

Running Head: TO OBEY GOD RATHER THAN MEN: A RHETORICAL ANALYSIS

To Obey God Rather Than Men: A Rhetorical Analysis

Karen L. Legg

Regent University

To Obey God Rather Than Men: A Rhetorical Analysis

In the 1980s, televangelism was a growing phenomenon that brought in millions upon millions of dollars annually. Among the many televangelists there were a few shining stars. Jim Bakker, Marvin Gorman, and Jimmy Swaggart were three of the most popular and nationally recognized. With players like these, it was not surprising that the entire nation got caught up in the complicated, outrageous, and shocking “soap opera” that unfolded over a period of just a few months in 1988.

This study will look at the rhetorical strategies used by Charles R. Fontaine and Lynda K. Fontaine in their 1989 book *Jimmy Swaggart: To Obey God Rather Than Men*. The author will analyze the text by pointing out, explaining, and interpreting various passages in the book that demonstrate how words and symbols are used to promote a specific view of reality. First, the author will discuss the purpose of the study, practical and scholarly significance, and describe the rhetorical situation. Next, the authors of the book will be described followed by their purpose and intended audience. Finally, the following themes will be discussed: (1) theology, including views of the Bible, Bible characters, and dreams, (2) anti-intellectualism, including use of emotional appeals and doctrinal arguments, (3) problems with the disciplinary policy of the Assemblies of God, and (4) methods for handling conflict in a biblical and God-honoring fashion, including views of authority, to construct a particular view of reality will be examined as they are found within the primary text.

The purpose of this study is to demonstrate how the words and symbols of terministic screens are used within religious communities to promote a specific view of reality and symbolically reinforce ideas and beliefs. The basic idea of terministic screens is that they direct the attention (Burke, 1966, p. 45). The words chosen to describe or explain something, by their very nature, determine how that thing will be seen. Burke offered an obvious example that a text book on physics would naturally draw the reader’s attention in a different direction from a book about law or psychology. However, the use of terministic screens can be much more subtle than this example. Burke explained that “much that we take as observations about ‘reality’ may be but the spinning out of possibilities implicit in our particular choice of terms” (p. 46). What people describe or explain as simple observations may not be quite so simple. If the

situation were to be defined or described using different terms, those same observations might be interpreted quite differently.

The phrase Burke used to capture the essence of terministic screens was “Believe, that you may understand” (p. 47). He broke this phrase up into two parts, in order to help explain it. “Believe” he said would be to “Pick some particular nomenclature, some one terministic screen,” and “that you may understand” would be “That you may proceed to track down the kinds of observations implicit in the terminology you have chosen, whether your choice of terms was deliberate or spontaneous” (p. 47). In effect, this phrase means that faith must come before sight. What one believes or expects to find, will determine how one interprets what is found.

Practical and Scholarly Significance

This study offers practical support to anyone wishing to better understand the biblical principles and ideas behind church discipline, religious rhetoric, how the Bible is used in persuasion, or how emotion can be used as a powerful rhetorical tool. These areas of understanding will be most helpful as they relate to the Assemblies of God. However, the principles learned could be carried over to other denominations or religions to aid in a better understanding of how rhetorical arguments are made, how church discipline works, how scripture is used, and how emotion influences persuasion.

For scholars there is an additional benefit to this study. A rhetorical analysis of a text written from a known denominational perspective to an audience consisting primarily of people within that same denomination offers a unique perspective on what methods of communication and persuasion are expected and accepted within their particular group. *Jimmy Swaggart: To Obey God Rather Than Men* is an exemplary text to examine because it is an admitted attempt at persuasion within a particular denominational context.

Jimmy Swaggart was a public figure in both religious and secular circles. The scandal, discipline, and defrocking that are now so closely associated with his name give this study an additional level of relevance and significance. Jimmy Swaggart was not just a preacher who fell into sin. He was the star of a leading television program that was viewed in hundreds of thousands of homes around the world. He and

his style of ministry were an example to countless thousands. Swaggart publicly shunned higher education and logic in favor of emotion. Although Swaggart started a Bible college, he was only educated through the eighth grade. This study helps scholars know more about this ideology of elevating emotion over logic by examining the patterns of communication Swaggart used so successfully and which are found throughout *Jimmy Swaggart: To Obey God Rather Than Men*. This study makes a scholarly contribution by shining light on the rhetorical devices and methods used and perhaps sometimes abused within the Assemblies of God.

