of God. That's the story of the bible. It's an epic tale. And it's beautiful.*

What we see here is the invocation of God as an agent of change promising renewal, and the act or choice of congregants (expressed as "we") to give themselves to him by serving him. We see also that God as an agent of change is responsible for changing the scene or life of those who follow him. The crux of the sermon excerpt is in Pastor John's second utterance when he says, "we're going to be working and serving God" and that "it's going to be amazing, but all for the Glory of God and the presence of God." Again, this speaks to Burke's Agent-Scene ratio with God being the force for change and with the end result a peaceful, serene existence in the worldly scene He has created.

At UNION, Pastor Matthias also rounded out the third act of his sermon by calling upon Act-Agent and Agent-Scene ratios. Just as Pastor John reiterates how the Glory of God leads to an amazing renewal or scene change, Matthias also urges his congregants to trust in God that there would be "good days" ahead:

> *My prayer, my hope, is for you in that is that we are IN Christ. In Christ means that we are like-minded, and like spirited. When we are in Christ, we are Christ-like. My hope and prayer is for you to be that. There are tough days ahead and that's okay. There are more good days though because we together we are IN Christ.*

What we see in this excerpt is an emphasis on being in Christ and Christ-like, which is a metaphor for the act of giving oneself fully to the Lord (God). The Act-Act ratio explains the moment of becoming "IN Christ" through one's willing choice while the Agent-Scene ratio explains how the collective Agent of the church, that is everyone acting together IN Christ, will produce a scene that replaces the secular, fallen scene in the first act. Instead of a place of loneliness and fear and anger, we will have a scene that

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promises "good days" because everyone will be "together" IN Christ.

Significantly, Brazos Fellowship's Paster Noah ends his own sermon on a similar note by describing the importance of committing oneself to God and following through with this commitment (covenant), trusting that he will begin a new chapter in their lives by erecting guardrails to guide and protect them. And at Ecclesia, Pastor Silas urges his congregants to "draw near" to God and Jesus and place their faith that he will heal, redeem, and restore everything that is broken.

While expressed by four different pastors at four separate churches, these brief sermon excerpts do two important things. First, the rhetoric of these sermons serves to enable pastors to establish an outside-inside dichotomy between the empirical world of the profane and the spiritual world of God and church. This dichotomy is expressed in narrative form through the establishment of a number of pentadic ratios in three individual acts. The purpose of establishing these ratios is to situate the church as a path to salvation: a conduit to God through which mass individuals can escape from their tedious lives of pain, suffering, and disappointment by following the rules established by God in scripture and codified by Jesus Christ who died on the cross for the sins of all mankind.

For evangelicals, then, salvation is expressed in the compare-and-contrast of Burke's pentadic ratios. These provide windows into the inner motivations of pastors who use sermons to group together mass individuals in the rhetorical performance of collective scripture recitation as a strategic means to an end. But while useful in helping

to establish the inner motivations of evangelical pastors and what they desire to achieve with mass audiences, Burke's pentadic ratios are unable to provide an explanation for how this actually occurs. How does the narrative of evangelical rhetoric (propaganda) actually facilitate the salvation of mass audiences? For this we must turn to logology.

Logology

While the pentad provides an invaluable tool for discerning the motivations of rhetors, it does not provide a realistic guide for how rhetors use language to facilitate action. For that, we must turn to logology since for Burke, dramatism is to motivation as logology is to action; it is the study of words using the language of theology as its model. For Burke, all language is rhetoric, and at the root of language is its symbolic use to induce identification and action. Logology therefore borrows from theology certain phrases and terms and applies them to the study of various linguistic endeavors to discern how rhetoric is used to persuade mass individuals to commit to the rhetor's desired course of action.

Before detailing the linguistic foundations of logology, however, a caveat must be clearly expressed: in addressing the logology of evangelical churches, I do not and cannot make any claims as to the theological worldview of these churches. Rather, in using logology to examine the rhetoric of these churches, I am instead focusing on the rhetorical strategies (propaganda) employed by these churches to induce cooperation toward a desired course of action: the spiritual and moral salvation of mass audiences. As will be made clear in this chapter, while operating essentially as independent business enterprises, each of the four churches featured in the present study makes use of

highly similar persuasive strategies; just as the dramatism of each church is similar, so too is their logology.

For Burke, at the root of this logology are five interconnected rhetorical characteristics: God terms, Dialectical terms, Positive terms, Guilt and Victimage, and finally, Redemption. Each of these strategies plays a key role in evangelical rhetoric; together, they form the basis of evangelical propaganda that churches use to facilitate the moral and spiritual salvation of mass audiences through their identification and agreement with what Burke labels terms of order. The overarching goal of evangelical rhetoric is an adherence by mass audiences to these terms of order in a binding agreement known as a covenant, and it is the task of pastors to use rhetoric to persuade audiences to accept the terms of the covenant and to punish themselves when they fail to honor them.

At the center of this theology is God, as God is the universal cause of all things on earth, both material and spiritual. For Burke, God also appears in language; however, in logology this appearance is not conceptualized in any theological sense but rather, as a universal binding principle which he labels a God term. In logology, a God term is a linguistic term or titular heading that groups together a progressive series of smaller, dialectical terms into what Burke labels a term of order. God terms are any words that symbolically represent a unifying principle atop a hierarchy and therefore exist in the realm of purpose and destiny. In scripture for example, the word God is used to symbolically represent the universal being of good, while the word Satan is used to

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present the universal being of evil. By viewing both God and Satan as ultimate terms, we see that below each term is a sequential hierarchy of what Burke calls dialectical terms. Lacking any empirical referents, dialectical terms are value-laden words in dialectical opposition to their counterparts and that exist in the realm of action and idea.

Dialectical terms are also used in scripture to signify the legitimacy of one value hierarchy over another, such as in Hosea 6:6: "I desire mercy, not sacrifice." Dialectical terms, however, draw their strength only in opposition to another, which is why they are met with equally potent dialectical terms of a negative nature, such as John 3:8: "Whoever makes a practice of sinning is of the devil, for the devil has been sinning from the beginning" with the dialectic being sin, the opposite of virtue. But while dialectical terms draw their strength in logology from their equally potent and value-laden opposites, they lack any empirical referent with which to ground them; they are simply concepts and nothing more. This is why Burke also organizes words into what he calls positive terms or words that have a sensible, tangible existence. Stemming from the realm of motion and perception, Burke's positive terms help to ground dialectical terms in the concrete world of the real, so that audiences can identify them and simplify their grouping into a term of order or logical sequence of hierarchical values that the rhetor wishes them to identify with.

Again, however, the appearance of these terms in evangelical language cannot be used to make claims regarding their theological importance and are instead indicative of strategic use in propaganda.

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For example, a pastor motivated to make claims about the sins of alcohol indulgence might construct a dramatistic tale of universal experience that his audience can readily identify with by grounding his tale in positive terms. If he were a particularly youthful pastor at a church frequented by university students, he might begin his sermon by asking: "how many of you have gone out on a Friday night and drank too much wine? How many of you have drank so much wine that the next morning, you awaken with a hangover and no memory of what you did last night? Well, that hangover is your body's way of telling you that you've sinned and that hole in your memory is God's way of reminding you than you can do better. Remember, wine plays a central role in the bible but as Jesus himself would tell you if you were alive today, moderation is key." In this hypothetical example, the wine producing the hangover in question, brought upon by overindulgence and careless decision-making, serves as a positive term to remind the audience of the dialectic of sin and virtue seen through the eyes of irresponsibility versus rational, moral behavior.

But even more important than the dialectic, however, is the use of specific language in what Burke labels the cycle of guilt and victimage, with its dual processes of mortification and scapegoating used to purge oneself of the temptations of the counter-covenant. For Burke, the terms of order of his logology, with its heady concoction of God and dialectic terms, are problematic in that they are essentially ideals, and all ideals are perfect. However, no human being can ever fully honor the terms of their commitment to Burke's terms of order; when this inevitably happens, it is the task of rhetors to induce guilt in mass audiences by way of victimage. In an evangelical context,

victimage occurs when pastors shun and scold mass audiences through rhetoric for failing to be virtuous and for falling, however briefly, into sin. When victimage occurs, pastors present mass audiences with two options: they can mortify themselves and symbolically kill off the aspects of the self that were responsible for their poor decision making, or they can scapegoat an external body such as Satan, thus purging themselves of sin and undergoing a symbolic process of redemption in which they reaffirm their commitment to God and Jesus—only to begin the cycle again.

But what does this process really look like? How do evangelical pastors strategically use rhetoric (propaganda) to persuade mass individuals to align themselves with the terms of their order and symbolically force these individuals to undergo repetitive cycles of guilt and redemption in an effort to purge them of their sins and realign them with their path to salvation? To explain this, I once again turn to my samples of sermons given by the executive pastors at Brazos Fellowship, UNION, City Life, and Ecclesia obtained during my field work. Significantly, while I cannot make any claims as to the theology of these churches, the following excerpts demonstrate that despite any theological differences, the churches are logologically highly similar in terms of how they disseminate their propaganda.

God Terms in Evangelical Rhetoric

In Christian theology, God exists at the center of the universe as the creator of all things. In evangelical rhetoric, Burke's God-terms or universal terms play a similar role in that they serve as titular headings to the linguistic terms of order that outline the evangelical path to moral and spiritual salvation. As I stated previously, however, while

I cannot make any claims as to the theology of Brazos Fellowship, UNION, City Life, or Ecclesia, their sermons nevertheless encapsulate the motivations of their pastors and their rhetorical strategies for orienting mass audiences toward an alignment with their worldview by giving cause to the necessity for forming a covenant or binding agreement with God through language. That is, each of the four churches I visited during my field work utilized God terms in their sermons to illustrate the moral and spiritual legitimacy of their term of order in which God serves as the guiding light and symbol of salvation.

An excellent example of the use of God terms in evangelical rhetoric as a rhetorical unifier of worldview comes from Brazos Fellowship during one of the final sermons that I attended. In this sermon, Executive Pastor Noah was beginning a new sermon series, aptly entitled Guardrails. The subject matter of this series was the establishment of moral boundaries in such areas of life as finance, relationships, and spirituality, both with the greater church community and, ultimately, with God. As I soon found out, Brazos Fellowship's Guardrails series was aptly titled, as following the four-song opening set and the band vacating the stage with their equipment, a pair of stagehands wheeled out a section of an actual guardrail of the sort seen on the sides of highways near embankments.

The guardrail in question had clearly been cut from a section of used highway material and I distinctly remember feeling as if I were witness to a scene change in a dramatic play rather than a religious sermon when the prop was wheeled on stage. The sermon itself followed the typical dramatistic three-act script in which God is introduced as central player during the second act. However, what makes this example so significant

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as a demonstration of God terms in evangelical rhetoric is how Pastor Noah wove these

terms into his sermon and used them to illustrate the necessity of obeying God (and

Jesus) as the first step toward forgiveness for sinful, regrettable behavior:

> *The New Testament teaches us that when you become a follower of Jesus Christ, you trust Jesus for the forgiveness of sin, that what he did on the cross was to pay the penalty for our sins. You receive that forgiveness, and you place him as the Lord in the leadership place of your life so that the spirit of God comes to reside within you, to help you to make wise choices for your life. But you've got to ask for it. You've got to say, "God, help me to be attuned to your spirit. Let me listen to your voice of wisdom. And as I spend time in your word, convict my heart over the areas of my life that need to change and let me begin to adopt guard rails."*

The underlying purpose or motivation behind Pastor Noah's use of the Purpose-Act ratio

is to illustrate for his audience that God forgives all sins, but only the sins of those who

obey him by forming a binding agreement or covenant. In this example, the reference to

Jesus on the cross dying at the command of his father places God at the apex of the

Christian term of order in that he chose to sacrifice his own son to symbolize penance

for the sins of mankind. This illustrates that the material world is fraught with spiritual

and moral danger and that only God is capable of forgiving us for wrongdoing. A close

textual reading of the sermon also reveals that when Noah says "that the spirit of God

comes to reside within you to help you make wise choices" his reference to God, or

more specifically the spirit of God (a universal term), represents the spark or light that

transforms the individual, absolving them of their sins as symbolized by Jesus and

placing them on the path toward the formation of guardrails that help protect against sin

via a covenant.

In addition, Noah's repeat use of the word sin also serves as a God-term or universal term, but one identified with the counter-covenant of Satan. In this brief excerpt then, we see the rhetorical use of God as a universal term atop the evangelical terms of order, with the underlying motivation behind the story being that all individuals are capable of both sin and redemption at the feet of a loving God. A loving God, however, will forgive all sins only if individuals take a willing step to accept God into their lives; only then will the spirit or light of God reside within them and illuminate a path to salvation.

The repeated use of these logological God-terms was also present in sermons at City Life, UNION, and Ecclesia. For example, during one of the earlier sermons I attended at City Life, Executive Pastor John invoked the use of God-terms in his rhetoric when he called upon audiences in a similar manner as Pastor Noah to accept God and Jesus into their lives to absolve themselves of sinful behaviors such as greed and other such animalistic desires. Just as Pastor Noah called to his audience to take that first step toward salvation by inviting God into their lives, Pastor John did a version of the same:

> *Jesus says, "you're wanting life but your pursuit of it is pursuing more and more of yourself in your own pleasures. And you'll never get it that way because that was the problem with the fall in the first place: doing things your own way." And Jesus says," you want to follow me, I'm not even doing things my way, I only do what the father tells me. And ultimately, I will go to a cross. I am going to be whipped by a God that's also bringing wine. I'm going to be whipped and scourged because I'm going to show you when you actually give your life and you live for something else, you'll find life."*

While Pastor John is not nearly as charismatic a speaker as Noah, and the rhetoric of his sermons was rather difficult to follow at times due to his often chaotic,

freewheeling style of preaching, he nevertheless made ample use of God-terms throughout to provide direction and justification for a particular worldview: the evangelical term of order. For example, his reference to the fall of man serves to motivate his audience to be cognizant that the pursuit of pleasure and self-indulgence results in sin, while the sacrifice of oneself to Jesus, just as Jesus was whipped by a merciful God who also brings wine (to provide for those who follow him), results in something greater than the self and more meaningful: everlasting life. In this example, Pastor John's use of the God-terms fall and "I only do what the father (God) tells me" reveals the underlying motivations of his rhetoric: true salvation can only be found by giving oneself to God, just as Jesus did.

Both Brazos Fellowship and City Life made repeated use of God terms in their rhetoric to illustrate the necessity of following God to secure salvation, and UNION and Ecclesia did more of the same. Significantly, while the overarching themes of their sermons were slightly different to reflect the various cultural orientations and branding of their church, the underlying structure of their rhetoric is essentially the same. For example, UNION is predominantly an outreach-oriented church and branded to appeal to mass individuals experiencing the pain of homelessness, addiction, and poverty, and to those for whom the world has made life difficult. This is reflected in the rhetoric of Pastor Matthias who, in his July 4th weekend web address, said that:

> *Many of you that are from UNION know that we do something called Freedom…we have something called Freedom where you can find freedom from things that hold us back. And you know, this past week a song was released by Kanye West called Wash Us in The Blood. In the very beginning it says: "the lion prowls around looking for someone to devour" and I believe that this is what's happening in our world right now.*

Matthias' emotive web address is decidedly more visceral than the more tranquil rhetoric of Noah and John, but it nevertheless serves a similar purpose. By pointing to the empirical world and labelling it a place of sin and danger while at the same offering up freedom to his audience, Matthias invokes freedom as a God-term reflective of salvation in the open arms of Jesus as illustrated in the next moments of his address: "Freedom really comes when we are in Christ. My prayer, my hope for you is that we are in Christ." As with Pastor Noah and John, this stems from forming a sacred covenant.

Rhetorically speaking, these excerpts demonstrate that by choosing to focus his rhetoric on "the things that hold us back," Pastor Matthias invokes a dialectical comparison between the spiritual world of salvation and the material world of sin. But as Burke argues, dialectics are also found in logology, in the form of dialectical terms that serve to compare and contrast fictitious entities in language. While these terms were exhibited in the rhetoric of each the sermons I attended during field work, two examples in particular stand out above the rest: one from Pastor Silas at Ecclesia and the other from Pastor Noah at Brazos Fellowship.

Dialectical Terms

While the use of God-terms in evangelical rhetoric serves as a unifying principle to illustrate the legitimacy of their moral and spiritual terms of order, God-terms alone are often not potent enough to encourage mass audiences to align themselves with these terms as part of evangelical propaganda. This is because God-terms exist in the realm of purpose and destiny and require a fulfillment on the part of mass audiences as well as

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identification. But to fulfill these requirements, mass individuals must be given a logical path forward from which to proceed. For Burke, this logic is found in the sequential use of compare-and-contrast dialectical terms that evangelical pastors use to provide a linguistic pathway, culminating in the revelation that true salvation can only be found in Christ and by agreement with God as the ultimate agent of change. The overarching goal of evangelical rhetoric is therefore to unify the worldview of congregations via identification with their linguistic terms of order, leading to the formation of a covenant or binding agreement with these terms and the spiritual figure or symbol they represent. For this to occur, however, evangelical pastors must first lay out the terms of this order via a linguistic compare-and-contrast of dialectical terms.

By way of example, Ecclesia's Pastor Silas made considerable use of dialectical terms in a sermon about the horrors of leprosy and how Jesus' kindness toward a leper in scripture illustrates the personal transformation that occurs when one accepts Christ into their lives and allows God to provide for them. After setting the scene for his sermon with a personal anecdote of driving down a highway and questioning why there was so much pain and suffering in the world, Silas recited the story of Dr. Paul Brand (1914 – 2003) to his congregation. Brand, a pioneer in the treatment of leprosy in the developing world, dedicated his life to helping the poor, and Silas made repeated references to Brand as a Christ-like figure throughout his sermon. Citing the synoptic gospels of Matthew, Mark, and Luke, Silas recited the story of a nameless leper who, upon seeing Jesus in the streets throws himself to the ground and cries out: "You can make me clean, if you want to."

The significance of Pastor Silas' use of this story, which appears in all three of the synoptic gospels, is in how he uses Burke's dialectical terms to create a rhetorical path of logical progression, culminating in the invocation of God terms to illustrate the power of Christ to transform human lives. For example, Silas' repeated reference to the leper dropping to his knees and calling out: "you can make me clean if you want to" is meant to signify the dialectical counterpart of the purity of Christ; for in ancient times, leprosy was associated with filth and disarray, and individuals suffering from the disease were told to call out "unclean, unclean" to passersby lest their disease contaminate others.

After introducing the biblical character of the leper from the synoptic gospels to his audience as an agent-act ratio, Silas then immediately transitioned his rhetoric to a number of dialectical-term comparisons between good and evil. He successfully made this rhetorical transition in both tone and content by discussing Dr. Paul Brand's discovery that leprosy damages nerve endings in the extremities, removing the protective warning of pain signals to the brain:

> *Most people view pain as an enemy. Yet, as leprosy patients prove, pain forces us to pay attention to threats against our bodies. Without it, heart attacks, strokes, ruptured appendices and stomach ulcers would all occur without warning.*
> *Here's one of the things that I discovered about pain, suffering, disappointment, and suffering: Jesus can heal you by taking away the pain or by giving the pain.*

By referencing pain as an enemy and then following up this utterance with one about the psychological and physiological benefits of it, Silas immediately creates a dialectical-term comparison between pain and comfort. More importantly, this initial comparison allows him to move his rhetoric one step further by associating healing (absolving filth,

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disarray, and pain) with the tender act of Jesus' touch as recited in the synoptic gospels.

Similarly, by stating that Jesus has the capacity to both give and take away pain, Silas

again invokes a dialectic between the material world of suffering and the spiritual world

of Jesus' everlasting love.

Significantly, however, the key actor in Silas' story is not the leper, nor is it

Jesus. It is in fact the mass individual who, like the leper, is blessed by the capacity of

free will to make the conscious decision to drop to their knees and beg Jesus to heal their

own pain: a pain brought on by life in a world of suffering and disappointment that is

very much the human condition:

> *Part of what all of us need is pain. Your relationships will suffer, your formation*
> *will suffer, your growth will suffer, if you don't experience pain. And that's not to*
> *say that it's all good, that whatever pain you're in that you're just in a great place*
> *because none of us believe that either. But what it is to say is that life has a way*
> *of shaping and molding us through pain.*

Here too, Silas invokes Burke's dialectical terms by repeatedly comparing and

contrasting the inevitable suffering of the human condition with the positive, healing

aspects that pain provides, just as God intends it. In these brief examples we see that as a

Christian, Jesus' capacity to heal knows no judgement, for just as he reached out and

touched the face of a leper disfigured by a disease of filth, so too can he reach out and

touch the face of man, disfigured in his own way simply by living in a disordered, often

morally ambiguous world.

Coping with the difficulties of life in a disordered and morally ambiguous world

was also the subject of a sermon by Brazos Fellowship's Pastor Noah. Like Silas, Noah

also invoked Burke's dialectical terms in a story of his own, this time focusing on the

positive role spiritual guardrails play in protecting and directing against sin. As I stated previously, Noah relied heavily on the guardrail sermon to illustrate the moral and spiritual legitimacy of God's teachings in protecting people from the hurt and disappointment of ill-thought-out decisions. More importantly, Noah's use of Burke's God terms in his sermon illustrates the moral and spiritual superiority of the Christian term of order and sacred covenant with Christ. God terms, however, lose their rhetorical power if not supported by the comparing and contrasting of dialectical terms to show the legitimacy of one term of order over another. As God-terms must be grounded in the action and idea of dialectical terms, they lose their rhetorical power if not linguistically linked to tangible objects. Because of this, the rhetoric of evangelical sermons requires the inclusion of Burke's positive terms.