The Rhetorical Situation

To fully understand what happened in the case of Jimmy Swaggart, it is important to have at least a cursory understanding of the immediate context into which it came. It is difficult to say when the trouble really began, but it can at least be said to have begun in 1987 when allegations came to the Assemblies of God concerning a moral failure on the part of Jim Bakker. Bakker confessed to having had an affair with his secretary, and then paying her not to tell any one that it had happened (Giuliano, 1999, p. 30). However, the scandal eventually did break open and an investigation by the Assemblies of God began. Jimmy Swaggart came out in harsh condemnation of Bakker, calling him a cancer that needed to be excised from the body of Christ (Koppel, 1987). Swaggart also brought allegations against Marvin Gorman, accusing him of having had over one hundred affairs (Giuliano, 1999, p. 112). Gorman confessed to one affair, but ended up suing Swaggart in a \$90 million defamation of character law suit. The suit was thrown out of court, but when Gorman revived it with appeals, Swaggart settled out of court in 1994 (p. 33).

Swaggart had been so vocal and proactive in seeing to it that other ministers were not allowed to live in secret sin, that when allegations came out that Swaggart himself was involved in moral indiscretions with a known Louisiana prostitute, the entire country was appalled. Soon after the allegations were brought before the Assemblies of God, Swaggart reportedly confessed to moral failure (Giuliano, 1999, p. 33-34; Seaman, 1999, p. 338). The exact nature of this failure was kept as ambiguous

as possible. While many reports graphically described sexual sin involved, others maintained that it was more of a struggle with pornography (King, 1988, February 23; Seaman, 1999, p. 347).

On Sunday, May 22, 1988, at the Family Worship Center in Baton Rouge, Louisiana Jimmy Swaggart confessed to sin before his congregation and the nation. In a weeping monologue that *Time* magazine called “without question, the most dramatic sermon ever aired on television” (as cited in Giuliano, 1999, p. 1). Jimmy Swaggart asked the forgiveness of his wife, son, family, congregation and the Christian community. By their response that day it seemed that he had it. Of course, there were many who saw the tears as yet another example of his hypocrisy.

Not long after this the Assemblies of God had to decide what to do as far as disciplining the famous Reverend Swaggart. This was really where the story began to get controversial. The Assemblies of God had an order and system for the discipline of their ministers. In this case, it fell to the District Presbytery to declare a discipline plan for Swaggart or to remove him from his position as a minister in the Assemblies of God (p. 38). The district voted that Swaggart would be admonished to undergo two years of rehabilitation, refrain from preaching for three months (except for present commitments with foreign governments), be relieved of his duties as co-pastor of the Family Worship Center (but retain the right to preach there after his rehabilitation), submit to weekly counseling and supervision with three Louisiana district presbyters, and submit periodic reports of his progress to the council (Giuliano, 1999, p. 38; Seaman, 1999, p. 347; Koppel, 1988).

Swaggart agreed to abide by the district presbytery’s recommendations; however, this was not the end of the story. The national Executive Presbytery stepped in and overrode the discipline plan of the district. They decided that a three month absence from preaching was not sufficient nor in line with their constitution and bylaws (Giuliano, 1999, p. 39; Seaman, 1999, p. 349). Swaggart needed to take a full year off from his position as a preacher. The district was not pleased with this, but did agree to support the Executive Presbytery’s decision. Swaggart, however, did not agree. He fulfilled the original agreement to refrain from preaching for a period of three months, but on May 22, he delivered his “come back” sermon. This was in direct violation of the orders of the Assemblies of God. Thus, Swaggart was

defrocked, meaning he was no longer a member of the Assemblies of God, and was cut off from fellowship with any member of the Assemblies of God (Seaman, 1999, p. 354). Just two hours after he was defrocked, Swaggart announced that he was resigning from the denomination (Giuliano, 1999, p. 39). Any member or minister who remained with Jimmy Swaggart would also be removed from fellowship. This meant that those on staff with Jimmy Swaggart's church or his ministry were required to quit or be removed from the Assemblies of God. Jimmy Swaggart Ministries was independent of the Assemblies of God, thus it could stay in operation as long as he could maintain the financial support he needed. Members of the denomination were told they were not even to attend any of Jimmy Swaggart's crusades (Giuliano, 1999, p. 110).

Swaggart's dismissal was viewed in varying ways. Many people applauded the Assemblies of God for having the moral fortitude to dismiss a rebellious, unteachable, unsubmitive minister who contributed \$12 million annually to the denomination and was famous around the globe (p. 47). Others did not look favorably on their decision, declaring it to be contrary to the Bible and not having a spirit of mercy and forgiveness (Fontaine & Fontaine, 1989, p. 39).

About the Authors

Charles R. Fontaine and Lynda K. Fontaine wrote *Jimmy Swaggart: To Obey God Rather Than Men* as a response to the defrocking and criticism of Jimmy Swaggart. The introduction to their book, written by Paul W. Carlin, Th.D., offered insight into the lives of the authors. Carlin described how Charles was a common man – a custodian at a local independent church and a maintenance man at a local YMCA (p. ix). He described Charles as being akin to the prophet Amos who was a common, everyday man, that God used in a might way. Charles was a member of the Assemblies of God for forty – five years and served as an active deacon. His wife Lynda was a member of the Assemblies of God for thirty years (p. x). Carlin pointed out that these years in the denomination gave them the credibility to speak because “neither [were] strangers [nor] outsiders to this prestigious denomination” (p. x). He said that even though they became members of an independent fellowship in 1984, they did not leave the Assemblies of God over doctrinal disagreements and had “no ax to grind” (p. x).

The book began with “A Personal Note” from the Fontaines (p. 1). They said that on April 28, 1988, at about 4:00 p.m., the Holy Spirit impressed them to write the book. A paragraph is even quoted relaying exactly what the Holy Spirit said. They went on to tell of a letter an Assemblies of God pastor sent to Jimmy Swaggart on August 8, 1988. The letter described a dream in which the pastor saw Swaggart broken and weeping, and God told him that He had forgiven and anointed Jimmy Swaggart and the pastor was not to criticize him as he had been doing (p. 1-2). Fontaine and Fontaine wrote that even though the letter did not give the date of the dream, they deduced from other comments in the letter that it must have been about the same time as the Holy Spirit spoke to them. There were no other details or evidence given to show why this dream should be viewed as significant by the authors and the primary audience of the book – a fact which will be examined later.

The Fontaines said that while writing their book, whenever they would not agree about what to say, they would pray and the Holy Spirit instantly gave them the words. Charles gave an example of another time when the Holy Spirit guided him to do the right thing, demonstrating his right relationship with God and ability to follow His leading. Knowing that a pronouncement of being given what to say by the Holy Spirit would receive mixed reactions, they pleaded with the reader to keep an open mind, pray, and not make a judgment until they finished the book (p. 3).

The Purpose and Audience

The purpose of this book was to inform people of the changes the Holy Spirit wanted to be brought about and to initiate “constructive action based on that information” (p. 149). Fontaine and Fontaine listed the three changes the Holy Spirit told them needed to take place.

1. The Assemblies of God disciplinary policy: The Holy Spirit wants it changed from a punitive one to one based on love.
2. The criticism of Jimmy Swaggart: The Holy Spirit wants it stopped.
3. The financial support for Jimmy Swaggart Ministries: The Holy Spirit wants Christians to support Jimmy Swaggart Ministries. (p. 13)

Their justification for knowing this is what the Holy Spirit wanted was that they were spoken to directly. “The Holy Spirit said:” (p. 13).

If the disciplinary policy is not changed there will be a time in the not – too – distant future that the entire denomination is going to suffer because of misconduct by its national leaders.

However, if they will base their conduct toward fallen and repentant brothers on love, they will personally benefit from the change and the denomination will be an example to the world of God’s love in action. (pp. 13-14)

This quote from the Holy Spirit was used as the basis for their authority and purpose in writing this book. The three changes mandated by the Holy Spirit were listed in the beginning of the book to validate their credibility and authority and again at the end, just before they ask each segment of their audience for specific action.

The authors listed seven groups of people to whom this book was addressed, beginning with the primary audience and ending with the most general audience. These audiences were (1) credentialed ministers who plan to be voting delegates at the next general council, (2) Executive Presbyters, (3) General Presbyters, (4) newsmen, commentators, or columnists, (5) those in control of programming, (6) executives, and (7) everyone else who reads the book (pp. 149-153). It was clear that the credentialed ministers planning to be voting delegates at the next general council were the primary audience because they said, “Our goal is to get a copy of this book in to the hands of virtually every pastor of an Assemblies of God church in the United States at the same time” (p. 150). They were attempting to make a coordinated effort to get so many pastors supporting the change in policy that none of the pastors would be penalized for their involvement. The authors encouraged the pastors to “be willing to put principle above position” and follow the Holy Spirit (p. 150).

The Executive Presbyters and General Presbyters were both implored to take action to change denominational policy and ensure that this kind of “deterioration from Fellowship to hierarchical rule” never happened again (p. 151). Newsmen, commentators and columnists were urged to use their public voice to support Jimmy Swaggart. Those in control of programming and executives of networks that had

dropped Swaggart's program were asked to keep airing the program or begin again, even if it meant a temporary financial loss for their company. They were encouraged to put principle above pressure because the eternity of many souls rested on their decision. Finally, everyone who has read the book was addressed. They were asked to refrain from criticizing Jimmy Swaggart, financially support him, and pray for him regularly.