Positive Terms

According to Burke (1989), all ideas are perfection for they are unsullied by the concrete world. But while God terms and dialectical terms play a key role in evangelical rhetoric by creating a compare-and-contrast linguistic pathway to illustrate the legitimacy of the Christian value system over others, they nevertheless exist as abstract ideas. For evangelicals, the perfection of ideas creates a problem when persuading mass audiences to form a covenant with one term of order over another: how can the abstract be made tangible and easily understood? For Burke, the answer is found in positive terms, which exist in the realm of motion and perception as tangible, concrete things with commonly understood labels. Unlike God terms and dialectical terms, Burke's

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positive terms are real entities and as such, round out the trilogy of terminology in Burke's terms of order.

Looking again at Pastor Noah's guardrails sermon at Brazos Fellowship, we see the interconnected use of both positive and dialectical terms in support of the moral legitimacy of the God terms of the Christian term of order. For example, following the Scene-Act introduction of the sermon during which a pair of stagehands wheeled in a section of guardrail cut from scrap, Pastor Noah transitioned the tone of his rhetoric toward more serious matters: the tangible value of the protective guardrails that a life with Christ provides. Here he invokes the universal human experience of regret:

> *In our lives we always have moments of regret, moments when we say 'that decision wasn't so wise' or 'that was really foolish. I wish I could go back and redo that.' We look back on all these moments and say that if we had better financial guardrails, better relational guardrails, better moral, better spiritual guardrails, we wouldn't have the consequences, the backwash, decisions that we have to live with today.*

Noah' choice of adjectives in this brief excerpt is no accident and in fact betrays a number of strategic choices in symbolic language designed to follow a logical sequence of events in a hierarchy of values. This hierarchy begins in the world of the symbolic and moves upward into the realm of ideas before culminating with the universal immateriality of God. For example, Noah begins the excerpt by outlining various modes of experience that mass individuals can readily identify with. This is seen in the statement of "in our lives we always have moments of…" in which the universal human experiences of regret are cloaked in the mode of experiencing times we have felt foolish for acting one way when we should have acted in another. Calling upon individual modes of experience, Noah uses them as a springboard to catapult his narrative toward

the true focus of his sermon: the establishment of guardrails as moral patterns of experience that stabilize and secure our path to salvation.

But rather than simply call for unquestioned obedience to God, which would likely result in a loss of audience attention so carefully focused on the stage by an elaborate media presentation, Noah instead moves his sermon into the realm of a sequential dialectic by illustrating the validity of the Christian term of order over another. Beginning with finance, Noah moves the structure of his rhetoric consecutively into relationships before transitioning his narrative into the realm of ideas by stressing the moral and the spiritual, as each of these is the subject of a later series in the sermon. Noah's initial emphasis on money and relationships stresses their symbolic importance as base-level opportunities for the practice of establishing guardrails and allows his narrative to transcend into the higher orders of morality and spirituality, leading ultimately to God.

The significance of Noah's strategic use of these dialectical terms in his opening address is that collectively, they carry universal meaning that transcends the disparate modes of experience of mass audiences. For example, financial stability translates into healthy and prosperous relationships whereas the dialectical opposites of these concepts (ideas) are akin to poverty and misery in marriage; their presence in narrative form necessitates the logical decision of establishing guardrails to prevent a fall into either of these sins. What is particularly striking about Noah's ordering of terms, however, is that he places finance and relationships below morality and spirituality and then connects them to the statement that "the world around us" makes adhering to this term of order

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difficult. This is significant because Noah's deliberate ranking of a term of order grounds his narrative sequence of terms in a universal experience that anyone present during the address can readily identify with.

In ranking dialectical terms in a hierarchy of order, Pastor Noah effectively argues for a moral and spiritual covenant with God as the answer to all of life's problems, which could have been avoided by the presence of a guardrail. By stating that "we look back on these moments and we wish we had better…guardrails," he validates the evangelical term of order by placing a moral and spiritual communion with God as the answer to all of life's problems and juxtaposes that against problems rooted in "the culture around us." This reference to mass culture indicates that the world outside of the church symbolically represents a competing term of order that anyone can fall prey to if they do not exercise their own free will and establish guardrails in safety zones. For Noah, the guardrail is not just a positive term but in fact a symbol of a pattern of experience that comes from an adherence or covenant to an ultimate term of order which sees God as a singular unifying principle.

This strategic use of positive terms in support of dialectical terms to outline the moral and spiritual legitimacy of the Christian term of order was also exhibited in the rhetoric of UNION, City Life, and Ecclesia Church. But in addition to Brazos Fellowship, it was Pastor John at City Life who stood out for me. During his sermon on the Book of John, Pastor John focused specifically on Passover and the ritual sacrifice of a lamb to symbolize how ancient Jews were commanded by God to sprinkle the blood of a lamb on their doorposts so that God would pass over their homes during the last of the

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ten biblical plagues. To commemorate the significance of this moment, John told his congregation, later generations would perform a similar sacrifice in the Temple of Jerusalem.

Jesus, however, had other ideas as according to Pastor John, he became frustrated with what he saw as empty ritual lacking in any meaning or reverence to God. Rather than conducting the ritual slaughter of the Lamb of God to atone for their sins and mark their commitment to their sacred covenant, John argued, people were simply going through the motions. Following this transition in his sermon, the Book of John became the focal point of Pastor John's sermon, and he used it to outline to his congregation that being a true Christian meant honoring your covenant with God and not simply being a casual participant:

> *Jesus walks in and instead of the place being a place of solemn reverence or even rejoicing for what God was doing in atoning for our sins, it was just crazy. And Jesus says, "You've turned this place into an emporium.' This is not what this area is supposed to be. You're supposed to buy the animal somewhere else and take the time to think and to remember and to repent and then to rejoice in God, not just show up to the temple, grab your thing, take two steps, sacrifice it and leave." He was talking about a mechanical type of religiosity, like going through the motions. And Jesus was irate, and he said, 'This isn't the point. You're missing the point.'*

While somewhat scattered and vernacular, this excerpt from Pastor John's sermon nevertheless demonstrates how, just as with Paster Noah's guardrails sermon, evangelicals strategically use Burke's positive terms to support dialectical comparisons that outline the moral and spiritual legitimacy of the Christian term of order. For example, he leans heavily on comparing and contrasting the symbolic difference of the dialectical terms reverence, rejoicing, repenting and atonement against Jesus' criticism

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of temple goers "showing up and going through the motions" of empty ritual. Particularly significant about this excerpt is how Pastor John strategically leans on positive terms to ground his dialectical criticism against those who claim to be servants of God but instead are nothing more than shallow participants.

Pastor John calls on positive terms via a linguistic re-imagining of what Jesus might have felt and said when he chastised his followers for treating the sacred temple of Jerusalem as "an emporium" or consumer marketplace: a rhetorical act very similar to Pastor Noah's use of the positive term "guardrails" to outline the universal experience of guilt resulting from ill-thought-out actions. As well, this echoes Pastor Silas's recitation of the Scene-Act ratio of driving down a highway and experiencing guilt for questioning God, and Pastor Matthias' call to the universal experience of loneliness and isolation of a life without Christ.

Taken together in the context of religious rhetoric, each of these instances is united by a singular overarching theme: guilt. More specifically, they speak to the inevitable guilt that comes from questioning God's plan, guilt as a consequence of the ill-thought-out decisions and foolish actions that scripture warns against, and finally, guilt for not honoring the terms of one's commitment or covenant with God. For just as each evangelical church makes ample use of the same ratios and terms of order in their rhetoric, so too do they make ample use of guilt and victimage to illustrate the redemptive power of belief and faith.

Guilt, Victimage, and Redemption

For Burke, guilt is a fundamental aspect of religious rhetoric, and the rhetorical cycle of victimage and redemption associated with it serves to re-align mass individuals with religious terms of order and, more importantly, their sacred covenant with God. As we have seen, evangelical pastors create a dramatistic story in their rhetoric through the strategic use of positive, dialectic, and God terms—rooted in universal human experiences—with which congregants can easily identify as part of their individual modes of experience. But at the root of these stories is an inevitable and all too human failure to honor the terms of their commitment to an idealistic term of order that they cannot possibly live up to. When this occurs, it is the task of evangelical pastors to shame their audience into guilt, forcing them to undergo a symbolic cycle of victimage and redemption after which they are cleansed of sin and made to re-affirm their sacred covenant, only to begin the cycle anew.

In addition to being the foundation of Christian rhetoric, guilt and redemption are the foundation of Christian theology. But while I am unable to make any claims regarding the theological orientation of Brazos Fellowship, UNION, City Life, or Ecclesia, I have demonstrated in this chapter how the dramatism of each of these churches is very similar. For just as every play has a logical conclusion at the end of the third act, so too does the rhetoric of an evangelical sermon. In fact, Burke (1989) argues that guilt is so essential to the drama of Christian rhetoric that the entire social order of Christianity depends on it to properly function. Social order aside, however, evangelicals find themselves in an altogether different situation regarding guilt and redemption than their more mainline counterparts.

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For example, Roman Catholics have at their disposal the ritual of confession in which a mass individual who believes (or has been told) that they have sinned can be redeemed by confessing their sins in private counsel with a priest. Following confession, the priest blesses the individual, who is considered redeemed until the next time they sin, after which the confessional cycle begins anew. Evangelicals, however, have no such system of ritualistic confession and must instead rely on what Burke labels victimage and its role in mitigating the circumstances arising when mass individuals violate the terms of order of their covenant with God. Referencing the relationship between victimage and dramatism, Burke argues, that "if order, then guilt; if guilt, then the need for redemption; but any such payment is victimage." Here, Burke offers up a set-piece, textbook example of the rhetorical process of evangelical guilt, victimage, and redemption which, as with their pentads and terms of order, is largely consistent from church to church. But how exactly does the evangelical cycle of guilt, victimage, and redemption work? More specifically, how do pastors linguistically create this cycle in their rhetoric? And how are mass individuals made to go through it?

As established throughout this chapter, the underlying goal of evangelical rhetoric is to persuade mass individuals to form a covenant or commitment to God via an identification and consubstantial agreement with the terms of order of their rhetoric. But as we have seen with the use of God-terms and dialectical terms in evangelical rhetoric, the evangelical terms of order are largely constructed (in narrative form) on abstract ideals rather than concrete, tangible percepts and for this reason, are impossible to fully

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honor or live up to.[8] When mass individuals inevitably fail to honor their commitment to

the evangelical terms of order through the very human act of sin, they can be said to

have fallen into a state of dis-order (Burke, 1989). Or, more significantly, if mass

individuals lean more heavily toward committing to a value system in dialectical

opposition to that of Christ (conveniently known in Christian theology as Satan), then

they can be said to have formed a consubstantial agreement with the sins of the counter-

covenant (Burke, 1989). By way of a heuristic, I offer a simple formula to briefly

explain Burke's cycle of guilt, victimage, and redemption before providing examples of

it pulled from evangelical sermons:

> *Evangelical pastor outlines terms of order of covenant and competing counter covenant to congregation* ➔ *Mass individual violates covenant because terms of order of covenant are idealistic and impossible to live up to* ➔ *Pastor tells them they have sinned via dramatistic examples pulled from everyday situations* ➔ *Guilt results in the mind of mass individual* ➔ *Mass individual desires to cleanse themselves of this guilt so as not to anger God and undergoes process of victimage* ➔ *Pastor then considers them redeemed* ➔ *Cycle begins again.*

For Burke, the key component in the guilt-redemption cycle is victimage, or the

penance that must be paid for violating the terms of one's covenant. Victimage can be

broken down into two salient components: mortification and scapegoating. In

logological terms, mortification is "a kind of governance, an extreme form of self-

control" in which mass individuals who have sinned by dishonoring their commitment

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[8] The exception to this are positive terms. While positive terms are built on concrete, tangible objects, their role in evangelical rhetoric is considerably more functional and for my purposes here are outside of Burke's cycle of guilt and redemption.

with God must willingly mortify or 'kill' those aspects of the self which caused them to sin in the first place, usually through the exercising of virtue and by saying "no!" to disorder (Burke, 1989, p. 289). In Brazos Fellowship's Guardrails sermon, for example, Pastor Noah outlined the process of mortification near the conclusion of his sermon by citing the Bible verse Ephesians 5:16, in which the Apostle Paul says to "make the most of every opportunity" because "the days are evil." Using this colloquial interpretation of scripture to blame the lack of morality in contemporary society, Noah then said:

> *It's time for us to get honest and say "listen, the days are evil. I can't trust the culture [around us]. I've got the trust the Lord in his word. I've got to begin to implement his wisdom in my life. That is a voluntary, self-sacrificial, self-submission. Kind of a moment of saying 'God, I'm going to let my life reflect your wisdom, instead of the culture around me.'"*

In this example we see that the mortification Pastor Noah refers to is the voluntary act to trust in the Lord, to give oneself to him fully and completely as an act of self-sacrifice in which mass individuals mortify or destroy the part of themselves that caused them to slip up, make mistakes, and lapse into states of disorder. At the root of this rhetoric of guilt and victimage is the notion that man is imperfect and has sinned against God because the world around him is dangerous and continually tempts him with the counter-covenant. But God and the church are waiting with open arms to redeem mass individuals of their worldly sins, and all it takes is a voluntary step forward and the acceptance of Jesus Christ into their lives. Then, when they are 'born again,' they can be said to have mortified or destroyed those aspects of the self which led them into the temptation of the counter-covenant.

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Pastor Noah's labeling the empirical world as one where evil deeds take place is yet another example of the evangelical outside-inside dichotomy in which pastors decry the lack of morality in contemporary culture and uphold the spiritual and moral superiority of a life in church as the answer to all of life's problems. We can see this linguistic creation of the outside-inside dichotomy again with Pastor Silas at Ecclesia, who, in a similar vein of reasoning, also invokes a mortification of the self near the conclusion of his sermon on Dr. Paul Brand and Jesus and the lepers by addressing his congregation in a final moment of solemn persuasion:

> *Ecclesia, I only have one suggestion for you, one job for you to do. Because if you look at the world, this world of pain, disappointment, and suffering, just do one thing. When you see it, when you spot it, when you locate pain, suffering and disappointment, your job, my job, is just to draw near. Draw near. Don't avoid it, don't walk around it, don't pretend it's not there. Just draw near. And in so doing, we emulate Jesus Christ who looked down on us.*

For Burke, the mortification of the self involves virtue or more specifically, acting with virtue, rather than its dialectical counterpart of sin. In this sense, true mortification involves a self-awareness of the misdeeds one is both capable of and has committed in the past. When mass individuals remove those aspects of the self by saying "yes" to virtue and "no" to disorder, then they can be said to have mortified themselves. This is evident in both Noah's calling his congregation to trust in God and Silas' calling to his congregation to "draw near" to Christ and in so doing, emulate the virtue of the Son of God who died on a cross for the sin of all mankind. And by drawing near, as Silas asks of his congregants, mass individuals mortify or purge themselves of their past sins and are reborn as faithful servants of Christ.

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But while mortification is a potent rhetorical technique at the disposal of pastors—who induce collective guilt in their congregations by juxtaposing their actions against the virtuous actions of Christ in order to have them re-affirm their commitment to the church, God, and Christ—it is limited in that mass individuals can mortify themselves only so many times before they start to look elsewhere for a convenient scapegoat for their ill-thought-out decisions and actions. Burke, however, anticipates this with dramatism in that he sees scapegoating or the blaming an external other serve as the counterpart to mortification in the rhetorical cycle of guilt, victimage, and redemption.

In scripture, the scapegoat is a sacrificial animal who first appears in Leviticus and is cast out into the desert to carry away all sins and impurities. However, as I am unable to make any claims as to the underlying theology of Brazos Fellowship, UNION, City Life, or Ecclesia, my use of the term scapegoat is limited to its appearance in the logology of these churches. Burke's scapegoat is aptly represented in the rhetoric of each church, and its common use by all four pastors supports Burke's theory that the scapegoat is essential to the continued success of the evangelical terms of order as a linguistic system of persuasion. The reason for the necessity of the scapegoat in evangelical rhetoric is twofold. First, it serves a functional use as a counterpart to Burke's mortification in that mass individuals can be made to blame aspects of themselves for ill-thought-out thoughts and actions for only so long before they begin to look elsewhere for an explanation for their lapses into disorder. Second is the fact that the scapegoat is somewhat of an empty vessel for evangelical pastors and their rhetoric, a convenient vessel for blame to be placed in. For example, when Burke writes of the

scapegoat in dramatism, he argues that such an animal must be "worthy of sacrifice" if it is to have any rhetorical value at all (p. 294).

Luckily for evangelicals, such an animal does exist and has existed for quite some time as contemporary society. In this case, the woes of mankind who continually sins can easily be cast aside and placed into the vessel of the scapegoat simply by blaming contemporary society as the source of all the evils in the world, known also in logology as the counter-covenant. The reason for the necessity of the counter-covenant in dramatism is that the entire Christian social order depends on the existence of the negative for it to properly function. Without Satan, for example, God's love for all mankind could not be known, and without the counter-covenant of the outside world, the relative safety and security of 'inside' church could not be understood.

Evangelical pastors are well aware of the value of the scapegoat as a rhetorical tool of persuasion, and their use of the scapegoat follows along similar lines from church to church. For example, Pastor John at City Life invokes scapegoating and the counter-covenant in his sermon on the Book of John when he discussed the Lamb of Pesach or Passover Lamb as a symbolic representative of the necessity of honoring the terms of one's commitment or covenant with Christ:

> *I want you to understand when we break relationship with God or much less one another, there is a death that happens in that relationship. If you cheated on your spouse, there's a death that happens to that relationship. If you lie to the person that you work with, there's a type of death that happens in that relationship. And this death symbolizes what is actually going on in that I am having to bring in this animal [into the temple] and I'm going to have to kill it because I have broken my relationship with God and there is a sacrifice to be made because a death has happened.*

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While somewhat lengthy in comparison to his usual utterances, Pastor John's calling to

his congregation to 'kill' or sacrifice the scapegoat as penance for breaking one's

covenant to Christ perfectly encapsulates the value of Burke's scapegoat in dramatism,

for it represents well how the scapegoat is a convenient 'vessel' or container for

mankind's sins to be placed in, locked up, and thrown away. In this example, we see that

the scapegoat in question is contemporary society in all its wicked ways, which pulls us

down into the depths of despair with only the waiting hand of Christ to pull us free.

Blaming society as for the woes of mankind is codified by Pastor John in a follow up to

his earlier comments about paying penance for breaking the terms of one's commitment

with God by killing the scapegoat:

> *So, what's my salvation? What's my redemption? Whatever gets me to renewal and renewal for me is pleasure. Happiness is defined as pleasure, which is a horrible term for pleasure, but in a very hedonistic, individualistic consumer culture, the culture designs us to where they want you to be discontent. Why? Because they promise you a renewal. If you get that new Apple [device], you will feel so much better about yourself. You will get back to your innocence. If you just take another drink, get another thing, go on that new vacation, that escapade, that's what you need. See, the problem is everybody is pulling you down and you just need to get back to your innocence.*

The innocence in question here that Pastor John speaks to is the purity or virtue of giving

oneself to God, in submitting oneself to his will and placing faith in God's plan as a

protective 'inside' that runs counter to the dangers of the 'outside' world. Similarly,

when Pastor John speaks of the "very hedonistic, individualistic consumer culture," he

makes a direct reference to contemporary culture at large, the very same culture that

Pastor Noah says illustrates the need for moral and spiritual guardrails that direct and

protect against ill-thought-out decisions and actions. Similarly, when Pastor Silas spoke

of "a world of pain, suffering, and disappointment," this too was a reference to contemporary culture with all its trappings of sin. And, finally, when Pastor Matthias at UNION referenced the Kanye West song "Wash Us in the Blood" and the line "the lion prowls around looking for someone to devour," this too speaks to the moral and spiritual dangers of contemporary society and the role it plays as a scapegoat for all the sins of mankind.

At the heart of evangelical dramatism is redemption: for every story, no matter how complex, needs a happy ending. In theology, redemption is a key component of the Christian worldview because Jesus, having been crucified for the sins of mankind, is redeemed in death and stands as an example to all men of the everlasting life that God provides. Again, however, while I cannot make any claims as to the theological orientation of worldview of Brazos Fellowship, UNION, City Life, or Ecclesia, I can state with some certainty that each church utilizes a similar redemptive model in the dramatism of its rhetoric. For just as Pastors Matthias, Noah, John, and Silas make use of similar ratios in setting the scene for the weekly drama of their sermons, they each conclude their sermons in a similar manner: by stressing the redemptive power of Christ.