Theology in *Jimmy Swaggart: To Obey God Rather Than Men*

The Bible

Words and symbols can be used to promote specific attitudes about many things, one of which is the Bible. The Fontaines explained that there is a true viewpoint from which to read the Bible. They argued they had the correct interpretation of scriptures concerning the discipline of Jimmy Swaggart and his accusers did not. The authors looked at Hebrews 12:10-11 as their example text (p. 68). The text in reference discusses discipline by fathers and God being painful at the time, but being necessary to produce a harvest later. Fontaine and Fontaine contended that because these verses specifically reference God and earthly fathers, then it cannot be properly applied to church discipline of a minister.

They used this verse to persuade their audience that Jimmy Swaggart was being disciplined based on verses taken out of context. However, there is a flaw in this argument. For one thing, the authors offered no reason for selecting these verses for examination, rather than some of the many other verses dealing with church discipline. In addition, their argument at this point in the book made it sound like they were opposed to church-led discipline altogether. However, this was not the case. They made the argument in several other places that church discipline is good and necessary as long as it follows Biblical guidelines (pp. 10-11, 28, 41).

Biblical Characters

The text also contains examples of references to Biblical characters being used to promote specific attitudes about those characters, the authors and Jimmy Swaggart. This was accomplished by showing similarities between respected Biblical characters, Charles Fontaine, and Jimmy Swaggart. Paul Carlin, Th.D., who wrote the forward of the book, compared one of the authors, Charles Fontaine, to the

prophet Amos (p. ix). He noted that neither one was the son of a prophet nor educated. He proclaimed them both to be common men whom God called to do great things. Carlin reminded the readers that Amos, though he was common, was raised up by God “with a message for the king of Israel that has never been equaled” (p. ix). These words could easily leave the audience with the impression what Charles Fontaine was also called to bring a message that has never been equaled.

The underlying message being communicated to the audience was that Charles Fontaine’s lack of education or prestige should not diminish his credibility in any way. On the contrary, his “unpretentious credentials” should serve to give him more credibility when it is remembered that God used a man just like him to lead “millions out of spiritual darkness” (p. ix).

The rest of the comparisons made were between Jimmy Swaggart and impressive Biblical characters. First, the authors compared Swaggart with David and the prodigal son. In response to the anticipated argument that Swaggart was not repentant because he did not confess his sin until he was caught, the authors reminded the audience that David “a man after God’s own heart” did the same thing (p. 5). He did not confess his sin with Bathsheba until he was confronted by the prophet Nathan. However, once he was confronted with his sin, he “came to himself,” just as the prodigal son did, repented, and was forgiven by God immediately (p. 5). The reference to the prodigal son would have brought thoughts of the father forgiving the son and returning him to his rightful status in his home immediately. In the example of the sin with Bathsheba, the authors did not make any reference to the fact that David’s rule and all of Israel suffered as a result of the sin. It was not a simple, forgive and forget situation. There were consequences and problems that came upon David and his house as a result of his sin such as the death of the Bathsheba’s baby, David suffered internal agony for at least a year, his household was in shambles, and the glory days of his leadership never returned (Hayford, 1988, pp. 42-44).

The second example from the text of Swaggart being compared to David was when God ordered judgment for David’s sin of numbering his fighting men (II Sam. 24:14). The authors point was that this verse serves as an example of the fact that it is God’s place, not man’s to discipline a leader (p. 41). What

the authors failed to point out was the fact that God did not simply forgive David and let him return to leadership. There was judgment from God, even after David repented. Also, there was no one higher in the land who could have disciplined him. There was no church structure as there is today. References to Swaggart being like David did not only come from Fontaine and Fontaine. Giuliano (1999) reported several instances of Jimmy Swaggart himself comparing his sin and repentance to that of David's with Bathsheba (p. 93). Swaggart read the confessional prayer of David after commenting on the similarity of their sins. Although he did not repeat the background story leading up to David's prayer, Giuliano suggested that it could be assumed his audience would have filled in the background on their own. The fact that Swaggart used comparisons of himself to Biblical characters demonstrates that this was a common type of persuasion used within the Assemblies of God, not limited to the Fontaines.

The authors made a point of explaining that God's call on Jimmy Swaggart's life to preach was irrevocable. They quoted scripture to emphasize the idea that their statement that Swaggart's call would never be removed by God or be allowed to be removed by man. They said, "For man to ignore the irrevocability of God's call and ban repentant ministers from the pulpit is, it seems to us, a direct challenge to God's sovereignty" (p. 35). This statement certainly promoted a view of reality that was consistent with their premise that Jimmy Swaggart was being obedient to God and the Executive Presbytery was disobeying God by banning Swaggart from preaching for one year and then defrocking him.

As an example demonstrating the fact that the call of God is irrevocable, the authors pointed to Peter. They explained that if Peter had been in the Assemblies of God, his denial of even knowing Jesus would certainly have fallen under "conduct unbecoming to a minister" (p. 36). This was part of the same clause which Swaggart's sin fell under. Thus, he would have been banned from preaching for a year, causing Pentecost to have never happened. The fact that 3,000 people were saved that day proved that God supported Peter and wanted him to preach. Peter, as well as Jonah, have often been used as examples in support of arguments like those of Fontaine and Fontaine. However, Hayford (1988) pointed out a significant difference between the sins of Peter and Jonah and the sins of pastors, like Swaggart. He said,

Neither Peter nor Jonah were financially dishonest, immoral, guilty of teaching false doctrine or puffed up with arrogant pride. Neither failed a body of believers in the sense that today's Church leader may impact the group he serves. Both Peter and Jonah were guilty of fear – committing a sin of temporary weakness and failure...Their failures were more of cowardliness than of corruption. (p. 49).

Fontaine and Fontaine (1989) later pointed out that if the other apostles had been Assemblies of God pastors and had continued to support and fellowship with Peter, then they would have all lost their credentials and the early church would have come to an abrupt halt (p. 108). They noted, "The Acts of the Apostles would have been a far different book, unless they, too, had said, 'We ought to obey God rather than men'" (p. 108). This last statement is of particular note because it implies to the audience that the Apostles and Swaggart were in exactly the same position. It implies that Swaggart's defiance of the Assemblies of God was just as good and right as the Apostle's defiance of authorities who commanded them to stop preaching the name of Jesus. The authors went even further to say that Jesus would never have commanded Jimmy, "a man whom His father had forgiven" to stop preaching (p. 108). This type of persuasion by comparison to Biblical characters was implemented by Swaggart himself on many occasions. Giuliano (1999) noted several instances of Swaggart comparing himself to the Apostle Paul (p. 8). In his publication *The Evangelist* Swaggart compared himself to Peter by saying that they both received the same call from God, "Feed my sheep" (Swaggart, 1988, p. 12).

Dreams

Fontaine and Fontaine also used words and symbols to promote specific attitudes about dreams, as discussed above. While the authors did not discuss why dreams should be persuasive to the audience, it was implied that they are naturally seen as such. There is evidence of dreams being used as persuasive tools by other pastors within the Assemblies of God. The longest section of Jimmy Swaggart's comeback sermon consisted of him relating two of his dreams to the congregation. He told them he dreamed he was lying flat on his back on the floor of a church. He was trying to get to the pulpit, but he was tied or held down so that he could not move, and a giant snake was beside him (Giuliano, 1999, p. 88). He said that

later that same night he dreamed he was fighting a huge snake. He fought to exhaustion and finally killed it, only to realize there was another, larger snake coming to attack him. He said that he realized he could not defeat this snake on his own. Fortunately, God came and killed the snake by saying “Satan, I rebuke thee” (p. 89).

Relating these dreams was most likely done with the intention of persuading the readers to see him as a Godly man who had usually been able to defeat the attacks of the enemy, Satan. Swaggart interpreted his dreams for the congregation saying that an attack came that was too strong for him to defeat on his own. He needed God’s help, and God did not let him down. This interpretation gave the audience the several pictures of reality that supported Swaggart’s position. First, his audience was well aware that the only thing preventing Swaggart from preaching had been the Assemblies of God. Thus, by relating his first dream he communicated that the Assemblies of God was holding him back from doing God’s work. Second, the audience was told, through the second dream, that there was no reason to worry about Swaggart’s need for rehabilitation because God himself had taken care of the problem.

Giuliano explained why Swaggart’s audience would have been so persuaded by his dreams. They leaned heavily on verses such as Matthew 2:13 that relate God speaking to people through dreams. Swaggart even listed dreams as one of the seven ways God uses to communicate with people today (as cited in Giuliano, 1999, p. 89). He believed and communicated to his followers that “Spirit – filled Christians do receive direct revelations and prophecies from God” (p. 58).

Poloma (1989) reported that eighty-six percent of pastors in the Assemblies of God said they had prayed for deliverance from demonic oppression during a church service (as cited in Giuliano, 1999, pp. 76-77). Because of this prominent additional belief in demons oppression, a dream by fellow televangelist Oral Roberts gained wide acceptance. Roberts reported a dream where he saw a demon of lust digging its claws into Swaggart. Roberts claimed to have excised the demon, thus freeing Swaggart from the cause of his moral failure. Giuliano explained that because the demon oppression or possession was not seen as being Swaggart’s fault, he could not be held responsible for what he did.