Looking once again to Pastor Noah's guardrails sermon, we see that following his call to his congregation to mortify those aspects of the self which cause them to fall into the temptation of the counter-covenant, the sermon concludes with an Agent-Act ratio in which the redemptive power of Christ's waiting is offered up to all those present, regardless of past sins and misdeeds. Unlike the rest of the sermon, however, this final speech to Pastor Noah's congregants is enacted in the form of prayer:

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I pray for any person in this room right now that'd be honest enough to say, "I don't have a personal relationship with the God of the universe, but I so desperately want that." If that is the cry of your heart, would you just pray, right where you sit? Pray that "Jesus, I'm asking you to forgive all my sin and be the Lord and leader over every part of my life. I'm tired of being a slave to so many other things and people and situations. I want to be the one I was created to be, your child. Forgive my sin, Jesus. Be the Lord of my life."

This final, solemn prayer at Brazos Fellowship marks the conclusion of the dramatism of Pastor Noah's sermon and also represents the culmination of Burke's cycle of guilt and redemption. The sermon begins with setting the scene for the dramatism to come with a Scene-Act ratio in which the outside, empirical world is blamed for the source of mankind's woes. In this case, Pastor Noah warns his congregants of the need to enact guardrails to direct and protect against sin and the temptations of the counter-covenant. Then, he transitions his rhetoric into outlining the evangelical terms of order through the use of positive, dialectical, and God-terms before calling upon Burke's cycle of guilt and victimage to demonstrate the redemptive power of Christ. However, Pastor Noah is not alone in the substance of his rhetoric. We see similar dramatistic elements in the conclusion of Pastor John's sermon at City Life:

Follow me as I follow him because we're trying to be like him. Not him like us. This is called discipleship. This now leads into our own holiness, where we're willing to say God, come in and just decrease things around me, whip the money changers out, whip the animals out in me because I want to be a person sold out to you in a relationship. And I will receive you as wine and a whip. Once you stand to your feet, we're going to worship together. I encourage you…We're going to sing this. Jesus be the center that all, and it's my prayer that some of you will rededicate that to the Lord today.

Pastor John begins his sermon with a similar Scene-Act ratio, then moves his rhetoric into the realm of personal responsibility to Christ and the Lord. His conclusion invokes an Act-Agent ratio in which he calls upon his congregants to be disciples, form a

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covenant with Christ, and honor this covenant by placing God at the center of their lives and allowing the redemptive power of God to lead them into holiness and, ultimately, salvation.

This dramatistic use of compelling storytelling and solemn prayer to orient mass audiences toward the evangelical terms of order is also exhibited by Pastor Silas at the conclusion of his sermon at Ecclesia. He wraps things up by once again reminding congregants of the significance of both Dr. Paul Brand and Jesus who, in the midst of a world of pain and suffering, did the compassionate thing and drew near to those who needed them the most:

> *Church, let me pray for you. God, would you show us where to draw near and how to draw near. To be people who respond to a broken planet with touch and nearness, to not be afraid to go places and to be with the people who need you most, as Jesus has done for us. And we thank you for the coming of Jesus that gives us new life. And it says, His name that we pray all these things, Amen.*

Just as Pastor Noah calls upon his congregation to take that first step toward redemption by admitting they have sinned and need help, and Pastor John calls upon his congregation to do the same and whip the money changers and animals out of their lives, so does Pastor Silas. At Ecclesia we see once again the same Scene-Act opening narration of a sermon, the same transition into the outside-inside dichotomy of the counter-covenant versus the covenant and finally, the Agent-Act ratio of redemption through Christ, following mortification and scapegoating for one's sins. As well, UNION offered a version of this structure when Pastor Matthias wrapped up his web address by saying:

> *I want to say as a church pastor, that we have failed in many ways. I haven't [always] been able to openly express it. We've created an environment and a*

culture, and when people are in relationship with the church instead of with
Christ. The relationship with the church should overflow with your relationship
with Christ, and we're shifting things. There's hope, and we're standing firmly in
that.

Here, Pastor Matthias again invokes the outside-inside dichotomy between the world

around the church and the environment within it. By arguing that "we've created an

environment and a culture" where people have relationships with the church instead of

Christ, he echoes Pastor John at City Life who spoke of Jesus chastising his followers

for fully committing themselves to the ritual sacrifice within the Temple of Jerusalem.

Then, having guided his congregants through a cycle of guilt and victimage, he, just like

each of the other pastors, offers up redemption for the soul and calls upon them to stand

firmly in their commitment and covenant with Christ.

Conclusion: On Evangelical Symbols and Society

Taken together in context, the dramatism of Brazos Fellowship, UNION, City

Life, and Ecclesia share similar rhetorical elements. First, each church makes use of the

same pentadic ratios during their sermons, and these ratios are spread out over three

dramatistic acts. In the first act, evangelical pastors utilize narratives of innocuous

stories of a commonly experienced empirical situation that all congregants present in the

service can identify with as part of their lived experience. The purpose of these

narratives in act one of an evangelical sermon is to create an inside-outside dichotomy

between the insular world of the church and the profane, external world that surrounds it.

Once this dichotomy has been established, pastors use rhetoric to emphasize that

although congregants are aware of the correct decision to make under these

circumstances, they often fail to follow through with it.

During the second act of a sermon, evangelical pastors illustrate the ramifications that result from taking the easy way out and making wrong decision when faced with these commonly experienced and morally ambiguous everyday situations. Evangelical pastors further identify with congregants as having lived through similar situations that have caused them to question why they are experiencing hurt, suffering, and disappointment over their actions. Significantly, setting up these second act ratios allows evangelical pastors to strategically transition both the tone and content of their sermons toward more theological matters by introducing guidelines for 'correct' moral and spiritual conduct found in scripture, illustrating the appropriate path forward when faced with these situations in the future.

In the third act of evangelical sermons, pastors invert the ratios from the first act to argue for the moral and spiritual legitimacy of the evangelical worldview as a solution to the commonly experienced problems outlined in act two. For example, pastors frequently call congregants to commit themselves to God and Jesus by forming a sacred covenant. By being "in Christ," congregants are told, they give themselves to God and Jesus as agents of change; when this occurs, better days lie ahead. This repeated theme of "better days lay [sic] ahead" is seen in how evangelical pastors end their sermons on a high note by painting a word picture of a life redeemed by calling upon an Agent-Scene ratio.

In addition to the ratios of the sermons being similar, their terms of order are also consistent. In fact, pastors at Brazos Fellowship, UNION, City Life, and Ecclesia each draw upon highly similar positive, dialectical, and ultimate terms in the rhetoric of their

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sermons. As with their ratios, the logology of evangelical sermons is strategically designed to facilitate an inside-outside dichotomy between the insular world of church and the profane world outside of church. When this dichotomy is delivered to congregants in narrative form through the use of easily identifiable empirical situations which they are likely to have personally experienced, congregants come to see the outside world as one of sin and danger and the world inside of church as one of safety and salvation.

While the logology of this rhetoric is largely consistent across Brazos Fellowship, UNION, City Life, and Ecclesia, it is not possible for me to make claims as to the theological orientation of this rhetoric or the significance of this orientation. However, I am able to say with certainty that the consistent use of language at these churches is significant. The reason this consistent use of language at each church is significant is how that represents a method of mass persuasion and propaganda or more specifically, what that demonstrates about the underlying motivation of evangelical pastors. Taken together, the common element in each of these dramatistic examples is an outside-inside dichotomy in which salvation and peace in a disordered, morally corrupt world are found by forming a covenant with Christ and aligning one's patterns of experience with those provided by the evangelical terms of order.

This brings us to the second part of the evangelical solution to the problem of uniting the disparate modes of experiences of mass audiences under one titular heading of symbol: persuading them to sit and listen to a religious sermon. Significantly, just as with the dramatism of the rhetoric at Brazos Fellowship, UNION, City Life and

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Ecclesia, the method for persuading mass audiences to listen to their sermons is also highly consistent and involves the same technology and the same orchestrated performance of sound and visuals to make listening to sermons an effortless, enjoyable, and enticing experience.

As will be discussed in the next chapter, each of the churches featuring so prominently in this dissertation makes use of a highly similar operational template that forms the foundation of its regular Sunday service. It is this template or routine method of operation, which I call the "evangelical operational template," that captures the attention of church visitors with the aid of corporate branding and entertainment media and efficiently funnels them from the outside world to the inside and relative safety of the church. Once inside these churches, mass audiences are subjected to the orchestrated presentation of religious sermons designed to unite their disparate modes of experience into the stable, Christ-like patterns of experience desired by evangelical pastors.

CHAPTER V THE ORCHESTRATION OF EVANGELICAL PROPAGANDA

In the previous chapter I described the structure and function of evangelical rhetoric. Specifically, I examined the logology of this rhetoric and how it is strategically used to align mass individuals with evangelicals' propagandistic terms of order as a means to the end of attaining spiritual and moral salvation in their audience. As indicated by sermon excerpts corresponding with the dates of my field work, evangelical rhetoric is highly similar from church to church, and pastors tend to rely on the same pentadic ratios and dramatistic symbols in their persuasion. However, while it is rhetoric and rhetoric alone that is ultimately responsible for persuading mass individuals to align themselves with evangelical knowledge and power structures to secure and facilitate their salvation, mass audiences must first be persuaded to sit and listen to a religious sermon.

The issue this creates for evangelicals is that not all audiences are attuned to the same sensibilities. Some are (presumably) enthusiastic Christians reading and willing to give themselves to God, while others may simply be first-time visitors right off the street and curious as to what these churches have to offer. Still others may have previously been members of religious organizations and since walked away for any number of reasons. But while I cannot make any claims as to the demographic makeup of Brazos Fellowship, UNION, City Life, or Ecclesia beyond what I witnessed during site visits, I can say with certainty that mass audiences of all types must be primed or prepped before they can be swayed by propaganda, whether religious in scope or not. Given that the

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stated mission of these churches across the board is generally oriented toward

conversion to an ordered, Christian-centric mode of living with stable, Christ-like

patterns of experience, the question remains: how do these churches do it? How do they

persuade disparate groups of mass individuals to sit and listen to religious sermons? The

answer is found in the orchestrated performance of what I deem the evangelical

propaganda template.

Grounding my analysis in the work of Jacques Ellul, Marshall McLuhan, and

Kenneth Burke, I examine the constituent components of this template in order to

understand its method of routine operation as well as the motivations and intentions of

the pastors, staff, and volunteers who create it. Accordingly, I argue in this chapter that

persuading mass audiences to willingly enter a church and subject themselves to

religious rhetoric on a routine basis requires the orchestrated presentation of a variety of

commercial entertainment media of the type seen in bars, nightclubs, and movie theaters.

These media and their placement in evangelical churches serve to amplify religious

rhetoric by 'hotting up' and 'cooling down' the immediate environment of evangelical

worship spaces in a McLuhan-esque manner.

By strategically manipulating the 'temperature' of the room, evangelical pastors

and staff can focus the attention of mass audiences in the direction of pastors who,

supported by these media, deliver their rhetoric in a highly persuasive and entertaining

manner to align these audiences with specific terms of order that are themselves

designed to facilitate the salvation of these audiences. Significantly, this template is

designed to increase the likelihood of inducing identification or agreement with the

religious-themed content of evangelical sermons. Adopting the perspective of a new or first-time participant at an independent, evangelical church, I describe the operational template employed by these churches and the immediate physical environment surrounding it. I then highlight select aspects of this template with a selection of interview quotes and photographs taken during field work conducted at the study's foursites during the summer of 2019 to demonstrate how this template works and what makes it so effective as an instrument of mass persuasion. In so doing, I demonstrate how evangelicals effectively operate within the constraints of technique by orchestrating various media forms to proselytize mass individuals: leading them, in the eyes of the pastors, to salvation in Christ by exposing them to religious messaging in an entertaining, easily digestible form that resonates with them. But before delving into the workings of the evangelical propaganda enterprise, an important question must be answered: *who are the people that evangelicals put so much effort into trying to reach?*

The Mass (Religious) Individual

Although they differ greatly in political, social, and religious affiliation, human beings are highly similar to one another in that they are each part of a mass society that is essentially an amalgamation of mass individuals bound together through shared beliefs, one of which is religion. According to Ellul (1973) it is mass society, or rather the organization of mass society, that makes mass individuals so susceptible to the effects of propaganda, which serves to align mass individuals with various power and knowledge structures. But why is this? What makes propaganda so effective in a mass

society, and how is it that skilled propagandists are able to persuade mass individuals with relative ease and efficiency?

In response to these queries, Ellul (1973) argues that for propaganda to succeed in mass society, two contradictory but complementary conditions must be met: mass society must be both individualistic in orientation and collective in structure. Regarding the susceptibility of humans to being persuaded, Ellul argues that the moment the mass individual leaves the immediacy of the small group or immediate family, they are at risk from the psychological effects of propaganda as they now lack the protective psychological barrier of the immediate family to shelter them from the more unpleasant or uncomfortable aspects of the world.

The reason mass society fosters a vulnerability to propaganda in mass individuals is that the nature of individuals' interactions with mass society is much more fragmented and unpredictable than with a small group, and these interactions frequently lack the stability and comfort that the small group or family provides. As Ellul (1973) argues, it is precisely the fragmented nature of mass society that makes the effects of propaganda so effective. When the mass individual is cut off or isolated from the immediacy of small groups, they inevitably find themselves alone and battling the current of a complex world of which they are only a very small part. This in turn leads individuals to seek the closeness of new groups and align themselves with the beliefs and world views of these groups, whatever and wherever they may be. For example, some of these individuals will seek out membership in groups and civic organizations whose highly structured world view lends a measure of stability to their otherwise fragmented and disconnected

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lives in mass society. Churches represent one such type of organization. But while some mass individuals will seek out membership in these organizations, others will not. Without the stability and predictability of small-group membership and identification, these individuals are most at risk from being swayed by propaganda (Ellul, 1973).

There is, however, an inherent contradiction in the alienating aspects of mass society and how it drives mass individuals to seek out small-group membership: the impossible demands foisted upon the mass individual by modernity frequently result in individuals withdrawing their participation from civic groups and isolating themselves to prevent further frustration and disappointment at not fitting in or not being successful enough. Ellul (1964) argues, for example, that the technique of modernity emphasizing absolute efficiency in every facet of human existence serves to dehumanize the mass individual and minimize their agency—to the point they are simply cogs in a technological society going through the motions of life. Put simply, the inevitable disappointment accompanying life in a technological society is part and parcel of what alienates mass individuals from another, driving them further apart.

For religious organizations (of which evangelical churches are one example), the individual who was previously a member by association of one or more of these groups, but whom technique has driven away, is a prime candidate for conversion to living a structured life of safety as a servant of Christ. In this sense, evangelical churches seeking to persuade mass individuals with propaganda to join them and live happy, fulfilled, and meaningful lives are no different than any other religious organizations seeking to do the same. The difference, however, is that evangelicals are arguably better at persuading

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mass individuals to join them than are other religious organizations due to the performance of an elaborate propaganda enterprise in support of their rhetoric.

Unlike with traditional, mainline religious organizations, evangelicals have no qualms about utilizing what Ellul (1973) calls "all available means of persuasion"; for evangelicals this includes but is not limited to a variety of commercial entertainment media of the type found in bars, nightclubs, and concert halls. These media are described in the following sections in this chapter but suffice to say here that evangelicals effectively combine these media into a carefully crafted operational template designed to invite persuasion by overcoming any psychological resistance on the part of mass individuals. Significantly, this operational template reflects a strategic, purposeful, and technologically advanced reaction by evangelicals to the constraints of technique and the alienating effects of mass society that combine to create the social conditions that necessitate its continued operationalization.

The target of evangelical propaganda and its operational template is therefore the vulnerable mass individual seeking the stability of membership in a civic organization such as a church, whether they are consciously aware of it or not. Practically speaking, this individual may have previously been a member of a church and since stepped away, or they may never have been a member of any civic organization at all. But whether they re cognizant of it or not, each of these individuals seeks something greater than themselves: they seek a stable community that evangelicals work to provide with the terms of order of their propaganda and, significantly, its operational template.

The Evangelical Operational Template: Overview

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In responding to the alienating effects of a technological society and the dehumanizing effects of technique, contemporary religious organizations face an uphill battle to bring into the fold the very isolated mass individuals who were previously members of civic organizations. As I discovered during my site visits and interviews at Brazos Fellowship, UNION, City Life, and Ecclesia, the evangelical response to these socio-technical conditions results in an operational template for the dissemination of propaganda that is contained within a set-piece environment and enclosed building space. Reflecting the efficiencies of technique that mandate all things done to maximize output while minimizing the expenditure of resources, this template is designed to maximize audience exposure to religious rhetoric in an efficient and practical manner and to do so on a large scale that minimizes expending church resources, both monetary and human.

Accordingly, the evangelical operational template begins with the choreographed greeting and shuttling of church visitors from parking lots into a welcome center and common area designed to facilitate small-group interaction and identification. As a final step, they enter an enclosed and isolated sanctuary or worship space where visitors are subjected to an orchestrated performance of religious rhetoric supported by a variety of hot and cool commercial entertainment media. This performance is designed to induce mass identification and consubstantiality with the church and the terms of order of its rhetoric by making sermons easily accessible and entertaining to church visitors.

Accomplishing this means-to-an-end task is the purview of evangelical technology team members who, under the supervision of a creative director in a back-of-

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house booth, orchestrate various forms of digital entertainment media of the type typically seen in bars and nightclubs. These include but are not limited to high-definition digital surround-sound systems and cameras, choreographed lighting, teleprompters, and large-screen digital video displays. Seeking to understand the performance of evangelical propaganda and its constituent components, I examine the media, performance, and persuasion techniques utilized by evangelicals to ensure the active and attentive participation of mass audiences in religious sermons. Grounding my analysis in the scholarship of Jacques Ellul, Marshall McLuhan, and Kenneth Burke, I support this analysis by way of ethnographic data recorded during a number of worship services at Brazos Fellowship, UNION, City Life, and Ecclesia. (These services match the dates of times of the sermons used in the previous chapter to analyze the structure and motivation of evangelical rhetoric.) In turn, my ethnographic observations are supported by select quotes culled from interviews with members of the pastoral and technology teams at the study's field sites, as well as with photographs of the worship spaces and media present within these churches. Interview quotes are edited slightly to improve grammar and readability, and italics are occasionally used to emphasize key words and phrases, but quotes are largely as I recorded them. Taken together, data indicate that the successful implementation of evangelical propaganda requires the consistent orchestration of three constituent components: *initial exposure and pre-determined action, utilizing all available means of persuasion, and orchestrated performance in a closed environment.*

Step One: Initial Exposure and Pre-determined Action

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For church visitors (both first timers and returning congregants), persuasion via evangelical propaganda begins even before they set foot on the premises with exposure to branded church signage and uniformed greeters. This initial exposure is paramount in capturing and holding audience attention; once this attention is gained, it can be directed toward the physical action of moving bodies into the church building and sanctuary. The significance of action with regard to propaganda is that, according Ellul (1973), "only action is of concern to modern propaganda, for its aim is to precipitate an individual's action with maximum effectiveness and economy" (p. 25). This emphasis on action is important because propaganda is most effective when it elicits the participation of individuals exposed to it. In an evangelical context, participation is oriented toward the saving of souls through conversion and an adherence to a structured world view.

It is only when action has occurred, specifically when mass audiences have physically been shuttled into the sanctuary, that exposure to strategically orchestrated religious rhetoric designed to facilitate the process of conversion can begin. But before this can occur, audiences must be persuaded to willingly enter the church proper. It is in church parking lots and entranceways where the practical efficiencies of technique are first experienced by the evangelical church goer. The method evangelicals use to ensure this action occurs through a combination of branded signage and greeting teams or 'cheer squads' wearing branded uniforms. During my site visits, I observed that while signage is not ubiquitous at evangelical churches its presence is nevertheless a significant factor in evangelical pre-persuasion.

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Figure 1

UNION Road Signs

For example, each church uses branded road signs (see Figure 1) placed at regular intervals by volunteer church staff near the parking lot. These branded signs help guide visitors into the appropriate staging area also branded with signage, usually in the form of hanging banners or free-standing flags. Working in close proximity to staging area signage are a number of volunteer church staff serving as greeters or 'cheer squads.'[9] This team works together in a choreographed fashion to funnel visitors through the church doors and into an enclosed and carefully set-dressed environment designed to look like a casual coffee house. Once inside, visitors are exposed to a slightly "warmer" persuasive environment with more media, including high definition hanging wall

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[9] The outlier to this scenario occurred at Ecclesia. The church is located next to a local homeless camp, and several individuals within the camp work as parking lot attendants in exchange for food from the coffee house located adjacent to the church. The remaining three churches, however, utilize volunteers from the larger congregation.

monitors displaying church advertisements and upbeat, contemporary music played over the house public address system (McLuhan, 1964).

Figure 2

City Life Lobby
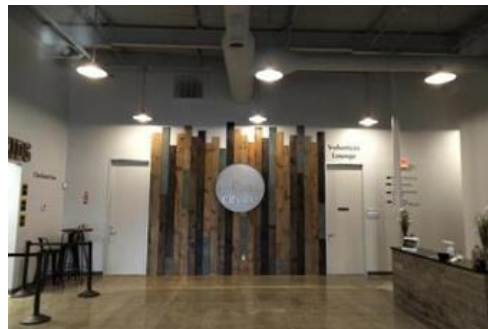
As church visitors are funneled into church lobbies (see Figure 2), church staff and volunteers hand out branded Connect Cards and swag bags to new visitors. These cards are used to collect personal identifying information of new visitors such as name, age, gender, and email address. This information is then collated and used to solicit tithes and for electronic community announcements. Notably, all the materials utilized in this process, including the uniforms worn by parking lot attendants and greeters, are branded with church logos. This is significant for two reasons. First, in an evangelical context, the desired course of action is salvation through repeat community participation brought on by repeated exposure to religious messaging. Because mass audiences are unlikely to be persuaded the first time they are exposed to propaganda, no matter how effectively crafted and delivered it is, this emphasis on repeat exposure to propaganda

precipitating action is necessary (Ellul, 1973). For this reason, evangelical churches make considerable use of groups of greeters wearing branded uniforms and shouting encouraging slogans such as "we're so glad you're here" and "welcome to [name of church]." Working in line of sight with branded signage, this approach exposes visitors to evangelical propaganda on a repeat basis via the interpolation or hailing of the individual and calling them to action via group participation in the greater church community.

Second, free market conditions necessitate competitive marketing and the maintaining of the public visibility of established brands. As described by Finke and Stark (2005), the saturated urban environment in which evangelical churches are predominantly imbedded necessitates competition between churches, many of which struggle to establish and maintain a distinct brand identity in these environments. Because of this saturation, branded signage and logos are used by churches to establish unique brand identities and distinguish themselves from other churches or competitors utilizing a similar operational template. Moberg (2017) argues, for example, that establishing brand identity is crucial for churches in establishing a foothold in local communities. Using a logo (see Figure 3) increases public visibility for religious organizations whose primary goal is the repeat participation or purchase by the religious consumer.

Figure 3

UNION Logo
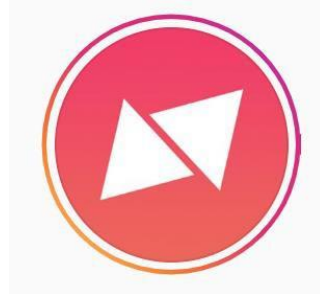
The presence of these branded materials across all four churches in the study is significant for it reifies the brand identity of each church, established for new visitors immediately upon entering the church parking lot. More importantly, it lends credence to the well-established phenomenon in market research that repeat exposure to an established and visible brand gives consumers the confidence that their experience with a product will be worthwhile and enjoyable (Casidy, 2013; Coman, 2019). By using a simple logo to brand each church as being culturally distinct from any other, even though this is rarely the case, evangelical churches establish a foothold in the free market religious economy, increasing their public visibility through the recruitment of new members (Einstein, 2011).

But while similar in presence and placement, the actual design of church logos is largely irrelevant although not without some meaning. The significance of branded church logos is found in their ability to differentiate one church 'brand' from another via second-order signification. Second-order signification is unique in that it is found at both the connotative and denotative level of symbols and signs (Barthes, 1972). At the

connotative level, each church logo serves as a visual representation of the greater cultural 'myth' of Christianity in the manner of the more traditional crucifix; therefore, each is associated with larger Christianity because it is linked via second-order signification to the universal concept of a church.

At the denotative level, however, the presence of a church logo differentiates one church from another and emphasizes this difference through repeat exposure to a signifying logo. This logo reifies the unique brand identity of each church in the minds of visitors in a manner befitting the consumer market each church inhabits as an independent, free-market organization offering a product or service to the public (Rossolatos, 2018). And while this product may be similar to many others, by virtue of its branded difference it appears as wholly unique while still being connected to the common myth of the Christian worldview. When these symbols are used in conjunction with other materials such as strategically placed signage, swag bags, and cheer squads, the result is a highly persuasive propaganda enterprise that, in the words of Aaron, a service programming director at Brazos Fellowship, is designed to capture the attention of newcomers and break through their inhibitions:

> *What we're trying to do here is provide an environment that brings down some of the walls that people bring in with them. Every word, every aspect of a service is intentional. We know that not everyone here believes in Jesus and that's okay. The environment sets them up to hear the message uninhibited and with as many walls down as possible.*

Slightly built, Aaron has been employed by Brazos since 2008, beginning his tenure as a bassist in the church band and then working his way up to a senior leadership role. Today, Aaron oversees the church's audio and visual program, which includes the

A/V team and musicians. I took to him immediately and of all the interviews that I conducted at Brazos, his was the one that resonated most with me. The reason for this was the way Aaron's spiritual journey intersected with the development of evangelical liturgy and how the honesty of his story appealed to me. Growing up in a conservative Church of Christ family environment, Aaron spent most of his childhood and teens in a liturgical atmosphere that shunned the use of electric amplification and musical instruments, emphasizing instead the a capella recitation of traditional biblical hymns. In his freshman year at college, Aaron joined a Christ-centered student organization and was for the first time exposed to the contemporary style of evangelical worship, which emphasizes multi-piece bands, lights, and visual displays of song lyrics. This would in time lead him to his current role at Brazos Fellowship. Aaron described the process as one of spiritual awakening, emphasizing how the use of media in worship helps him and others to reach the un-churched:

> *People whose liturgical tradition says, "that's the way it's always been, and we'll continue to do it that way," I found that for me and people I knew, we were walking away from the church because it didn't speak a common language. I just found that contemporary music really spoke to me and to the people that we're trying to reach; the people that are lost and the un-churched who don't understand a traditional liturgy because they didn't grow up in it.*

Emphasizing the importance of music in reaching mass individuals unaccustomed to church life, Aaron would connect the use of music to other forms of media, emphasizing media as tools that can be "leveraged for the Kingdom of God" to touch people who have either stepped away from the church or never been a part of it at all. Aaron's continued emphasis on using media to reach the so-called 'un-churched' is a significant point because it shows a recognition on the part of evangelical senior leadership at

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Brazos Fellowship that evangelizing mass individuals with little to no prior religious experience requires a propaganda style or technique that appeals to their sensibilities rather than alienating them.

For Aaron and others in similar roles in churches, operationalizing this technique requires the presence of two significant demographic characteristics of the mass society that Ellul (1973) outlines in Propaganda: proximity and susceptibility to persuasion. Ellul argues that for propaganda to be psychologically effective requires a dense population located in urban areas such as city centers. A densely populated urban demographic is necessary for facilitating effective persuasion because when a propagandist has masses of individuals living in relative proximity to one another at their disposal—as each of the four churches in the dissertation do—the propagandist can take advantage of the "psychological modifications that collective life produces in the individual" (Ellul, 1973, p. 95).

As argued in Chapter Two, these psychological modifications stem from feelings of loneliness and isolation in the mass individual that result from the transition from the small group or family to life in greater mass society. This in turn fosters a susceptibility to propaganda, especially propaganda from organizations that market themselves as providing a solution to these feelings of loneliness and isolation. Significantly, many of these mass individuals report having religious faith or spirituality but not religious affiliation (believers not belongers), while others still report having no faith at all, thus leading scholars to view these 'religious nones' as a very heterogenous demographic

(Chaves, 2017; Chaves & Gorski, 2011; Why America's 'Nones' Don't Identify with a Religion, Pew Research 2018).

Heterogeneity aside, however, reaching these mass individuals with propaganda requires the use of cleverly orchestrated and strategic techniques designed to break through any pre-existing psychological barriers that may prevent them from being persuaded. With regard to the present study and the varied makeup of religious nones, this includes any preconceived negative opinions or emotions about organized religion. However, as I did not conduct any interviews with congregants at Brazos Fellowship, UNION, City Life, or Ecclesia and was not given access to the private congregation data of these churches, I cannot make any claims as to whether or not such individuals are regular attendees. What is certain, however, is that evangelical churches are making concerted efforts to target the religious unaffiliated mass individuals with their propaganda, regardless of any heterogeneity of belief. For example, during my interview with Matthias and Mara, the husband-and-wife senior leadership staff at UNION, I learned firsthand the emphasis evangelicals place on trying to reach this particular demographic.

High school sweethearts now in their mid-40s, Matthias and Mara led fragmented lives of their own before coming to walk with Christ later in life. But while Mara was the stereotypical 'good girl' in school, Matthias led a very different life of drug addiction, crime, and eventual bankruptcy before re-discovering Christ in his late 20s. An intense and charismatic individual with multiple tattoos and an often-manic personality, Matthias built UNION from the ground up with the help of Mara, whose

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calm demeanor and practical personality helps translate her husband's artistic vision of a church for the disenfranchised into reality. Matthias emphasized the realness of UNION and how he envisions the church as a safe space for individuals in similar situations to the one he was in twenty years ago:

> *We want to be a church, but we don't want to be churchy. I want to assume that every person in the room is new and that we're going to tell them what we're doing. So instead of just saying "let's worship" we say, "let us be in His presence." And we'll paint that picture with "let us posture out hearts away from our problems, away from our anxieties, away from our depression, our loneliness, and toward the one that created us.*

While scattered, Matthias' description of a church for the unchurched is nevertheless significant. Emphasizing the church as a space for visitors to step away—albeit temporarily—from their fragmented lives as mass individuals, Matthias demonstrates a self-reflective understanding that mass individuals often foster a deep distrust for organized religion and that reaching and engaging these individuals on a spiritual and emotional level requires an approach designed to comfort rather than inflame their vulnerabilities. Echoing her husband's words in a rather more pragmatic manner, Mara described this unique approach to evangelism as one of comfort and familiarity rather than outright proselytization:

> *Let me say this. Every single thing we do, we try to look through the lens of a new believer or a first-time person to church. That's with our verbiage is, that's with our visuals, everything we do is trying to make them comfortable, so that things don't seem religious, that they don't seem too churchy. So that they can feel comfortable.*

Echoing similar statements made by Aaron, Matthias and Mara also emphasize an operational and liturgical template that is "not churchy." Defining this concept, however, is no mean feat for it is at best a vague descriptor for a complex set of ideas akin to

integrated marketing and communications in a mass religious context and utilizing all available means of persuasion. In practical terms, the comfort and familiarity evangelical leaders seek with this operational template is an atmosphere or environment that solicits audience participation via a consubstantial agreement with the terms of order of religious rhetoric. But as Mara and Matthias indicate, this agreement is contingent on environmental factors in order to facilitate it.

McLuhan (1964) illustrates the importance of environment in facilitating persuasion with his explication that the medium is the message, specifically in his focus on the importance of figure and ground. Applying McLuhan's metaphor to evangelical use of an established brand identity, we see that branded materials (visuals) serve as a figure which solicits the attention of the mass individual who is the target of the evangelical propaganda enterprise. Once this attention has been gained, it can be directed toward the ground where the persuasive messaging (rhetoric) facilitating the actual propagandistic process is disseminated.

However, whether the presentation of this message focuses on the Book of Job or the Book of John matters less than whether it is presented in a familiar (not churchy) manner with a specific figure (medium) that grabs the attention of the viewer and directs it toward a specific ground (message).[10] In the context of evangelical propaganda, branded signage serves as the figure, grabbing the attention of the new church visitor and

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[10] This example emphasizes that the content of this persuasive message reflects its natural environment. If the environment were non-religious, the content of the message would be different; however, the operationalization of the persuasive process would not.

directing it toward the ground that is the greater church enterprise: or more specifically, the interior of the church where the presentation of church propaganda is delivered in an elaborately orchestrated manner. McLuhan's understanding of figure and ground therefore demonstrates that when Aaron, Matthias, and Mara emphasize the importance of being "not churchy," they are emphasizing an integrated approach to marketing and communications that actively solicits the attention and participation of new members and directs it toward delivering religious rhetoric or propaganda as a means to an end.

It is therefore imperative that the active proselytization of new audience members occur in a comfortable and familiar manner that is "not churchy" lest it alienate audiences' sensibilities. Similarly, the all-important comfort Aaron, Matthias, and Mara refer to when they describe being "not churchy" is what leads to conformity because when agreement with the content of persuasive religious messaging occurs in groups of mass individuals, the result is wide-ranging conversion brought upon by repeat participation in the evangelical propaganda enterprise. By branding church materials in a manner that is not dissimilar to how common consumer materials are branded and combining this branding with a staging area and greeting team similar to those in countless storefronts and entertainment venues across the country, the result is a carefully constructed environment that actively invites audience participation by telling visitors they are entering the comfortable realm of the familiar.

More importantly, the immediate comfort and familiarity of this environment informs new visitors that whatever they experience inside will be just as familiar and entertaining as what they have experienced outside. In this way, Brazos Fellowship,

UNION, City Life, and Ecclesia each demonstrate the importance of figure and ground and its relationship to the technique of effective persuasion. However, gaining the attention of mass audiences and directing it toward the interior of churches is only one small part of the evangelical operational template. For further persuasion to occur, mass audiences must be subjected again to propaganda, but in an entirely different manner than what they were exposed to outside. For it is inside the lobby of evangelical churches where the next step in the evangelical propaganda enterprise occurs—utilizing all available means of persuasion to facilitate agreement with the terms of order of religious rhetoric.

Step Two: Utilizing All Available Means of Persuasion

Moving on from the parking lot and external staging area of churches, visitors enter the church proper through a set of large double doors, beyond which lies a secondary staging area. This staging area is set-dressed to resemble the interior of a convention center or hotel lobby, complete with a registration desk and staff and a variety of tables displaying water, coffee, juice, fruit, and small cakes. Once inside this space, visitors are encouraged to help themselves to refreshments and wander around before the start of the service. This casual pre-service gathering occurs under the watchful eye of church leadership and staff who work diligently to welcome new and returning guests: offering handshakes, hugs, and words of encouragement. I should emphasize that these interactions occur within line-of-sight of church advertising which includes video announcements from hanging wall monitors.

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This overt display of church advertising serves to remind visitors they are in a specific location; as with the use of external branded signage in church parking lots, this is a function of effective brand management (Casidy, 2013). But beyond the function of brand management, this deliberate design strategy that blends church advertising with the casual atmosphere of a hotel lobby serves two important purposes. First, it helps visitors to relax, and this is indicated by the lack of overt displays of religiosity in the space and the use of soft, mid-tempo music played in the background at each church.[11] Daycare services are also provided as are nursing rooms for new mothers and the ubiquitous 'Sunday School' for older children, each of which contributes to feelings of being in a close-knit and supportive community. Second, and more importantly, the strategic blend of multiple forms of media working in concert with one another to create a relaxing atmosphere is significant, for the practice closely resembles what Ellul (1973) describes as the propagandist utilizing all available means of persuasion.

Effective propaganda requires orchestrating multiple forms of media technologies to facilitate the action of mass audiences. In practice, this orchestration is dependent on the "usable mediums" or technologies available to the propagandist (Ellul, 1973, pp. 9–10). Each usable medium is suited to a certain style of propaganda and psychological effect, such as how the spoken word produces different audience reactions

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[11] The exception to this is Ecclesia, which displays a large pair of artistically created crucifixes: holdovers from the church building's previous use as an art gallery.

than the visual medium of film or contemporary high-definition video. Skilled

propagandists recognize the differences in medium effects and arrange their

orchestration in a manner that maximizes the collective effect of all available tools of

persuasion. Similarly, in addition to Ellul's explication of different mediums producing

different effects in audiences, McLuhan (1964) argues that the temperature of a

particular medium—either hot or cool or a combination of the two—also determines

how the receiver will be affected by its content. Hot mediums such as radio, for

example, produce more immediate psychological effects in mass audiences than

relatively cooler mediums such as video, which require more cognitive involvement by

the receiver for their full effects to be felt. Their use in propaganda is dependent on the

suitability of these media for the task at hand (McLuhan).

Because of the variations in the design of different mediums and how their

respective temperature produce different psychological effects in mass audiences, an

effective propaganda enterprise combines various mediums together in a strategically

integrated package that Ellul (1973) describes as total propaganda. Total propaganda is

typically seen, however, at the level of totalitarian mass society such as with Nazi

Germany or Stalinist Russia in which every aspect of the mass individual's life is a

carefully orchestrated exposure to the propaganda of the regime involving all available

mediums of persuasion. But while Ellul's explication of total propaganda does not

directly apply to the evangelical propaganda enterprise, it does apply to select aspects of

the design of evangelical churches, namely because of how the design of these churches

efficiently facilitates persuasion in mass audiences. For example, the interior of an

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evangelical church is deliberately designed to mimic the outside world as much as possible (I describe this above as being "not churchy"). Entrance halls are designed to mimic the interior of hotel lobbies and coffee shops and, as Matthias and Mara noted, to look like anything but a church so as not to alienate new visitors. The purpose of this "not churchy'"design is to help new visitors relax and orient themselves in their new surroundings in order to prepare them to receive religious rhetoric once inside the church worship area.

This media-centric design, seamlessly blending both hot and cool media in a non-threatening and inviting atmosphere, is shared by Brazos Fellowship, UNION, City Life, and Ecclesia as well as many other evangelical churches. Its purpose is to bombard visitors with visual and aural propaganda from the moment they arrive until the moment they leave. This speaks to Ellul's (1973) conceptualization of total propaganda and its persuasive effects in mass audiences, in that total propaganda utilizes all available means of persuasion in the most efficient, practical way possible.

As interview excerpts from Aaron, Mathias, and Mara demonstrate, the decision to craft an environment and operational template that is "not churchy" represents a deliberate means-to-an-end strategy conducive to the effective facilitation of a propaganda enterprise directed towards mass audiences who have little to no prior experience with organized religion. It must be emphasized, however, that while the operationalization of this strategy and its enactment by church leadership and staff occurs in the micro-environment of an evangelical church, the techniques and technologies involved are identical to those used for purposes of mass audience

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persuasion in mass society and are therefore representative of Ellul's conceptualization of total propaganda, albeit on a condensed and simplified scale. In the micro-environment of evangelical churches, for example, the combination of hot media (high-definition advertisements) and cool media (casual, relaxed atmosphere) serves to loosen any tensions that visitors bring into the space with them, relaxing them so they are better prepared to receive the true purpose of evangelical propaganda: a religious sermon.

This occurs in much the same fashion as total propaganda in mass society, in which various combinations of hot and cool media serve to loosen the inhibitions and reservations of mass individuals and orient them toward action, whatever that action may be. For example, at popular music venues consumers are bombarded by the flashing lights and pulsating sound of live music, just as supporters of winning political candidates are bombarded by light and sound in a similar manner with the only difference being the end goal in mind. But while in mass society this orchestrated indoctrination occurs in temples of consumer entertainment and politics, in the micro-environment of evangelical churches it occurs in the enclosed spaces of entrance halls, lobbies, and sanctuaries. It is also in these enclosed spaces where evangelical total propaganda deliberately fosters forced interpersonal interaction between both new visitors and established community members in a manner that also utilizes all available means of persuasion.

The reason for the effectiveness of this forced interaction in facilitating evangelical total propaganda is that propaganda's persuasive effects are most acute in groups rather than in isolated individuals, and a church congregation is a readily

available group as well as a captive audience. The susceptibility of groups as pathways to persuasion is supported by Ellul (1973), who argues that "propaganda enterprises are limited by the necessity for physical organization and action … effective propaganda can work only inside a group" (p. 21). In the case of evangelical propaganda being motivated by action, specifically in terms of salvation through repeat community involvement, groups of individuals are more easily persuaded to listen to strategic religious messaging than individuals alone because it is individuals who have the capacity to think and act for themselves and therefore reason themselves out of the cognitive trap of propaganda.

The rampant inability of members of a collective or group mind to think independently is a crucial element in the effective technique of propaganda. Elaborating on the power of the group mind, Ellul (1973) writes that "propaganda reaches individuals enclosed in the mass and as participants in the mass … the individual never is considered as an individual, but always in terms of what he has in common with others" (pp. 6-7). This is further understood by the Burkian concepts of identification and consubstantiality described in Chapter Two and is visible in the design elements of church entrance halls, which actively foster community participation and involvement between visitors. For example, coffee and snacks are provided free of charge, and community members are actively encouraged to interact with one another and make friends, thus leading to identification over a shared group activity. Identification over shared activity is then consubstantiated at a later point during the worship service when visitors each receive the same strategic message as part of the larger church community or congregation.

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Regarding the forced interactions that characterize pre-service community gatherings, I observed that it is extremely difficult to sit or stand alone during the pre-service coffee period. I tested this theory during my field work at Brazos Fellowship, only to find that fellow community members would walk over and ask me how I was doing that particular morning. By ensuring visitors are not left alone from the moment of their arrival, the evangelical propaganda enterprise beginning in the church parking lot is amplified in the entrance hall or gathering place of each church.

The propaganda enterprise of evangelicals does not operate in a vacuum, however. It mimics the atmospheric and environmental conditions of mass society and utilizes similar technologies and techniques. More importantly, it retains a human element in the form of church leaders and their staff, who facilitate the greater evangelical propaganda enterprise through orchestrating various hot and cool media forms such as music, video advertisements, and mood lighting in a manner not dissimilar to that of performance artists. As with all performances, the successful facilitation of a show requires considerable support in the form of technologies designed for various entertainment purposes, as unsupported acts tend to founder with audiences steeped in the language of modern communications strategies.

For instance, I observed that each of the churches in the present study uses a near-identical A/V (audio-visual) setup of both hot and cool media in its pre-service gatherings. This integrated approach to propaganda involves the use of portable speakers playing up-tempo music at a moderate volume so as to not obscure small-group conversation and the use of hanging wall monitors (see Figure 4) displaying branded

church advertisements, so visitors are aware of where they are at all times. Even church bathrooms are not exempt from the totality of evangelical propaganda, as I observed that the interior of individuals stalls have scheduled community announcements affixed to the doors. As with secular enterprises using similar equipment and strategies with the end goal of orienting mass audiences toward action, the evangelical equivalent also works to orient audiences toward action, albeit action of a different order: identification with the content of a religious sermon.