Anti-intellectualism as a rhetorical strategy

The approval of dreams and impressions as a means for knowing the will of God fits in well with the typical Pentecostal community. People within this faith community tend to rely on non – intellectual ways of knowing. In fact, education was often looked down on as not relying on God. An example of this trend was evident in the praise of the low level of education of the authors (Fontaine & Fontaine, 1989, p. ix).

Noll (1995) suggested that fundamentalism, dispensational premillennialism, the Higher Life movement, and Pentecostalism were all responses to the religious crisis of the late nineteenth century, and each served to protect some portion of the Christian faith. However, “together they were a disaster for the life of the mind” (p. 24). He argued that the problem of anti – intellectualism among Pentecostals came as a negative side – effect of a very worthy goal. They wanted to pursue God and emphasize His presence, which Noll noted was worthy and admirable. The problem was that in their pursuit of this goal they “must no longer pay attention to the world” (p. 123). This led to a rejection of intellectual arguments.

Marsden (1980) related how anti – intellectualism was firmly established in the early nineteenth century at the Scopes Monkey Trial. Normal Furniss said of fundamentalists that “ignorance ... was a feature of the movement; it became a badge the orthodox often wore proudly” (as cited in Marsden, 1980, p. 212). Works such as *Inherit the Wind* and *Six Days of Forever*, both dealing with the Scopes Trial, worked as rhetorical agents to help cement the view of anti – intellectualism of fundamentalist Christians in the minds of Americans (p. 199). This way of thinking about emotions and intellectualism was still a big part of the theologies of evangelicals at the end of the twentieth century (Noll, 1995, p. 142).

Emotional Appeals

Pentecostals have been looked down on as being uneducated and backward because of their practice of speaking in tongues and their ecstatic style of worship (Alexander, 1994, p. 127). Swaggart himself only had an eighth grade education (Lundy, 1999, p. 162). However, Swaggart defended Pentecostals saying that what others mocked for being uneducated was really just “baptism of the Spirit” (Alexander, 1994, p. 127). Burke (1950) suggested that a rhetor is only successful insofar as he can speak

the language of his audience (p. 55). Swaggart had mastered this art. By using uneducated language, even incorrect grammar in his oratory (Pullum, 1990, p. 45), he was able to both connect with his audience and reinforce ideas of anti – intellectualism.

Peck (1993) explained Swaggart’s worldview as a rejection of dominant consumerism in favor of 19th century Protestantism (p. 228). She said, “Swaggart eschews reason in favor of the emotional experience in religious ecstasy...Conscious reflection, in fact, creates a chasm between the individual and the sacred. Self consciousness is sin because it separates people from God” (p. 228). He believed that psychology was sinful because it told people to think about themselves. He believed the only reason for suffering was sin, thus God was the only one to look to for answers. Peck quoted Swaggart as saying, “Man’s greatest sin is that his every thought is not on God” (p. 167).

Jimmy Swaggart was a very skilled speaker who had mastered the art of engaging his audience (Peck, 1993, p. 124). He relied on his powerful preaching style, rather than a logical sermon, to connect with and move his audience (Frankl, 1987, p. 89). In fact, the extent to which emotion was the predominant emphasis of Swaggart’s church services sparked debate among evangelicals as to whether or not high levels of emotion in the church undermined rational control and discipline (Steinfels, 1988, February 23).

Doctrinal Arguments

Giuliano (1999) discussed ten doctrinal arguments that Swaggart made during his attempt to persuade his audience to forgive him and resume or continue support of his ministry. Several of these arguments were supported in the book by Fontaine and Fontaine and were reference by Giuliano as evidence that Swaggart’s audience accepted certain doctrinal arguments (p. 60). One such doctrine is the doctrine of repentance, forgiveness, and redemption. Swaggart, Fontaine and Fontaine, and rest of Swaggart’s audience all believed that once sin was confessed, then God would forgive, forget, and it was over for that sin. The test for knowing if a person was sincere in their repentance was if fruit was produced. The Fontaines explanation of the fruits evident in the life and ministry of Swaggart were proven by offering quotes from Swaggart to demonstrate how he was exhibiting all nine fruits of the spirit

(Fontaine & Fontaine, 1989, pp. 143-147). Giuliano (1999) suggested that this was likely a very persuasive tactic for their Pentecostal audience (p. 66).

Another doctrinal argument commonly accepted within the Pentecostal community which the Fontaines took on was interpersonal forgiveness between Christians. Swaggart's proclamation that he had done the right thing by confessing his sin served to remind the community that they too had a responsibility to do the right thing, follow the commands of the Bible, and forgive him (p. 77). If, therefore, Swaggart followed the commands of the Bible and confessed, then the audience too had to follow the Bible and forgive him. They were left with no other Biblical choice. This concept will be discussed further in the following sections.