Figure 4

Brazos Fellowship Advertisement
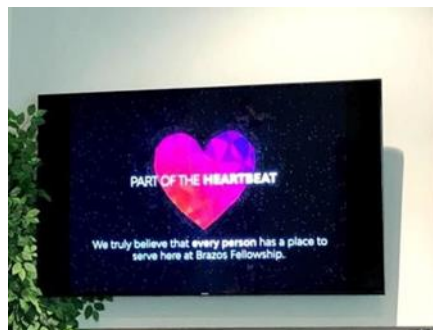
During my initial site visits I was surprised by the sheer penetration of evangelical media, and I made a pointed effort during interviews to inquire about the rationale behind it. During subsequent site visits this surprise did not abate, and this is likely because of my having come from a traditional Catholic background; the churches I was accustomed to had neither the presence nor the repetitiveness of evangelical media. In fact, I specifically remember being intrigued by the use of hanging wall monitors playing branded community video announcements on a loop in church lobbies because

after all, isn't the presence and penetration of such media usually found in bars and clubs? While each of my participants went to great lengths to justify the use of such media and techniques, it was during an interview with Benjamin, a junior member of the creative team at City Life Church when I felt I truly came to understand the evangelical perspective on total propaganda or, as Benjamin called it, "the guest experience."

Benjamin is a 31-year-old graduate of Texas State University employed at City Life Church in a variety of roles: including photographer, musician, and social media executive. Previously a marketing and communications student at the University of Houston, Benjamin made a concerted effort during his interview to outline and justify City Life's strategy and approach to integrated marketing and communications as a pathway to growing the church congregation. The interview was initially quite difficult as Benjamin was very protective about his work at City Life and likely saw my research as a threat to its legitimacy. However, I found that by mentioning my own background and experience in marketing, I was able to disarm him and build a bridge of connectivity between our life-worlds. The interview ran much smoothly after that.

While Benjamin initially answered my questions in blunt sentences once I mentioned that I had visited other churches and was surprised at how similar their liturgical operation was, Benjamin jumped at the opportunity to argue that City Life's use of similar equipment and strategies was simply a matter of telling the story of good in a "unique and compelling manner" for "people who don't come to church here." Pressing Benjamin to expand on this, I argued that over-selling a brand frequently results in consumer disappointment. He quickly countered this:

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What is the guest experience like? That's our priority. There's more effort put into first time visitor style Sunday stuff than there is with creative social media and all of that other stuff. There's way more effort put in what is it like for a person's first time to be here. Who do they see from the parking lot? Is the parking lot team running tight? Are the greeters and ushers running tight? Is the Connect Team running tight? So, keeping everything in-house, that's the priority.

Benjamin's emphasis on keeping things in-house is remarkably transparent, for it demonstrates that church leadership and staff at City Life recognize the necessity of keeping a tight lid on the operationalization of its propaganda enterprise. By keeping the operation internal as much as possible (colloquially, in-house), City Life's leaders and staff are able to control this operation and exercise a degree of consistency in their liturgical operation.

While the structure of evangelical propaganda is predominantly vertically oriented with a leader (pastor) serving as a figurehead, certain aspects of the evangelical propaganda enterprise like the pre-service coffee hour are akin to what Ellul (1973) labels as horizontal propaganda. Contrasting the efficiencies of Harold Laswell's (1938) top-down, mechanized propaganda with its emphasis on technologically mediated persuasion, Ellul's horizontal propaganda is seen in its small-group focus and appearance of being leaderless. Messaging with horizontal propaganda is deliberately kept at the level of small-group discussion rather than outright dictatorial directives, and this lack of outright order allows the individual to voluntarily participate (Ellul, 1973). In the evangelical context, for example, the individual is consciously aware of their presence in their immediate environment and that they may voluntarily leave at any time. They may have been invited to attend, but they made a conscious choice to do so and are beholden to no-one to stay.

For evangelical leaders and staff, rather than immediately exposing new church visitors to the vertical propaganda of the religious sermon, they instead emphasize the casual, comfortable guest experience, encouraging visitors to mix and mingle and "have a coffee." And rather than make use of a stereotypical frocked priest circulating among his flock, evangelical leaders prefer to think of themselves as friends of a community offering moral and spiritual guidance as servants of Christ, and this is reflected in their dress, deportment, and overall engaging mannerisms (Webber, 2002).

In addition to audience and environment, the contrast in evangelical propaganda between its vertical and horizontal structures is also seen in the difference in tone between the sermon or message component and the role of the pre-service mix and mingle in facilitating it. For example, while the sermon itself with its overt media orchestration and top-down dissemination from a figurehead on stage is characteristically vertical propaganda, the pre-service coffee hour is experience oriented and small-group focused. When Benjamin emphasized the effort that City Life's staff place on the "guest experience" of the pre-service show, he is in fact describing how the church uses horizontal propaganda within the specific time frame of the pre-service greeting period to maximize the opportunities church staff have to capture and hold onto the attention and interest of new church visitors.

Once the attention of new visitors has been gained and held, then it can be directed toward the appropriate spectacle: the propagandistic message of the orchestrated sermon led by a charismatic pastor. Because of the need to direct the attention of new visitors to the outright proselytization of the evangelical sermon, the emphasis church

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staff place on prioritizing the guest experience described by Benjamin necessitates using

horizontal propaganda to ensure a positive experience in a new environment. In

accordance with basic marketing theory, ensuring that the first experience potential

consumers have with a new product is paramount in ensuring repeat interactions and

eventual purchasing (Ahin et al., 2011).

Applying this strategy to the context of evangelical churches, ensuring that

visitors have a positive first experience with the 'product' of evangelical propaganda

increases the probability of a repeat 'purchase' and therefore requires the utilization of

both horizontal and vertical propaganda to effectively facilitate this purchase. This is to

say that, in order for evangelicals to heighten the odds that new visitors will return,

church staff must utilize all available tools or means of persuasion. Reflecting on the

pragmatics of this, Harry, the production director at City Life, described the process as

follows:

> *One of the biggest things I realized is that from the perspective of a newcomer*
> *coming and deciding whether they're going to be a part of the church is that*
> *different people see different things. So, you have parents and they're going to*
> *come in and look at the media and not care…but when our church started taking*
> *a shift toward a younger audience, more college age, and young professionals,*
> *when they walk into the auditorium, we play secular music, something that they*
> *recognize. What does that mean to them? It helps them to relax and say oh, this*
> *isn't one of those uptight churches that is super traditional and tells them that*
> *them have to act in a certain way.*

A bear of a man with a close-cropped receding hairline and ruddy complexion, Harry is

a graduate of the University of Houston who worked for a number of years in television

as a production assistant in television shows such as Judge Alex before leaving the

industry entirely to dedicate his life in the service of God. During our interview, Henry

told me that during the last film he worked on in 2017, he had a conversation with God one evening and told him that he was done with life in the industry and desired something more meaningful. Already a member of City Life's congregation, Harry took a leap of faith and began volunteering his time with the audio-visual team, which eventually led to a permanent paid position. This combination of industry and local experience made Henry an invaluable interviewee. His description of the contrast between the liturgy of traditional and non-traditional churches is significant for several reasons.

Traditional Christian institutions such as Catholicism and mainline Protestantism receive a fair share of criticism from their detractors. For evangelicals seeking to distance themselves from their more traditional brethren, such criticisms often involve accusations of a rigid hierarchical structure incompatible with modernity and a lack of forward-thinking leadership (Stolz et al., 2016). This rigidity, critics argue, leads to some religious organizations falling behind the curve of social progress; this, when coupled with clergy who emphasize tradition recognizing the church's changing role in a modern world, only adds to the growth of frustrated religious 'nones' or the religious unaffiliated (Carlin, 2013). But while I cannot make any claims as to whether the congregant base at Brazos Fellowship, UNION, City Life or Ecclesia is made up of numbers of religious 'nones,' I can say that each these churches goes to great lengths to create an atmosphere and environment that for visitors from all walks of life feels fresh, modern, and above all, relevant.

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For example, when Harry describes City Life as a church that isn't "uptight" or "super traditional," he is describing a church that makes a conscious effort to contrast itself with more traditional churches such as the Catholic Church: that what City Life lacks in historical trappings it makes up in atmosphere, environment, and fun. Moreover, Harry's statement indicates an understanding that new visitors bring with them their own preconceived notions of what church is and how it ought to be. To combat this, technology team members such as Harry work to create an environment that is warm, inviting, and above all comfortable and enjoyable to be in. This is significant, for the concept of making church fun for congregants is a prime indicator of a willingness by church leadership and staff to embrace the techniques of modern communication in their liturgy as exemplified in churches such as City Life, which go to great lengths with their propaganda to ensure that the guest experience for newcomers is everything that the propaganda of more traditional organizations is not.

These orchestrated and carefully planned efforts by evangelicals to brand themselves as not simply a routine or habitual religious destination but a life experience to be enjoyed is a unique characteristic not often shared by mainline institutions, which remain tied to tradition and often outdated views on how best to communicate their message (Christensen, 2020). Additionally, the self-reflexive understanding displayed by church leaders and staff such as Harry about how the prior experiences of new visitors shape their future evaluations of churches is also a factor in the design and operationalization of the evangelical propaganda enterprise. But while the overarching goal of both traditional and non-traditional churches is arguably the same—salvation

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through community participation and shared worldview via agreement with specific terms of order—the strategies employed by these churches are vastly different.

Whereas mainline churches have a tendency to stick to tradition, evangelicals employ a variety of strategies that go beyond branding and marketing themselves as an alternative destination for the religious novice: they also market and brand themselves to the religious unaffiliated and, more importantly, the disenfranchised. And while mainline churches have their own version of appealing to the disenfranchised such as the "Catholics Come Home" movement (https://www.catholicscomehome.org/), evangelicals take things one step further by creating an environment that specifically appeals to the lost.

While I cannot make any claims as to whether or not the congregations of Brazos Fellowship, UNION, City Life, or Ecclesia include religious disenfranchised mass individuals as I did not conduct any congregant interviews, it was during my interview with Mark at Ecclesia when I learned a valuable lesson in just how much emphasis evangelicals place on creating an environment that visitors damaged by traditional religious organizations will embrace rather than eschew. Bespectacled, bearded, and deeply contemplative, Mark is a seminarian with a multi-faith background, and I found interviewing him to be a highly rewarding intellectual exercise. In discussing the unique environment of Ecclesia with its artistic interpretations of the crucifix, soft mood lighting, and Victorian-style candelabra, some of which are holdovers from the building's previous use as an art gallery, Mark described the Ecclesia approach as a "one

size fits all" operational template designed to appeal to inter-denominational faiths and preferences:

> *Each congregation, each community, needs to understand the context in which they're operating. For some, with a distinctive denominational affiliation, some of that is already decided. We [Ecclesia] have become a home for so many individuals coming from a broad array of traditions or some having come from very deep harms in the church that they grew up in. And some come to the faith anew.*

Before unpacking Mark's quote, it is important to note that Ecclesia considers itself part of the emerging church movement. While controversial in some circles, the emerging church movement is best understood as a broad movement that uses culturally sensitive left-leaning approaches to reach the postmodern unchurched population with the Christian message through de-emphasizing doctrinal creeds and absolutes and re-evaluating the Bible and its teachings (Slick, 2007, n.p.). But while Ecclesia does brand itself as part of the emerging church movement, its methods of persuasion are nevertheless highly similar to those of other evangelical churches in that the equipment, rhetoric, and design of the church shares characteristics with those of Brazos Fellowship, UNION, and City Life.

Mark's statement on Ecclesia being a home for people coming from "very deep harms in the church" is quite significant, for it speaks to an ongoing effort by evangelicals to brand and market themselves as offering a better experience for congregants than their mainline counterparts. As Mark points out, providing this experience isn't just for the religious novice or new visitor but also for the religious disenfranchised who have walked away from church for a variety of reasons. Many of these reasons hinge on the proximity of mass individuals to other mass individuals

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sharing similar worldviews. It is significant therefore that contemporary sociological research on the religious unaffiliated indicates small group socialization is a significant influence on why growing numbers of individuals identity as having no religious affiliation or proclivity toward faith when others do (Thiessen & Wilkins-Laflamme, 2017).

In operational terms, this widespread disaffiliation from organized religion often stems from an immediate family environment with parents who raise their children as non-religious or have loose religious affiliations. Once individuals leave this small group environment and enter mass society on their own, they tend to continue to orient themselves toward associations and activities that reflect their upbringing; over time, this produces a generational decline in religious association (Hout & Fischer, 2002, 2014). However, the reasons why the religious disenchanted leave organized religion rather than having never really been a part of it are another matter entirely. Listing some of the reasons for the ongoing growth in the religious disenchanted and leaning heavily on poll data from the Barna Group, Duin (2008) summarizes a gamut of grievances against organized religion including church scandals and corruption, uninspired sermons, prayers going unanswered, and a general view of congregations having grown stale. Echoing this, data from both the Pew Institute and Hout and Fischer indicate that among Americans who report having faith rather than religious affiliation, reasons for disaffiliation include questioning church teachings, not liking religious leaders, and disliking the position that churches take on certain political issues (Why America's 'Nones' Don't Identify with a Religion, Pew Research 2018).

Many of these well-documented reasons for religious disenchantment overlap with Mark's comments about Ecclesia being a home for people coming from a broad array of traditions as well those who have experienced deep harm in churches. This demonstrates that widespread criticisms over churches having grown stale or losing social relevance are well recognized in evangelical circles and that ongoing solutions to these issues are routinely provided by the very structures and orchestrations I described previously in this chapter. Less commonly discussed, however, are the concerns over church scandals, abuse, and corruption and how evangelicals work to mediate these concerns and bring back into the fold individuals who have previously walked away.

When Mark indicated that each church needs to be aware of the context in which they operate and be cognizant of the need to repair the damaged relationships that people have with organized religion, he is indicating ongoing efforts by evangelical churches to a) brand themselves as quantifiably different than other churches and b) create an environment and operational template that differs from the type that fostered religious disaffiliation and disenchantment in mass individuals. These parameters work in tandem to alleviate the opinions and concerns of the religious disenfranchised who may be visiting a church again for the first time in a while and aren't quite sure of themselves. But while I cannot make any claims about the number of these individuals in attendance during the sermons that I participated in during my field work, or if they were even in attendance at all, I can say with some certainty that churches such as Ecclesia are marketing themselves to them just as UNION markets itself to the unchurched, and City

Life and Brazos Fellowship market themselves to various other groups of mass individuals.

What these various insights into the motivations and approaches of those responsible for crafting the template of evangelical propaganda demonstrate is that the successful and routine operationalization of this template requires a specific technique or style of propaganda in a safe, comfortable, and inviting micro-environment that mirrors the outside world and doesn't seem "too churchy." More importantly, these various propagandistic approaches to mass persuasion demonstrate that not only are the rhetoric and methods of persuasion employed by church propagandists highly similar but that underlying this similarity is a fundamental means-to-an-end strategy: the creation of a specific product appealing to various types of mass individuals' active involvement and participation in a spiritual community greater than themselves.

However, true salvation for these individuals is not found in the parking lots, entrance halls, or lobbies of evangelical churches. Rather, it is found in the content of strategic religious rhetoric to which exposure occurs in the sanctuary or worship space of churches. Owing to the pragmatics of exposing large numbers of mass individuals to this rhetoric repeatedly, it is imperative that the media orchestration supporting this exposure occurs in a sealed environment that minimizes distraction and actively orients the audience toward the front stage from which the message is disseminated.

Step Three: Orchestrated Propaganda in a Closed Environment

The evangelical template of persuasion is most effective when mass audiences are exposed to propaganda in an enclosed environment free of outside distractions.

Unlike traditional mainline religious environments, however, this environment does not resemble a typical church. In fact, it resembles the atmosphere and environment of the cathedrals of contemporary entertainment culture such as cinemas, concert halls, or night clubs: replete with comfortable seating, an elevated stage, surround sound speakers, and large screen visual displays. Significantly, this purpose-built setup allows evangelicals to persuade large numbers of mass individuals with relative ease and efficiency. The rationale behind its unique construction is best understood through Ellul's (1964) emphasis on the automatism of technique and its relationship to the superiority of the technical over the non-technical in all facets of human activity (p. 83).

Writing in *The Technological Society*, Ellul (1964) describes a hallmark of technique as an automatism of technical choice throughout mass society. Because the efficiencies of technique are so pervasive, mass audiences have developed, to a remarkable degree, an a priori understanding that activities involving the technical are at all times more efficient and therefore preferable to those that do not. With regard to the transmission or dissemination of information in mass society, this a priori understanding dictates that mass audiences will adhere to the most technical and efficient methods for doing so. However, this choice is not consciously made by mass individuals and is in fact a function of propaganda designed to foster an orthopraxy or uniformity of action in mass audiences (Ellul, 1973).

This large-scale use of technical means to attain an orthopraxy of action is symptomatic of life in a technological society and is also the reason why the evangelical operational template, which imbues visitors with propaganda of its own, is designed to

mimic rather than challenge the world of the familiar. By crafting a template and delivering it to mass audiences in a technical environment, evangelicals adhere to the efficiencies of technique through the "McDonaldization" of religiosity to recruit large numbers of mass individuals with relative ease and efficiency (Watson & Scalen, 2008, p. 171). Similarly, given the proclivity of contemporary mass audiences to value the technical over the non-technical, crafting a complex and highly entertaining form of worship is more likely to appeal to the sensibilities of these audiences, who typically see more traditional forms of liturgy as outdated and irrelevant (Hackett, 2008)

The ongoing technical developments seen in the liturgy of evangelical churches is in direct contrast to the historic and largely static liturgy of traditional mainline institutions. Moreover, the rationale behind these developments involves an ongoing concern that churches must adapt themselves to contemporary communication styles to maintain the interest of contemporary audiences (Sample, 1998). This notion of adapt or perish was directly expressed to me when I interviewed Samuel, a production assistant with Brazos Fellowship, who is responsible for creating the visuals displayed by the church on their large screen monitors. In his early 30s and with sandy hair, Samuel was accompanied by a gurgling newborn, which caused our interview to be cut short due to the infant having stomach trouble. Samuel did, however, describe in detail the long road to recovery that evangelicals have had in adapting themselves to the technical milieu of contemporary society:

> *I think with our current culture it's taken a long progression for churches to*
> *catch up to how we communicate. I think it's a matter of realizing that people*
> *outside of church don't use hymnals to talk to each other. I mean if you look at*

mass communication on tv, and social media, you've seen the culture take leaps and bounds in how they visually appeal to the masses.

Samuel's concise, matter of fact statement is significant for two reasons. First, his description of "current culture" speaks to mass culture, and mass culture is predominantly a culture of media. Because of the media-centricity of mass culture and the confines of technique, mass audiences are accustomed to having information disseminated to them in a media-centric manner, one that also happens to utilize all available tools of persuasion (Ellul, 1973). In addition, while the technologies themselves have changed over time and developed into a multi-media landscape of interconnectedness or network society, what is particularly significant about these developments is the effect they have had on religious organizations (Castells, 1996). For example, when Samuel mentions that churches need to realize "people outside of church don't use hymnals to talk to each other," he is describing an understanding among evangelicals that if they wish to proselytize contemporary mass audiences accustomed to the technique of efficient communication (propaganda) in their everyday lives, churches must adapt themselves to this landscape or risk falling into irrelevancy. Referencing the all-encompassing conformity of technique, Ellul (1973) argues that propaganda is a total system that must be either accepted by religious organizations or rejected, thus risking the accusation of being "out of step" with mass society (p. 229). For evangelicals then, the only practical response to this dilemma is conformity with technique. But what does this conformity look like? How is it operationalized in worship? And more importantly, how is this template used to direct audience attention toward a message that mass

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individuals have been conditioned to ignore by a society that increasingly sees religion as outdated and irrelevant?

Hot and Cool Media in a Windowless Room

All Christian enterprises have their own method of disseminating religious messaging to audiences, but it is the evangelicals who have perfected a method as a persuasive means to an end. This advantageous position occupied by evangelicals is due to the technique of their orchestrated presentation of religious messaging involving several spatial and technical elements, some of which I have described in this chapter. The most striking of these elements, however, is the complete lack of windows in the evangelical worship space, which blocks out natural lighting and keeps the room in near-total darkness. This lack of natural light in evangelical churches is in direct contrast to the strategic use of windows and stained glass that has been a hallmark of mainline institutions since the medieval era, illuminating church architecture, priests, and congregants (Reuterswärd, 1982). This is not, however, a hallmark of evangelical church design.

Figure 5

Brazos Fellowship Interior

Blocking out natural light from sanctuaries allows evangelicals to strategically coalesce the often-fragmented attention of a captive audience and direct it toward an expansive stage at the front of the room, a stage from which the evangelical pastor engages in the electronically supported dissemination of persuasive religious messaging (see Figure 5). The purpose of this unusual architectural arrangement is owing to two factors. First, Christian religious services are typically held once per week, typically on Sundays. This means that for six consecutive days, mass individuals live their lives away from the church where they are exposed to any number of environmental stressors. These stressors impact their emotional wellbeing and give evangelicals the opportunity to brand the action of attending church as a means of alleviating this stress, thereby demonstrating Ellul's (1973) emphasis of propaganda being used to precipitate a desired course of action in mass audiences.