Problems with the Disciplinary Policy of the Assemblies of God

Fontaine and Fontaine (1989) discussed four major problems with the disciplinary policy held by the Assemblies of God. However, prior to embarking on a discussion of these four problems, the authors listed three traits of a denomination that they proposed were commonly misunderstood, thus leading to confusion about the discipline of Jimmy Swaggart as well as other pastors. They first argued that a denomination "is a man – made organization that is neither mandated nor defined in the Bible" (p. 17). Second, they pointed out that "it is a voluntary organization" meaning that a minister can choose to be a part of a particular denomination or choose to resign from it at any time without violating scripture (p. 17). Finally, they stated that "its leaders, policies, decisions, and actions are not infallible and should not be expected to be infallible" (p. 17).

With the aforementioned misunderstandings in mind, the authors went on to propose that the disciplinary policy of the Assemblies of God was ambiguous, unfair, punitive, and unscriptural. They cited using the official minutes of the Forty – Second General Council of the Assemblies of God, held on August 6-11, 1987, specifically the constitutions and bylaws as evidence for their argument. They quoted Article IX, A, Section 1 which stated: "The aims of discipline are ... that those under discipline may be brought to repentance and restoration" (as cited in Fontaine and Fontaine, 1989, p. 19). The issue they took was with the phrase "may be brought to repentance." They were troubled because the phrase

assumed the minister was not already repentant, as in the case of Jimmy Swaggart. Article IX, A, Section 7b was quoted as reading, “The Credentials Committee shall weigh decisions on the basis of ... the manner and thoroughness of his repentance” (as cited in Fontaine and Fontaine, 1989, p. 19). This section implied the committee was dealing with a minister who has repented. The authors claimed that the wording of the policy is ambiguous because it is not clear which part applies to a minister who has repented and which part applies to a minister who has not repented. They claimed that this ambiguity caused the policy to be improperly applied to Jimmy Swaggart, in that he had repented, but was treated as though he had not.

The next issue the authors took with the disciplinary policy was that it was unfair (p. 21). They claimed that the Executive Presbytery’s use of precedent as their reason for demanding Swaggart refrain from preaching for one year was unfair for two main reasons. First, it was described as being unfair because it did treat everyone the same. They recognized that this statement might come across as counterintuitive, but went on to explain. They proposed that because everyone is not the same, the discipline would have a different effect on each person. Thus, each person’s situation should be taken into account, rather than apply a policy across the board that may or may not have the intended effect.

The second reason the policy was seen as unfair was because it locked God out of the process (p. 22). The authors argued that the Executive Presbyters could not allow themselves to ask if God might want Swaggart to have a different punishment because they were determined to follow precedent. They used John 21:22 as an example of Jesus agreeing with their premise that each case, or person, should be treated as an individual. This verse is the account Peter asking Jesus when John would die. Jesus answered that it was completely up to him when or if John would die. The authors used this verse to argue that God should not be confined to a man – made policy, “but that is exactly what happens every time this policy is enforced” (p. 24).

The next problem the Fontaines expressed with the disciplinary policy was that it was punitive. They defined punitive as “inflicting, involving, or aiming at punishment” (p. 25). At the very beginning of the book, the authors said, “policies and tradition apply punishment instead of forgiveness” implying

that the disciplinary policy and tradition in the Assemblies of God offered human ideas of punishment in place of God's commands of forgiveness (p. xii). The disciplinary policy in Article IX, A, Section 1 stated that discipline was "to be redemptive in nature as well as corrective" (p. 25). The problem that authors drew from this was that corrective discipline means corrective punishment. They made this connection by stating that the dictionary used "corrective punishment" as an example to show how the word "corrective" is used. However, this does not mean "corrective" must always go along with punishment. It could be just a change in course. For example, if a person was driving and realized they were going the wrong way, repented, and then took corrective action to get back to where they needed to be, then "corrective" would not at all refer to punishment but merely a change.

The authors went on to give examples of news media reports which referred to Swaggart being punished. They claimed that the failure of the Assemblies of God to correct the media's use of the word "punishment" showed that they agreed that it is a proper term. They concluded their discussion of the disciplinary policy being punitive by reminding the reader that it was the Holy Spirit who wanted the policy changed and proclaimed that the argument of their last few pages had proven that "repentant ministers are not to be punished by man" (p. 27).