But facilitating the action of attending church requires more than simply branding church as a desirable destination for alleviating the life stresses of mass individuals. Also needed is a method for focusing the fragmented experiences of these individuals and directing them toward a singular point: the pastor on the stage. Doing so involves the orchestrated 'hotting up' or gradual raising of the temperature of several hot and cool media forms in the enclosed space of the sanctuary, which is designed to maximize exposure to this orchestration. Similarly, while seating in evangelical churches follows a similar arrangement as traditional pews in mainline institutions, it is not of the same construction. In lieu of hard wooden pews, evangelical churches typically use

plush sofas and chairs because seating of this type is more likely to help audiences relax and feel comfortable.

In addition to making audiences feel comfortable, evangelical seating physically directs their attention toward the pastor on the stage because, in an otherwise darkened room, the only source of illumination or warmth stems from the overhead lights controlled from the A/V booth at the back of the room, illuminating the stage in multiple colors to adjust the 'temperature' of the room. For example, the hot medium of overhead lights illuminating the stage for pastoral addresses is used in conjunction with large hanging wall monitors located behind the stage, providing additional visual stimuli in the form of branded community announcements, worship song lyrics, and motion backgrounds. When combined with the predominantly cool atmosphere of a darkened room with comfortable seating, the use of these warmer visual stimuli aids in capturing the attention of mass audiences and directing it toward the front-of-house rather than what is occurring outside the sanctuary. This strategic set design, which combines both hot and cool media in a complete package, is significant for regardless of where audiences are seated in the sanctuary, they have a clear and unobstructed view of the stage; this in turn means each individual receives equal exposure to the orchestration that occurs in line of sight (see Figure 6).

Figure 6

Ecclesia Sanctuary

Ensuring audiences are comfortable and then increasing the temperature of the room with strategic lighting and motion graphics is a potent tactic in the evangelical strategy book. However, visual stimuli require an additional auditory equivalent for the full effects of evangelical propaganda to be felt by audiences, and these tactics are found in the strategic use of contemporary music. Evangelicals have a long association with contemporary music, the use of which during worship is a hallmark of their independent religious identity (Hartje, 2009). But while evangelical worship has been oft discussed in comparison with the use of traditional hymnals in mainline religious organizations, it is underexamined as a tool of propaganda and persuasion.

While evangelical music is not stylistically homogenous, its use in worship nevertheless follows a similar format (Ingalls, 2017). Music during an evangelical service typically follows a four-song format played by a multi-piece volunteer band that takes the stage immediately before a service and vacates after the set to make room for the pastor and his weekly message. The songs themselves are classified as 'Christian

contemporary' and are of a moderate tempo and predominantly involve verses of sacrifice, praise, love, and worship (Ingalls, 2018). I observed variations of both volume and tempo within this format at each of the study's four field sites, but these variations are not large enough to warrant further consideration. What does warrant further consideration, however, is how evangelical worship music is used to increase the temperature in sanctuaries and, in combination with strategic lighting in a windowless environment, direct audience attention toward the pastor on stage with his weekly message.

During interviews, participants described how music is strategically used to elevate the mood of audiences, making it easier to direct their attention toward active participation in the service. Harry, the production director at City Life Church, described this process to me as surreptitiously using sound and rhythm to prepare audiences to receive the pastor's message:

> *Taking what I've learned professionally, when I was younger and went to clubs, the one of the things I remember is how my body was moving before I even got into the place. Why? Because I'm feeling the bass. My body is vibrating to the rhythm. One of the things I see in churches is that people are walking in exhausted. They're walking in tired because it's been a long week. So how do we them focused on worship and on the Word? Louder music. More amplification on the bass and so, unbeknownst to them, they're coming in here hopefully a little more awake and a little more alert so that by the time they hear the message they're alert and they're listening.*

Harry's quote describes in detail how the strategic orchestration of sound and rhythm is used to motivate audiences to sit through and pay attention to a religious sermon. This is supported by Pratkanis and Aronson (1992), who argue that audience motivation is key for effective propaganda since unmotivated audiences are less likely to be persuaded and

therefore less likely to commit to the propagandist's desired course of action. Harry's description of how evangelicals use sound to facilitate action, in this case entering a darkened sanctuary and listening to a religious sermon, also demonstrates a remarkable understanding of McLuhan's (1964) maxim "the medium is the message," specifically in how the orchestration of hot and cool media effects mass audiences. Put simply, the song lyrics themselves are not as important as the sound and tempo of the music; when combined with strategic lighting and motion backgrounds that match this tempo, the effect is to motivate an audience to actively participate in worship and the absorption of a sermon.

The Granfalloon of Collective Participation

Evangelicals' use of music supported by orchestrated lighting and visuals has proven effective at focusing fragmented audience attention to a point of total concentration. The effects of propaganda, however, are at their most potent when directed to the individual as part of a collective rather than the individual in isolation. It is the collective that raises the desire of an isolated individual to share in a meaningful activity, invoking in the individual a "psychology of participation" (Ellul, 1973, p. 172). Given that the target of the evangelical propaganda enterprise is the mass individual in need of saving, the orchestrated persuasion of this enterprise is most efficient when it causes the individual to lose control and submit to the external impulses of a group (Ellul, 1973, p. 172).

In operational terms, this psychology of participation is created by the phenomenon of the minimum group paradigm: a collective association of disparate

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individuals sharing nothing in common beyond the activity they are participating in. By creating these associations among individuals, the propagandist is more effectively able to manipulate the crowd and direct their attention toward a desired end. The effectiveness of the minimum group paradigm as a tool of persuasion is owing to two simple elements: the knowledge that an individual is part of a group, and that membership in this group is a source of self-esteem and pride (Pratkanis & Aronson, 1992, p. 217). In the context of evangelical propaganda, the minimum group paradigm occurs when mass individuals form loose associations with one another as collective members of a church and then draw upon this collective as a source of in-group pride by association. This can be understood by the rhetorical statement—"I'm a Christian and I belong to this church. I am part of a community that accepts me."

While the minimum group paradigm functions as a source of in-group pride, it nevertheless originates with an invitation to join a collective, typically via the persuasive speech of a skilled rhetor who creates the necessary social conditions showcasing the allure of group membership. By creating social conditions that impress upon the individual the appeal of group membership—such as the use of cheer squads, swag bags, and branded signage—the individual is more likely to see that in-group as a well of self-esteem that can be drawn upon to boost their own well-being. This well-being is then furthered by group participation in the collective of worship, which is itself a function of the orchestration of various hot and cool media forms.

Membership in a religious community therefore functions as a stable minimum group paradigm that can be relied upon each week to deliver a much-needed dose of

social activity to the mass individual struggling to make sense of a disordered world.

Echoing Ellul's (1973) emphasis on the persuasive power of the collective and Pratkanis

and Aronson's (1992) description of the appeal of the hive-mind of in-groups, Mark, the

community pastor at Ecclesia, described the weekly worship experience as one of

emotional release through collective participation in the act of worship:

> *I think the experience is an invitation to step out of whatever you're bringing in with you, whatever tensions or concerns and trials, whatever this week has held, that you come into this place, that you come into this place together, and that we are submitting ourselves to the collective act of worship.*

Mark's brief quote demonstrates that the performance of orchestrated evangelical

worship as part of a collective can be relied upon by congregants to temporarily release

them from the trials and tribulations of life as a mass individual in mass society.

Focusing the fragmented attention of mass individuals to the stage where a pastor

delivers an uplifting spiritual message, a sense of order is brought to an otherwise

chaotic and unpredictable world. This focusing of audience attention as a means to an

end is aided by the closed environment and set design of the evangelical sanctuary,

which contains the media orchestration emanating from the control booth and raises the

temperature of the room, directing it to a point of total concentration as part of a group.

Mark at Ecclesia, expanding on how he described the use of orchestrated media to direct

the attention of a disparate group of individuals as a means to an end, noted that

> *The feeling that we would love to have is one that it is free of unnecessary distraction, one where we focus attention to where we would ultimately like it to be [the stage]. There is an element of orchestrating, or directing that feeling, and that's why the cooperation between the gatherings team, the teacher team, the tech team, all has to work in concert. Because ultimately, we're getting at the same end which is how we use this time each week that's been called out for our community to come together in the act of worship.*

The significance of Mark's quote is that it describes how the orchestration of various media forms, both hot and cool, creates a collective experience that captures the attention of mass individuals and directs it toward the church stage as a means to a singular end: the receiving and understanding of a religious message designed to induce persuasion and eventual salvation.

Mark's emphasis that this invitational orchestration occurs in an environment free of unnecessary distraction, with total cooperation between church leadership and staff, is also significant because it demonstrates that when directing propaganda toward a newly formed minimum group paradigm, words alone do not suffice. They require the support of a suite of hot and cool media designed to facilitate the formation of this group and the focusing of its attention as a means to an end. Mark's statement also demonstrates that for the fragmented mass individual, salvation is found not in isolation but in the active participation in this group and by exposure to the orchestrated propaganda that is directed toward it.

Instant Gratification and the Deliverance of Easily Consumable Information

Facilitating effective propaganda requires a considerable amount of technical support for its persuasive elements to be successful at inducing mass audience identification with its content. Referencing this, Ellul (1973) writes that the propagandist alone is ineffective at inducing persuasion, for if they rely solely on psychological action to persuade an audience his propaganda will lose its effectiveness (p. 24). Overcoming this disadvantage, Ellul (1973) writes, requires that the propagandist "become a

technician" and select "technically calculated words … that reflect an organization even when they seem spontaneous" (p. 24).

In the context of evangelical propaganda, we see that the carefully chosen words of evangelical rhetoric reflect a technical mindset in pastors who strategically design their rhetoric to facilitate action in mass audiences: action that aligns these audiences with the evangelical terms of order. However, the pastor's presence on stage delivering a religious message is not enough to facilitate the persuasion of large audiences of disparate individuals, for even the most skilled propagandist requires some assistance. For this reason, evangelical pastors rely heavily on the instrumental technique of commercial entertainment media in their worship services in support of their persuasive message.

Evangelical propaganda seamlessly blends technology and rhetoric in a calculated package to maximize efficiency of information transmission toward mass audiences to facilitate action, and its success in inducing persuasion hinges on the cooperation of a number of key elements and actors. These elements and actors are found at the rear of the sanctuary or worship space in an enclosed and elevated control booth that provides necessary technical support for the successful transmission of persuasive religious messaging by church pastors. The importance of the control booth, and the church staff who operate the complex suite of digital media within it, cannot be overstated for it is they who are responsible for inducing the initial audience cooperation that pastors then build on with their weekly sermons.

Describing the importance of the booth and tech team members to facilitating the

persuasion of mass audiences, John, the executive pastor of City Life Church, noted that

Media provides opportunities to get other people involved in the message, so it isn't just the man of God [pastor] coming down from the mountain and sharing the word of God. When you're able to think about creating a certain environment and bringing in other elements, you're building a team so that other people feel a part of the message too. So, for us it's creativity, it's excellence, and it's presenting the story of God in a way that I think is not just relevant, but really makes sense in our culture.

Of moderate height with thinning hair and a cherubic face, John is an enthusiastic

speaker and one of my first contacts when I was working to attain permission to conduct

field work at independent churches. My interview with John was held in his private

office in full view of white boards listing scheduling and social media rankings (which I

attempted to secretly photograph but failed), and I found his blend of spiritualism and

technical pragmatism enticing. John's quote about presenting the story of God in a

manner that "is not just relevant but really makes sense in our culture" is significant, for

it demonstrates an understanding of how a liturgy can be directed, via the orchestration

of hot and cool media, to alleviate the reservations of the religious unaffiliated and

disengaged.

The fragmented demographics of evangelical church goers present unique

opportunities for the dissemination of evangelical propaganda because many attendees

are first-time visitors having sought out a church for a variety of reasons. Some are there

at the invitation of friends or colleagues, some attend because they found the church

online, and others are there because they feel hopeless and in need of assistance. What

these individuals have in common is that increasing numbers of them attend church for

practical rather than spiritual reasons (Why Americans Go to Religious and Church Services, Pew Research 2018). For example, the religious unaffiliated may attend because they desire being part of a minimum group paradigm, while the religious disengaged who may have suffered deep harms from the church as described by Mark at Ecclesia, attend because they are willing to give church another chance. Again, however, while I cannot make any claims as to whether such individuals were indeed present in these churches, arguably the possibility of their visiting churches   gives pastors and staff members the opportunity to demonstrate to their audiences why attending church still matters. In fact, this notion of the changing role of the church in contemporary society is what John alluded to with his statement of using media to show congregants that church and therefore Christianity still "makes sense" in a culture grown accustomed to the technique of contemporary communication with its built-in immediate gratification by the efficient information dissemination capabilities of hot and cool media. For John, then, the orchestrated, performative use of media in worship is the key to unlocking the door or psychological barrier that prevents mass individuals from being saved. But how is this breaking down of psychological barriers in mass audiences orchestrated? For this, we turn to the pragmatics of evangelical persuasion.

The Pragmatics and Material Constraints of Persuasion

While ultimately church pastors are responsible for delivering mass audiences to salvation through their rhetoric, presenting this rhetoric to mass individuals in an entertaining form is the task of evangelical tech teams. These multi-member teams, predominantly volunteer staffed but led by a salaried senior member, occupy the control

booth at the back of the church and are responsible for soliciting and retaining the active

attention and participation of visitors, subtly orienting their focus toward the stage

through the careful presentation of visual and aural stimuli. Significantly, the suite of

media within this booth includes control boards for sound and lighting displays, high-

definition video cameras, on-screen visual displays, and teleprompters to help pastors

recite their scripted sermons multiple times daily. None of this equipment would look

out of place in a cinema, nightclub, or concert hall.

The purpose behind the placement and orchestration of these complex media

forms is as practical as the content of the pastor's sermon that it supports. During my

interview with Aaron, Brazos Fellowship's production director, he described his team as

willing to engage with any media, regardless of form, so long as it proves effective at

presenting scripture in a meaningful manner and in a style that resonates with the

communication preferences of congregants:

> *We want congregants to come face-to-face with the message of Jesus and then decide what to do with it. We want them to come in here. What is important to their culture? And then, how can we use that? Technologically speaking, what can we leverage for the Kingdom of God? If using technology means we can use a presentation software on a screen well let's use that for God. If we can use lights, if we can use sound, an electric guitar, let's use all of that for God's glory.*

When Aaron emphasizes leveraging technology for the Kingdom of God, he is

expressing a viewpoint shared by other interview participants: namely that evangelical

liturgy must appeal to the communication preferences of mass individuals rather than

forcing these individuals to adapt to a rigid liturgical structure, such as seen with

mainline religious institutions. His sentiment that "we want them [mass individuals] to

come here" speaks to a mission-centric mentality of salvation through participation in a

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minimum group paradigm, and his question of "what is important to their culture"

expresses an instrumental view of media in which resonating with this group means

using all available means of persuasion, proselytizing them to serve God.

Aaron's pragmatic views on the use of media in worship are supported by a

similar quote by John, City Life's executive pastor, focusing on the technique of

evangelical instrumentality. During this interview, I engaged in some contemplative

back and forth with John, asking him how City Life's media-centric liturgical format

compares with Jesus's primary orality. I distinctly remember John not even missing a

beat with his answer, telling me quite matter-of-factly that when dealing with today's

audience of mass individuals, a liturgy relying primarily on spoken word is unlikely to

resonate or appeal to them:

> *I think we need to tell it [the gospel] in multiple angles, multiple facets. As many facets as possible. Everything from video to music to spoken word to dance to lighting; I mean everything. I don't think for church purposes, even just preaching the gospel, that the spoken word is powerful enough.*

John's focus on the unsupported gospel not resonating with mass audiences is

significant, for it hints at conflict between religious history and tradition which are

frequently at odds with the efficient technique of contemporary communication and the

emphasis on rapid, easily consumable pieces of information over quiet, pious

contemplation. New and first-time visitors to evangelical churches are likely to enter the

church with a set of expectations fueled by the technique of contemporary

communication, which emphasizes efficiency above all else. For John and other

evangelical pastors, failing to meet these expectations by not catering to them in the

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presentation of religious materials, in a manner they have come to expect, is likely to end in failure of these materials to resonate.

There is, however, an additional issue with using orchestrated media to satisfy the presentation requirements of mass individuals to facilitate religious salvation through community participation: over-orchestration. Walking the fine line between using media to direct audience attention toward a pastor's sermon and veering off into entertainment for entertainment's sake is an issue of considerable concern to evangelical leaders and tech teams, who must remain cognizant that the 'show' supports the sermon and not the other way around. This was best described to me by Sara, City Life's creative director and the wife of Pastor John, who noted that

> *We have to constantly remember why is this important. Why are we doing this? Is it just to show people how cool we are or are we actually encouraging them with the message of Jesus? Whether it be actual words where we're talking about him or we're showing it through the life of our community and just the authenticity of that spiritual family [we have to remember why we're here.].*

Diminutive, pert, and engaging, Sara has been married to John for twenty years and has headed up all creative endeavors at City Life for a number of years, including overseeing the tech team, although the day-to-day operation is handled by Harry. When Sara mentions authenticity and how leaders must constantly remember "why this is important," she is in fact referencing an authenticity of form rather than content. Given that the content of the Bible is seen as sacred, in the eyes of the disseminators of its content their work as faithful servants of God is also sacred and therefore as authentic as God's word.

However, proselytizing an audience of mass individuals conditioned by a growing culture of skepticism to accept this is no mean feat and requires the support of several tools that evangelicals have at their disposal. Delivering this support means using flashing lights and the pulsating sounds of a multi-piece band belting out Christian hits and aided by large-screen teleprompters to springboard audience members out of the rote routine of everyday life, pushing them out of idleness and setting them up to hear a carefully crafted religious sermon, all in support of the Kingdom of God. But for Sara and other evangelicals like her, this approach must not come at the cost of the authenticity of their task, which remains rooted in a mission-centric worldview emphasizing salvation via commitment to a way of life that mass individuals must experience first-hand before they can live it. Working within the confines of an enclosed environment, evangelical leaders are afforded the material and technological advantage of both a captive audience and the orchestration of hot and cool media in support of their sacred and authentic mission: the saving of lost souls, one Sunday service at a time.

Summary of Participant Observation

When looking at the trappings and set dressings of the evangelical template of persuasion, it is easy to criticize churches for adopting a lowest common denominator approach to evangelization. However, it is important to remember that churches such as Brazos Fellowship, UNION, City Life, and Ecclesia each operate with a singular goal in mind: salvation for the masses. But delivering salvation to audiences in a technological society that consistently alienates mass individuals and diminishes their agency while their actions become subsumed by technique is no mean feat, nor is it one to be taken

lightly, for evangelicals have set themselves on a heady mission that arguably becomes more difficult each time the world around them changes.

The participant-observation data and interview excerpts within this chapter demonstrate that evangelicals have carved out a unique space in religion: developing a shared approach to religious persuasion that seamlessly blends elements of contemporary entertainment, rhetoric, and mass persuasion in an engaging template, whose popularity with mass audiences justifies both its raison d'etre and uniqueness of execution. For in leveraging this unique operational template, evangelicals effectively navigate the complex landscape of contemporary society which they inhabit and are forced to come to terms with and, in so doing, persuade large groups of individuals to adopt their worldview and hopefully provide them with salvation.

Bridging the divide between the need for spiritual fulfillment in a world fraught with ambiguity and isolation and the constraints of technique, which emphasizes the dissemination of information in rapid, easily consumable packaging, evangelicals effectively disseminate propaganda of their own and do so out of necessity. In aligning themselves with the all-encompassing conformities of technique and designing a unique and entertaining propaganda style, evangelicals aim to persuade church visitors to adhere to Christian doctrine and in so doing, equip them with a spiritual toolkit of stable patterns of experience to help them regain a measure of salvation and agency. Ironically, however, the very tools and methods that evangelicals are forced to rely on for facilitating this salvation are the same ones that make mass audiences vulnerable to propaganda in the first place.

This paradox is at the heart of the evangelical propaganda enterprise. While its chains have yet to be broken, the operational template orchestrated by evangelicals as a means to achieve their desired end proves a very viable method for aligning mass individuals with a specific worldview whose terms of order are said to deliver these audiences into salvation, but only if they can be persuaded to align themselves with these terms. However, as the interview excerpts and participation data in this chapter indicate, achieving this spiritual and moral end requires a considerable amount of both human and material resources, all of which are strategically controlled, orchestrated, and disseminated by a team of hard-working staff and volunteers at evangelical churches.

For new visitors investigating an evangelical church for the first time, often at the recommendation of a friend or through the strategic use of digital advertising, exposure to evangelical propaganda begins even before they enter the building: for as Ellul (1973) writes, effective propaganda must be precipitated by action. For this reason, choreographed teams of uniformed church volunteers work as 'cheer squads,' helping to shuttle visitors from the church parking lot into a common staging area and distributing swag bags or free gifts branded with the church logo. In accordance with Finke and Stark's (2005) emphasis on religious organizational growth in a free market requiring public visibility, a series of large and highly visible branded signs and banners along the roadside leading to the parking lot and near the front doors of evangelical churches reify the independent brand identity of churches in the minds of visitors. This combination of greeters and highly visible branded signage is used by evangelicals to great effect to

physically bring people from the street and into churches, where the next step of the evangelical propaganda enterprise begins.

Once inside the church doors, visitors are confronted with a staging area where they are actively encouraged by church leaders and staff to commune rather than isolate. Forced community, Ellul (1973) argues, heightens the psychological effects of propagandistic context: propaganda is far more effective when directed toward groups rather than isolated individuals with the ability to be alone with their thoughts. Congregating in the minimum group paradigm of a pre-service coffee ritual, new visitors come to identify and consubstantiate with established community members, who provide assurances that they have come to the right place. This too occurs under the influence of media, for church staging areas make active use of various forms of hot and cool media, such as background music and digital wall monitors displaying branded church advertisements and community announcements.

Once services begin and visitors are shepherded through a set of expansive double doors and seated in a darkened, windowless auditorium, they are exposed to the efficient technique of the evangelical propaganda enterprise. Utilizing all available means of persuasion, church leadership and staff orchestrate their efforts to produce an entertaining, appealing, and above all inviting experience for all those present (Ellul, 1973). From the moment the church band takes the stage and begins their typical four-song set of uplifting Christian worship music, visitors are lulled into a state of participatory complacency as the technology teams in the back-of-house control booths

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operate a complex suite of equipment to orchestrate a visual, aural, and kinesthetic experience in support of both the worship music and the pastor's weekly address. Analysis of the operation of this process is supported by interview insights from several participants, who indicated that the rationale behind this elaborate presentation of media is to artificially elevate the mood of congregants and prepare them to receive Christian teachings in the form of an uplifting spiritual message, the pentadic ratios and logology of which were described in Chapter Four.

Significantly, it is this rhetoric or rather the content of this rhetoric that is ultimately responsible for conversion to the Christian worldview; the elaborate, orchestrated presentation of this rhetoric is at the very heart of evangelical propaganda. However, for church visitors to sit and listen to a religious sermon they must first be persuaded to do so. This is explained in part by McLuhan (1964)'s explication of figure and ground, in which media (figure) are strategically leveraged by tech team members to orient church visitors toward the stage (ground) where they receive the pastor's weekly message. Given that visitors are easily distracted by external stimuli, it is imperative that they be imbued with the content of this persuasive message in a completely enclosed environment.

While the evangelical propaganda enterprise begins in the church parking lot with branded signage, cheer squads, and merchandise, full exposure to its power is found in the orchestration of various media elements which operate behind the closed doors of a darkened sanctuary and in a layout common across all churches in this study. Significantly, the technique of this orchestration involves a complex interplay between

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organizational requirements and available resources and is used to solidify the

evangelical propaganda process in the minds of congregants.

I have argued that the implicit evangelical goal of conversion through persuasion

via the alignment of mass individuals with specific terms of order to form stable patterns

of experience is carried out by entertaining mass individuals with the elaborate

presentation of these terms in a form that appeals to their sensibilities and

communicative preferences. When this orchestrated engine fires on all cylinders and is

directed toward mass audiences in a consistent and routine manner, evangelicals

effectively maintain both their popularity as well as a competitive edge over mainline

religious institutions, demonstrating that if church is a business, then evangelicals have

'the right stuff.'

CHAPTER VI REFLECTIONS AND CONCLUDING REMARKS

At the outset of this dissertation, I introduced a number of interconnected considerations and constraints that are experienced by evangelical pastors seeking to successfully operate an independent church in a crowded market. Notably, these considerations and constraints are experienced by anyone wanting to plant and grow a church regardless of theological orientation, and this is reflected in the swaths of start-up literature available on the consumer market for anyone with enough business savvy and aspiration to try. But particularly interesting about these considerations and constraints is that the solutions to them are to a fault almost identical across various churches, each of which has its unique congregation or flock to watch over.

In the present study, I examined the operational template of Brazos Fellowship, UNION, City Life, and Ecclesia church and discovered that while each of these churches operates as an independent religious franchise with unique congregations, their method of evangelization is largely the same. I say this because in creating a brand, template, and worship style that appeals to large numbers of disparate mass individuals, each of these churches relies on a persuasive and propagandistic enterprise that is largely homogenous and reflective of both the constraints of a technological society and the communicative preferences of contemporary mass audiences. Significantly, this persuasive and propagandistic template, which I have dubbed the 'evangelical template of persuasion,' allows pastors and staff to proselytize large numbers of mass individuals with relative ease and efficiency and persuade them to align themselves with specific

terms of order: altering their patterns of experience to reflect desirable, Christ-like

behaviors that are said to facilitate their moral and spiritual salvation.

As sermon-excerpts and interview data demonstrate, it is the terms of order of

this template or rather, the inexorable push to adhere mass audiences to them, that drive

these audiences into an endless cycle of guilt and redemption in a never-ending quest for

salvation of the soul. But unlike mainline religious organizations such as the Catholic

Church, evangelicals have an additional tool at their disposal: commercial entertainment

media of the type seen in bars, nightclubs, and concert halls—media allowing them to

orchestrate their propaganda in a highly performative manner that is attractive,

appealing, and interesting for contemporary mass audiences.

But while the subject, focus, and scope of this dissertation are the inner workings

of this persuasive enterprise and how it is used by evangelical organizations to

proselytize mass individuals into aligning themselves with specific terms of order, I

believe that these inner workings must be further examined by way of reflection in this

final chapter. However, I will first provide an overview of the principal tenets of this

dissertation and describe how I successfully (and in some cases unsuccessfully) met

them. As with all long-term projects, some questions remain unanswered, with aspects of

the work in which my reach extended beyond my grasp.

My interest in evangelical churches is a long-standing one and is likely the result

of my experiences with Catholicism as a young child. While I was not a confirmed

Catholic by any means, my trips to church on weekends with my Croatian Grandmother

certainly laid the foundation for my later interest in media, rhetoric, and religion, and I

retain vivid memories of the confusion I felt at the intricacies of the mass. This would in time lead me to my subsequent interest in evangelicals and how their operational template differs from that which I experienced as a wide-eyed child. Granted, evangelicals are not the same as Catholics any more than they are to Baptists or Methodists. But the point I wish to make with this brief biographical aside is that I have always considered myself a student of power or more specifically, mass persuasion. After all, if an organization can convince scores of mass individuals to believe in a higher power, obey the rules of this organization, and alter their behavior accordingly, then there must be something significant to this organization beyond what immediately meets the eye.

Pulling back the proverbial veil on religious organizations and laying bare their inner workings has always been at the back of my mind when reflecting on why I, as a devout atheist, have spent the last five years trying to understand what makes evangelical churches so successful at proselytizing the masses, at least in comparison to more traditional mainline religious organizations such as the Catholic church that I visited as a child. I am cognizant of the fact, however, that defining and measuring this success with some measure of validity is no mean feat; any examination of an empirical phenomenon that blends rhetoric, medium-theory, and the study of mass persuasion is likely to draw more than its fair share of critics who would decry the lack of structure in my study.

However, I believe I have responded to these critics in a not unreasonable manner by providing a logical account of the inner workings of the evangelical template

of persuasion and, more importantly, the motivations of the very individuals who are responsible for designing and implementing it: the pastors and staff of churches who orchestrate and present their propaganda so efficiently. Having now completed this study and given myself time to reflect on what I have learned, I believe I have finally begun to understand what it means for religious organizations to effectively facilitate the business of salvation in a society that increasingly sees these organizations as having lost touch with the modern world.

For evangelicals in particular, the importance of providing salvation to the masses through weekly worship and a life-long adherence to specific terms of order is paramount; it is their stated belief that they have a God-given duty to go out into the world and spread the Gospel of Christ to the religious unaffiliated to secure salvation for their souls. Granted, not every single congregant who attends an evangelical church qualifies as religious unaffiliated, and while I certainly can't make any claims as to whether such individuals are present in the congregations of Brazos Fellowship, UNION, City Life, or Ecclesia, this is likely given that church congregations tend to be a microcosm of the structure of greater society. But regardless of who actually attends evangelical churches and what their reasons are, one thing is certain: they will have been proselytized by the evangelical propaganda enterprise to accept Christ into their lives and conduct themselves in accordance with core tenets of the Bible. I say this because newly minted evangelical Christians are typically ardent in their faith and vocal about the power of Jesus to change lives. As I have argued, the reason for this ardent belief is

the effectiveness of the evangelical propaganda enterprise and the efficiency with which it aligns mass individuals with the evangelical terms of order.

But from where does this propaganda enterprise originate and what is behind its calculating efficiencies? My research and field work led me to discover that the origins of the evangelical propaganda enterprise are found in our contemporary technological society. More importantly, the socio-technical conditions or technique of this society place a high degree of emphasis on efficiency and practicality in every facet of human existence, and for religious organizations this has proven to be quite unfavorable. The reason these conditions are so unfavorable for religious organizations is that the machine-like efficiencies of technique in contemporary society diminish the agency, or habits of the heart, of mass audiences, causing them to withdraw their participation from civic organizations, and this includes churches.

As this well-documented withdrawal occurs on a growing scale throughout the United States and Canada, religious organizations are forced to reexamine how they present themselves to contemporary mass audiences and their changing preferences as religious consumers. As I would discover, however, if this reexamination is not accomplished with the same efficiencies of the technique which causes it to occur, religious organizations slip further into declining relevancy as their once vibrant public visibility and religious vitality diminish. To stem the tide of this decline, religious organizations must learn to cater to the communicative preferences of mass audiences and reinvent their liturgy and their operation accordingly. As I have demonstrated throughout this dissertation, those making this transition successfully, such as the four

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churches featured herein, tend to be extremely successful in their proselytization efforts and attract greater numbers of new congregants with each passing year.

But what I have learned in the process of conducting this study? What did I really hope to accomplish? In setting out to discover how religious organizations and their leaders cater their liturgical approach and rhetoric to modern audiences and the technique of contemporary society, I must admit I had secretly hoped to uncover a deeply theological rationale for both, and that after gaining my participants' trust, they would reveal to me some deeply hidden secret of their worldview. I soon realized, however, that far from being deeply theological, the motivations behind the evangelical approach and worldview are in fact largely instrumental and rooted in a simple means-to-an-end strategy of bringing the Gospel of Christ to mass audiences in the most efficient manner possible. More importantly, I would come to learn that this instrumental view of proselytization exhibited by evangelicals differs from the more traditional views of their mainline counterparts who, by virtue of their long-standing histories, are wedded to holding onto the past in order to secure their future.

I say this because, while I first imagined that the long-standing traditions of mainline religious organizations would be advantageous in a free-market economy in which established brands command considerable public visibility and vitality, I soon learned that holding onto these traditions often comes at the cost of maintaining the interest of contemporary mass audiences who might otherwise be called religious consumers. I would also learn that the declining public visibility and vitality of established religious brands comes at the cost of the continued expansion of these brands

in a market where the consumer preferences of mass individuals reign supreme. Like all businesses, it seems, churches that are viewed as out of date and out of step with the times tend not to be very successful for very long.

While viewing churches as brands and congregants as consumers of a religious product is controversial, I have demonstrated in this dissertation that religious organizations of various types and sizes are locked in a state of competition with other religious organizations, whether they are cognizant of it or not. The difference between churches and other consumer organizations, however, is that the ultimate prize with religion is not who sells the most wares but rather, who is chiefly responsible for saving a society from the perils of Sin by offering salvation to mass individuals in the form of Christ's waiting hand. In fact, the comparatively advantageous position enjoyed by evangelicals with their unique worship style and operational template may be likened to the basic market principle that companies building a good product enjoyed by the public will prosper compared to those that do not.

This is not to say, however, that the religious product offered by mainline organizations is in any way inferior, simply that their weighty histories and traditions are at times a burden which inhibits their ability to adapt themselves to changing times, and that this is reflected in their declining public relevance. Evangelicals do not suffer the same misfortune; in their inexorable push to maintain their comparatively advantageous market position, they have a decided advantage, for their relative lack of history and tradition allows them to craft an operational template, flexible liturgy, and unique style

of rhetoric that appeals to the widest possible consumer audience in the most efficient manner possible.

More importantly, the freedom of approach afforded by this template means that smaller independent churches, such as the four featured in this dissertation, can successfully compete against larger and more established churches through the strategic use of branding and maximizing several performative variables. It is significant that, regardless of any visible discrepancies in operation among churches such as the minor stylistic differences among the four in this dissertation, the evangelical operational template and propaganda enterprise has proven itself as the most practical and efficient method of proselytizing large numbers of mass individuals with relative ease. But as with all propaganda enterprises, accomplishing the task of mass persuasion requires that an organization have adequate material resources. Understanding which material and rhetorical resources are required to accomplish this means-to-an-end task is therefore the key to understanding the relative success of evangelicals in a market as unforgiving of failure as it is rewarding of success.

This line of reasoning leads me to the structure of the present study. In drawing from and combining the disciplines of rhetoric, medium theory, and the study of mass persuasion, I was able to pull back the veil on the evangelical propaganda enterprise and understand the inner workings of a very unique religious product: a template of persuasion that has proven itself highly appealing to various types of mass audiences. This product as I understand it gives evangelicals a discernable edge over their more traditional, mainline counterparts who, like it or not, are locked in a competition with

one another for the salvation of the public's soul. But while mainline institutions are forced to reckon with the weight of their histories and traditions, evangelicals are relatively unencumbered and attain their advantageous position with the aid of a very persuasive and easily consumable propaganda enterprise. Though the evangelicals who wield the various hot and cool media forms used to amplify their persuasive rhetoric do not readily admit to engaging in the facilitation of propaganda, the operational template that supports and amplifies this propaganda is common across multiple churches and demographics, leading me to conclude that evangelical persuasion really is a case of the ends justifying the means.

I make this claim because underlying this template of persuasion is a singular motivation shared by each of my interviewees: a motivation to proselytize the uninitiated, to use whatever means necessary to persuade these individuals to align themselves with specific religious terms of order and conform their behavior to specific and desirable Christ-like patterns of experience to facilitate their moral and spiritual salvation. This, then, is the primary conclusion of the present study: the strategic combination of orchestrated media in support of disseminating specific and focused rhetoric is responsible for the success of independent evangelical religious organizations and explains why they continue to hold the lion's share of the religious consumer market of the United States when other religious groups and denominations are declining.

But what are we to make of this? What can we safely and realistically say about the current state of evangelical Christians? And what does their unabashed use of outright propaganda say about their worldview? First, the present study demonstrates

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that the key to success when marketing a religious product is to make this product as appealing as possible for the widest possible consumer population. This was evident throughout this dissertation in that, for evangelicals seeking the attention and participation of mass audiences, designing an operational liturgy and template that is "not churchy" is an extremely effective method of accomplishing this goal. Second, the study demonstrates that media alone are not persuasive enough for soliciting the attention and participation of uninformed and uninitiated mass individuals, but neither is unamplified rhetoric. Instead, it is the strategic combination of media and rhetoric, presented to mass audiences in an appealing and easily consumable form, that is most likely to capture the attention of these mass audiences and induce their cooperation and hopefully, their alignment with the evangelical terms of order. More importantly, the ever- present guilt and redemption cycle just underneath these terms of order is an additional tool in the evangelical propaganda enterprise, one which evangelical pastors are unafraid to use due to its efficiencies at re-aligning mass individuals with their path to spiritual transcendence and communication. In summation then, the heart of the evangelical template of persuasion is the instrumental manipulation of mass audiences as a means-to-an-end spiritual journey oriented toward completing what evangelicals see as a God-given task: the saving of lost souls. Whether or not these souls actually require this salvation, however, is a question that presently remains unanswered and is outside the scope of the present study.

In terms of my contribution to scholarship with the present study, my work here is by no means unique in that I am simply a new name on a long list of scholars who

have studied religious communication and turned a focused eye on how religious

organizations use media to persuade their followers to live more fulfilled lives.

However, this study is original in that its approach is arguably atypical: while many of

its central observations may seem commonplace, the underlying goal of any study is to

bring clarity to the opaque and render knowledge where there once was confusion. In

this sense, the present study draws its strength from a number of previous studies on

religion, media, and communication and contributes to a long-standing area of

scholarship by focusing on the operationalization of evangelical persuasion, not simply

from the perspective of a mass consumer product but from the perspective of a

propagandist or church consultant. This perspective, I believe, is what is missing in other

studies of religion, media, and persuasion.

For example, Tex Sample (1998) in his book The Spectacle of Worship in a

Wired World makes a cogent argument that humans today are conditioned by the culture

around them to see the world in a particular way and react to this world in a particular

manner. In so doing, Sample argues, an expectation is created in mass audiences of how

information should be delivered to them. While Sample (1998) does not specifically

mention Jacques Ellul's (1964) technique in his diagnosis of the socio-cultural

conditions of modernity and their impact on religious organizations, the theme is

nevertheless implicit throughout his book, especially in how he sees contemporary

entertainment culture conditioning the communication preferences of mass audience. In

addition, Sample's detailed breakdown of the appropriate church response to these

conditions is prescient, specifically in how he argues that successful churches will be

able to appeal to contemporary mass audiences in new and exciting ways by creating a liturgy or worship template borrowing heavily from the images, sound, and visualization of contemporary entertainment culture and its pillars of mass consumption.

However, in making his case for engaging the world through images, sound as beat, and the visual as visualization, Sample (1998) neglects to discuss the importance of using these three integrated components of contemporary worship in support of religious rhetoric. As the present study has demonstrated, this integration is what is primarily responsible for persuading mass audiences to alter their patterns of experience and align themselves along specific Christ-like behaviors to facilitate their moral and spiritual salvation. Moreover, Sample's argument is nearly 25 years old; both technology and mass audiences have developed in a number of new and interesting ways since then, which makes Sample's study less relevant than it once was.

But while Sample's 1998 study is arguably outdated, its core thesis—that religious organizations must learn to adapt to changing socio-technical conditions—is not. Picking up where Sample left off, Shayne Lee and Phillip Silitiere's (2009) book Holy Mavericks: Evangelical Innovators and the Spiritual Marketplace echoes Sample's notion that successful churches continually reinvent themselves to keep pace with changing times. Through a series of biographical case-studies of a number of 'Holy Maverick' celebrity evangelical innovators bucking the stereotype of the traditional evangelical preacher, Lee and Silitiere engage in detail with how evangelicals have learned to alter their approach and change with the times to meet the needs of various mass audiences and demographic groups by developing a brand and style that appeal to

mass religious consumers. For instance, Lee and Silitiere argue that in a crowded free-market religious economy with a plurality of churches clamoring for the attention and participation of large numbers of religious consumers with disparate tastes and preferences, successful churches are those that build a brand and a church around a celebrity pastor and then market this brand to carefully chosen target audiences. In fact, Lee and Silitiere go so far as to argue that scholars of religion in previous eras "were much more willing to reduce the popularity of religious movements to the irrationality of clients rather than the genius of suppliers" and that in overlooking this, they neglect to understand that religion, just like consumer entertainment, "is dependent on innovative leadership to exercise mass appeal with contemporary audiences" (p. 159).

In relation to the present study, Lee and Silitiere's (2009) work does much to articulate the importance of building a brand identity around a celebrity pastor when building for success, much as how UNION's Pastor Matthias has carved out a name for himself among large numbers of Houston's people of color and Brazos Fellowship's pastoral team successfully markets the church to young White families and university students. We see this also with City Life's successful marketing of itself as a destination church for Houston's more affluent citizens while at Ecclesia, church leadership has successfully created a left-of-center, postmodern emerging church template specifically aimed at individuals who have suffered deep harms at the hands of traditional mainline churches.

However, while Lee and Silitiere's (2009) focus on contemporary Holy Mavericks provides a good evaluation of how evangelicals successfully build and market religious brands (and religious entertainment products), their work does not really focus on the intricacies of the operational templates of these churches and how altering the format and style of these templates produces different effects in mass audiences of religious consumers. On the other hand, David Christensen (2020) in The Persuasive Preacher: Pastoral Influence in a Marketing World provides a readily accessible and useful guide for pastors seeking to update their rhetoric for contemporary mass audiences' tastes and preferences as free market religious consumers. Taking a page directly from advertising and public relations handbooks of mass influence and persuasion, Christensen provides a step-by-step, easy to understand guide for contemporary pastors seeking to do God's work preaching to their congregations but crucially, helping them to do so in a manner deeply rooted in rhetoric as the art of persuasion. Delving into the rhetoric of ancient Greece, Christensen argues for the viability of certain linguistic tricks of persuasion developed in the ancient world that are still relevant today. But while the art of persuasion is useful in gaining and holding the attention of mass audiences, Christensen argues, even more useful is renowned psychology and marketing researcher Robert Cialdini's Six Principles of Persuasion (2009) and how these principles can be successfully applied to religious rhetoric to gain mass audience agreement and redirect it into action. However, where Christensen's work moves away from Cialdini's is in his insistence that pastors can and should moderate their use of proven rhetorical tools with Christian ethics, lest they fall into the

age-old trap of sophistry. For Christensen (2020) then, preaching is all about the message of Christ, and throughout his book he urges pastors not to forget this in their desire to persuade to facilitate salvation.

In regard to the present study, while Christensen's guide to ethical religious persuasion is valuable in that it provides a workable rhetorical template for pastors to follow, it does not adequately address the need for pastors or preachers to rely on orchestrated media to make their rhetoric appealing to mass audiences. Because of this, Christensen is unable to fully make the connection, as the present study does, between religious rhetoric and the orchestrated performance of this rhetoric, which requires media to be heard and understood.

In a similar manner, Hendershot (2004) shares many of the same claims as Sample (2008) and Lee and Silitiere (2009) in that she successfully identifies the need for religious organizations to change with the times and cater to the needs and preferences of contemporary religious consumers by using media to facilitate the difficult business of salvation more efficiently. Unlike Sample and Lee and Silitiere, however, Hendershot prefers to emphasize conservative Christian entertainment media such as books, magazines, and film. Regarding the consumption of these faith-based media, while Hendershot is correct in her principal argument that evangelical media provide a certain spiritual value to religious consumers as believers, she is unable to provide a detailed explanation of how this occurs other than through the act of consumption itself. In so doing, she makes a similar error as Christensen (2020):

attributing value to media as a tool of persuasion without providing a rational explanation for its supportive role in amplifying religious rhetoric.

In conclusion, each of these studies complements the present study in that each argues, in a number of interesting ways, that churches in the contemporary religious marketplace must learn to adapt their methods of reaching religious consumers by updating their rhetoric and methods of persuasion to appeal to the communicative sensibilities of these consumers, even if their proposed methods for doing so differ. These studies also demonstrate that by creating a unique brand, worship template, and style, successful churches are able to maintain their relevancy in a market of religious plurality and capture the attention and participation of mass audiences of religious consumers. And while none go so far as to label this phenomenon an outright religious 'product,' it is nevertheless clear to Tex Sample, Shayne Lee and and Philip Silitiere, Roger Finke and Rodney Stark, David Christensen, and Heather Hendershot that true religious organizational success is measured in dollars and not just prayers.

However, while each of these studies makes a valuable contribution to the present study by way of inspiration, scope, and structure, they also fall short of the mark because they are unable to successfully connect religious rhetoric and the performance of religious propaganda in support of this rhetoric with how this connection actually works—and more importantly, how it is facilitated by evangelicals. This is where the present study's contribution becomes evident; it provides a workable guide for the construction of the evangelical template of persuasion and how propaganda can be tailored in support of rhetoric oriented toward mass audiences. Specifically, the key to

understanding this template is found in how it is performed and how the orchestration of this performance amplifies the rhetoric that is responsible for delivering mass audiences to salvation as a means-to-an-end strategy of religious persuasion.

The all-important connection between rhetoric and the performance of evangelical propaganda in support of this rhetoric, then, is that the two must be treated with equal reverence rather than viewing one as more important than the other. In a sense, they are intertwined in a symbiotic relationship with one another, where developments in one must be met with subsequent developments in the other. For example, the rhetoric of UNION is very much oriented toward the culture and style of its target demographic, and so-called 'street language' is ubiquitous in Pastor Matthias' sermons. Logic (and technique) dictate that the orchestrated performance of the propaganda in support of this rhetoric also reflect the stylistic choices of its leadership; for this, the church makes considerable use of secular hip-hop music and stylized beats in its template of persuasion, something Tex Sample (1998) is likely to understand and appreciate as a prime example of what he calls 'sound as beat.'

The rhetoric of Ecclesia, however, is very much oriented toward the slightly left-of-center demographic that it caters to. When Pastor Silas spoke of the universal experience of questioning God's plan and the redemptive power of Christ in cleansing away one's sins as Dr. Paul Brand did in his work on leprosy, the overall theme of this rhetoric was oriented toward an audience assumed to have a more tenuous relationship with organized religion, and the performance of propaganda designed to support this rhetoric reflects this. If he were to visit Ecclesia, Tex Sample would likely see the

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persuasive template of the church as reflecting his notion of the visual as visualization. I say this because Ecclesia differs from the other three in that its worship space and media orchestration are very much a muted, fragmented, and post-modern affair that re-tribalizes its congregation by quietly removing psychological barriers they may have about organized religion (alluded to during interviews).

At Brazos Fellowship and City Life, conversely, the rich and multicolored mosaic of its performance creates a visual spectacle of image that makes ample use of all available means of persuasion in support of rhetoric that directly targets the sensibilities of the respective audiences of these churches. And while the style of operational template at Brazos Fellowship and City Life differs than that of UNION and Ecclesia, its overall form is highly similar, as are the Pentadic ratios that its executive pastors rely on in the rhetoric of their sermons. Regardless of which of the four churches one chooses to visit, a keen eye would surely notice that the clockwork operation of this operational template follows a familiar pattern each and every weekend, as does the rhetoric of their sermons. The consistency of this template across each church serves as ample justification for my argument that regardless of any theological differences between these churches (of which I cannot be certain), their method of persuasion is largely the same.

Another important aspect of understanding evangelical persuasion and propaganda that the present study provides is a rational, workable model for understanding the influence of technique on this process of persuasion and propaganda. For example, when looking at the reasons why evangelicals have widely adopted a

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similar template of persuasion for proselytizing mass audiences, it is common among

scholars to look at changes to the structure of contemporary mass society. Sample is one

such scholar, as are Lee and Silitiere, Finke and Stark, Christensen, and Hendershot. In

their own way, each of these scholars casts an eye toward the socio-technical conditions

of society and asks the question—"What is happening in society that influences religious

organizations to change their method of operation to stay relevant?" Pastors too ask this

same question as their very livelihood depends on diagnosing the symptoms of mass

society that have contributed to churches' decline in relevancy.

But what each of these scholars overlooks in their examination of media, society,

and religion is the influence of technique in pushing churches to adapt themselves to

changing social conditions: not out of choice, but out of necessity. In this, Ellul (1964,

1973) was correct in his identification of the adapt-or-perish mentality of religious

organizations that have but one singular goal in mind: salvation for mass individuals,

often by way of conversion as a central tenet of evangelicalism. For as Ellul was apt to

argue, the choice is in fact not a choice at all: churches can create propaganda and risk

losing themselves to the inhumanity of technique that moves mass individuals away

from their natural state of being (with God), or they can choose not to create propaganda

and risk losing their influential positions in mass society as purveyors of spirituality and

salvation.

But while many scholars do not recognize this crisis, it is clear from my

interviews and site visits for the field-work component of the present that by and large,

pastors certainly do. In fact, there is in many ways a shared understanding among the

pastors and staff at Brazos Fellowship, UNION, City Life, and Ecclesia that society has developed to such a degree that a concern arises among Christians about whether the principal teachings of the religion are seen as less relevant than they once were. Given that the solution to the woes of the mass individual today is, in the eyes of many evangelicals, found in Christ, then it is logical to do something that makes Christianity appear more relevant, more interesting, and more useful for people today. It is here where the influence of technique is found, for in placing the blame on mass society for the diminishing interest in participating in organized religion, evangelicals are in fact identifying the influence of a technological society in driving mass individuals into a disengagement from participation in the very organizations that are purported to provide their salvation.

Ironically, however, and as I have demonstrated through this dissertation, the solution to these issues is, in the minds of evangelical pastors and staff, to utilize the very tools and technologies that have created the unfavorable socio-technical conditions that evangelicals find themselves in: using media and orchestrating these media for the performance of religious propaganda in support of rhetoric. For just as media can be used to move mass individuals away from religion by creating a sublime spectacle of questionable morality, it can also bring them back. This Janus-like use of media marks the most important aspect of the present study: that evangelicals have correctly identified the source of their ongoing concerns regarding their plurality and vitality and significantly, that they have learned to rely on a common template of operation to support their propaganda, a template that exists for a very simple reason: it mitigates

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these concerns and guarantees results. However, the present study is not without limits, and these need to be addressed in order of precedence.

First, while the present study addresses several concerns related to the relationship between evangelicals and mass audiences, it does not address the issue of White nationalism in relation to status discontent theory (see Chapter Two). For example, since the 2016 US presidential election, there has been a growing body of research on the political mobilization of conservative Christians and, relatedly, on the rise of what scholars label as White Christian Nationalism. While I did not analyze my data with these concepts in mind, future research could explore the way that churches such as the four featured in the present study address or choose to marginalize issues of so-called morality such as abortion, homosexuality, and police and criminal justice reform, especially among members of Black, Indigenous, and people of color communities.

However, several scholars have addressed these issues, notably Robert Wuthnow (2018) in *The Left Behind: Decline and Rage in Rural America* as well as Theda Skocpol and Vanessa Williamson (2016) in *The Tea Party and the Remaking of Republican Conservatism*. Others, such as Andrew Whitehead and Samuel Perry, have looked into this issue as well, most recently in *Taking America Back for God: Christian Nationalism in the United States* (2020) and in conjunction with Joseph Baker in a study focusing on the influence of fear of ethnoracial outsiders and the intention to vote for Donald J. Trump (2020). If the present study were to analyze its data sets in relation to issues of White Christian Nationalism, then specific attention would need to be paid to how

pastors and staff at Brazos Fellowship, UNION, City Life, and Ecclesia view themselves and their congregations in relation to concerns of their social status being threatened by outsiders. As stated, however, this was not part of the study's primary focus.

In addition, while the present study focuses on the role of media in supporting the performance of religious rhetoric as propaganda, it makes a number of assumptions about media that could be seen as problematic. For example, in focusing on the orchestration of evangelical media in worship, the study assumes that these media are used for practical, instrumental reasons and that their churches adopted them for similar reasons. However, there may be other reasons behind this adoption that remain unclear in the present study. In addition, the study assumes that the organizational adoption of these media before their orchestrated, performative use follows a path of efficiency as per the constraints of technique and further, that the use of these media in evangelical worship is also efficient in that it maximizes mass audience affect at a minimum of resource expenditure.

One way these concerns could be addressed is to replicate the current study, but with the additional component of Poole and DeSanctis' (1994) Adaptive Structuration Theory or AST.

As discussed in Chapter Two, AST views organizational appropriation as a series of structural moves that can be mapped and tracked and significantly, takes into account the question of spirit which signifies whether technologies are used for their intended purposes or not. Given that the commercial-grade entertainment media commonly used by evangelical churches such as Brazos Fellowship, UNION, City Life, and Ecclesia

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were originally designed for use in the secular sphere for purposes other than religious persuasion, there is some question as to whether evangelicals are using these media in accordance with their spirit or not. In addition, there is some question about how exactly these churches go about adopting these media and adapting them to their unique purposes as part of a faith-based, persuasive, and propagandistic enterprise. As with the question of the spirit of evangelical media, adaptive structuration theory may prove a useful theoretical platform in future studies focusing on evangelical media use.

I would like to conclude this dissertation with a quote from Canadian media scholar and medium theorist Marshall McLuhan. I first encountered McLuhan as an undergraduate and was enamored by his writing, worldview, and thinking, Now, as I conclude my tenure as a graduate student, I remain enamored still. While McLuhan is best known for his oft-misunderstood aphorism the medium is the message, what is less known is his ardent faith in God. I can think of no more fitting a quote with which to end this research project than what McLuhan wrote in a series of posthumously released letters and essays entitled *The Medium and the Light: Reflections on Religion:*

> *"I never came into the church as a person who was being taught. I came in on my knees. That is the only way in. When people start praying, they need truths; that's all. You don't come into the Church by ideas and concepts, and you cannot leave by mere disagreement. It has to be a loss of faith, a loss of participation. You can tell when people leave the Church: they have quit praying."*

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APPENDIX A

PARTICIPANT OBSERVATION IN RELIGIOUS SERVICE GUIDE

Name of Place of Worship:

Date of Observation:

Type of Service:

Number of congregants:

Number of Staff present:

Technologies Present:

Spatial Construction of Technology:

- Describe the church space and design. How does it integrate and/or adapt the space in any way to technology?
- What design elements of a traditional church seem to be absent or present? Why do you think these choices have been made for this space?
- What religious symbols are present in the space? Which ones you expected to be there are absent and seemingly replaced by media, technology, or new symbols?
- How does the space present and frame Christianity and/or their beliefs of the congregation? Does technology contribute to these perceptions in any way?
- How do people act within and navigate the space? How do people relate to the space in terms of body posture, line of sight, facial expressions, etc.?
- Describe the technological ambience crated within the service (sound, lights, screen images). How have they cultured or shaped the sanctuary and church to transform it from a secular to a sacred space, or vice versa?

Decision Making & Negotiation Regarding Technology:

- How mediatized is the space? What technologies are the congregation required to engage with in the service and how? (i.e., Wi-Fi, mobile phone, ATM, digital screens)
- Do any interesting engagements or conflicts emerge in the service due to technological elements presents?
- Are there any instructions or guidelines given regarding the use of different media? (i.e., in the notices, sermon, in service instructions, etc.) By whom? Describe.

- What themes are emphasized?
- How is technology framed and negotiated by the staff, and the congregation?
- In what ways do or don't they connect digital culture/tech to traditional church culture/practices?
- How does staff anticipate the technological needs of the congregation in terms of media integration and placement? Is there a specific official policy, teaching or decision-making process in place to guide these decisions?

Conclusions Regarding Media Use & Viewing Technology in Worship:

- Based on this service, what appears to be the core value/s of this religious community?
- What types of media are used in the service? How are they used, and by whom?
- What other type of media are present in the worship center? (i.e., flyers, books in hallway, etc.) How are they framed or presented?
- How does the presence or lack of media effect or influence the worship experience?
- How would you describe this community's general relationship to media based on your observations?

APPENDIX B

PHOTOGRAPHS OF EVANGELICAL CHURCHES

Figure 7: Brazos
Fellowship Back of House

Figure 8: Brazos
Fellowship Visual Aids

Figure 9: Brazos
Fellowship Application
Prayer

Figure 10: Brazos Fellowship
External

Figure 11: UNION signage

Figure 12: UNION soundboard

Figure 13: UNION A/V booth

Figure 14: UNION slide deck

Figure 15: City Life wall advertisement

Figure 16: City Life event advertisement

Figure 17: City Life sermon guide

Figure 18: City Life video controller

Figure 19: Ecclesia coffee shop

Figure 20: Ecclesia center stage
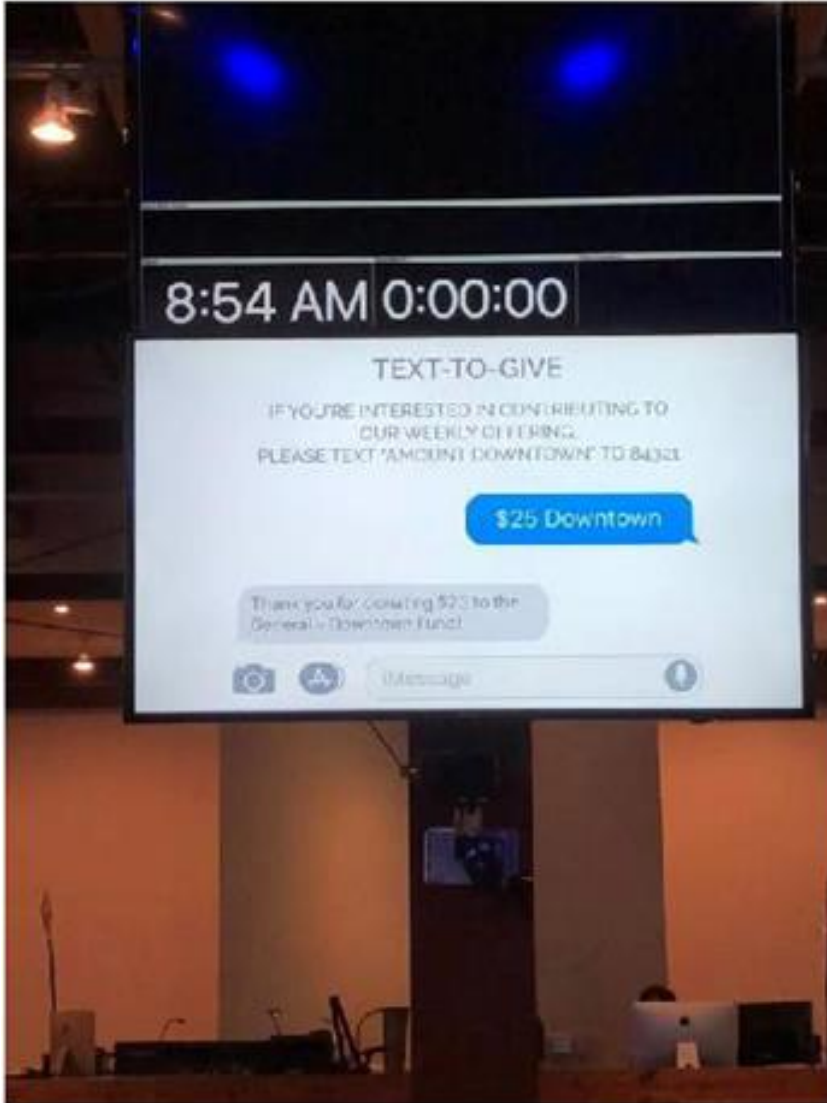
Figure 21: Ecclesia tithing advertisement

Figure 22: Ecclesia sermon

APPENDIX C

STUDY INFORMATION SHEET, INFORMED CONSTENT, AND INTERVIEW

QUESTIONS

INFORMED CONSENT DOCUMENT

<u>**Title of Study/ Project:**</u>

Digital Decisions: Religious Leaders, Digital Media, and Liturgical Design

Principal Investigator:	**Student Researcher:**
Dr. Heidi Campbell	Adam Bajan
Professor	PhD Student
heidic@tamu.edu	adambajan@gmail.com
Phone: 979-845-5500	Phone: 979-721-0264

The researcher is a graduate student in the Communication department at Texas A&M University. He is conducting a study of how Christian organizations evaluate and use digital media as tools for increasing attendance in worship and for maintaining community participation. Specifically, the researcher is interested in understanding what assumptions pastors and tech team members have about media and how these assumptions impact their strategic use.

This research involves a series of open-ended interview questions designed to probe your thoughts, feelings, and opinions on evaluating and using digital media as a tool for spirituality and community engagement. Participation in this study is strictly voluntary and the interview will take no longer than one hour to complete. Interviews will be audio recorded and transcribed however your identity will be kept confidential and no identifying information will be used in the final write up of the study.

Permission to conduct this survey has been granted by the university's IRB (Institutional Review Board). Should you have any questions or require additional information related to this study, you may contact the researcher, Adam Bajan, by phone: 979-721-0264 or through e-mail: adambajan@gmail.com

If you have any concerns or complaints about the study or your participation in it, you may contact the TAMU Institutional Review Board at: 979-458-1467, or through e-mail: outreachrcb@tamu.edu

Participant's Agreement   **Please Circle**

I confirm that I have read and understand the above-mentioned information   **Yes**   **No**
and have had the opportunity to ask questions

I understand that my participation in this study is strictly voluntary and that I **Yes**   **No**
may opt out at any time without reason or penalty

I give my consent to participate in this study   **Yes**   **No**

I give my consent for the interview to be audio recorded   **Yes**   **No**

I give my consent for the use of substitute names in publications for the   **Yes**   **No**
purposes of de-identifying data and protecting the confidentiality of my
participation

I give my consent for Adam Bajan to retain all interview data for the purposes   **Yes**   **No**
of this study and to use my identifying information in addition to the content
of the interview

I understand that information compiled in this interview may include a   **Yes**   **No**
published paper(s), as well as the possibility of inclusion in a Doctoral
dissertation or book at a future date.

CONSENT TO FOLLOW-UP INTERVIEW   **Please Circle**

I give my consent for the researcher to contact me in the future to clarify items **Yes**   **No**
and ask for additional information, by phone or e-mail

I give my consent to a potential follow-up interview   **Yes**   **No**

I have been offered a copy of this consent form to retain for personal reference   **Yes**   **No**

I give my consent for the use of my personal information as agreed upon in the above mentioned
conditions. I therefore authorize the principal investigator of this study, Adam Bajan, to use this
interview, audio recordings and interview write ups for the purposes of research which may be
published.

Name of Participant   Name of Researcher

_____   _____
Signature   Signature

Date   Date

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Project Title: *Digital Decisions: Religious Leaders, Digital Media, and Liturgical*

Design

1) Tell me a little about yourself. / How did you first come to be a pastor/tech team member at [name of church]?

2) Can you tell me about your faith and what influenced you to become a pastor/work at [name of church]? / What does being a part of the religious community at [name of church] mean to you?

3) How do you view the role of digital media in worship?

4) Can you tell me a little about your personal approach to integrating digital media in worship?
(PROMPT: what are some of the important issues that come to mind when you think of using digital media at [name of church]?

5) As a pastor/tech team member, what influences your decision to integrate certain forms of media into the liturgy here at [name of church]?
(PROMPT: is this a team effort?)

6) Tell me about how you operate digital media during worship. What goes into the synchronization between the audio-visual booth and the on-stage performance?
(PROMPT: how does this relate to audience participation? What sort of audience responses are you looking for?)

7) What can you tell me about the purchasing process of the equipment you and your team use here every weekend?
(PROMPT: what parameters or qualifications do you look for when selecting this equipment?)
(PROMPT: how are you evaluating the effectiveness of the media you use in liturgy?)

8) Tell me a little about branding. There are multiple similar churches in town here. What are you doing to make your church stand out from the others?
(PROMPT: do you have a design strategy for this? If so, what can you tell me about it?)

9) What does the future of worship at [name of church] look like?

10) Is there anything else you'd like to tell me?