Finally, Fontaine and Fontaine argued that the disciplinary policy not only had no scripture to support it, but it actually ran counter to scripture (p. 30). They argued based on verses such as I John 1:9 and Hebrews 8:12 that say that when people confess their sin, God forgives them, cleanses them, and remembers their sin no more. They argued that once God has forgiven and forgotten sin, there can not be any God ordained punishment. God would not ordain punishment for a sin that He does not even remember. The idea of a one year ban from preaching was not mentioned in the Bible. It was developed by man because God's way seemed too easy. Man decided to add a two – year disciplinary program and a one year ban from the pulpit so that God's grace would not be taken advantage of. The Fontaines said "The very concept of requiring something that man can provide, in addition to the grace of God, to restore a repentant minister is preaching another gospel" (pp. 31-32).

Their statement about preaching another gospel was laden with meaning intended to promote a specific view of reality. It conjured up the idea that if a person supported a two year rehabilitation period and a year ban from preaching then they were a false prophet, promoting teaching contrary to the true gospel. Based on the assumption that no one in their intended audience would desire this label, it is logical to assume the Fontaines message was intended to leave the audience no option but to agree with them or support a false gospel.

They went on to argue that the disciplinary policy of banning a repentant minister from the pulpit for a year was unscriptural based on Matthew 7:15-18 which talks about knowing a tree by its fruit. They argued that a minister must be allowed the opportunity to produce fruit under the same conditions he was under when he fell. “Just as the tree must be allowed to function as a fruit tree to produce fruit, so must a minister be allowed to function as a minister in order to produce his fruit” (p. 33). Thus, according to their argument, a minister would not have opportunity to produce fruit to show he is right with God unless he was allowed to preach. A return to the pulpit was argued as the only way for a minister to produce fruit and regain the trust of his followers. However, no evidence was offered as to why fruit could only be produced if the minister was serving in the same capacity as he was before he fell. It could be argued, based on other scripture, that the minister would need to prove himself to be faithful with less responsibility before he would be entrusted with a lot (Luke 19:17).

Handling Conflict in a Biblical and God-honoring Fashion

Fontaine and Fontaine wrote that Swaggart was right to confess his sin before the Louisiana District (p. 6). This was a God – honoring, Biblical thing to do, based on James 5:16 which commands Christians to confess their sins to each other so that they may be healed and restored. They put forth the argument that the church only has authority to discipline a fallen brother if he does not repent. If he does repent, then he is to be forgiven and restored to his former position. The step to disassociate with someone who has fallen should be the last step taken (p. 10) This should only be done when a person is continuing in sin and refuses to repent (I Cor. 5:11, 13).

The Fontaines used the term “shunning” to describe the practice of disassociation, relating the Assemblies of God to a “religious sect” that even promotes wives shunning their husbands who violate various rules (p. 105). They argued that the shunning of Jimmy Swaggart mandated by the Assemblies of God was unbiblical because he had repented. However, the sin from which Swaggart repented was his moral failure. The sin mandating the disassociation was his lack of submission to discipline, not the original moral failure. Thus, the Fontaines argument against shunning and disassociation from a repentant minister would not apply to Swaggart’s situation.

Many people criticized Jimmy Swaggart for being a hypocrite. This was said because he had condemned other ministers for similar sins and supported a one year ban from the pulpit. However, when the tables were turned, he decided the one year ban was unscriptural and against the will of God. The authors addressed this issue by saying that he was not being a hypocrite, but that he has simply changed his mind on the issue (Fontaine & Fontaine, 1989, p. 55). They said that once he was personally in the situation, he could see clearly how unscriptural it was. They argued that Swaggart realized that accepting the ban would have been sin because to refrain from preaching would be to ignore God’s call on his life (p. 56). They went on to argue that the decrease in financial support was because of the perception of sin by not submitting to discipline (p. 65). However, since they claimed that the discipline asked for was unscriptural, Swaggart would not have been sinning by refusing to submit to it.

The authors cited I Tim 3:7 as a verse used by some to justify keeping Jimmy Swaggart out of the pulpit (p. 91). The verse says that a leader in the church must have a good report from those outside the church. Fontaine and Fontaine interpreted this verse to mean that unbelievers must not have any legitimate reason to give a bad report on the person. They qualified any reason with “legitimate” because preaching the gospel is always offensive to some. However, Bible scholars have interpreted this verse to refer to the person’s neighbors being able to offer a good report (Church & Peterman, 1992), not just unbelievers in general. This would mean that the community around Jimmy Swaggart would have to be able to say he conducted himself in a respectable manner. Certainly moral failure with a prostitute would

be enough to constitute a bad report for a time. Swaggart's bad report status was not due to his preaching of the Gospel, but his moral failure.

Fontaine and Fontaine proposed that the Assemblies of God should throw out the old disciplinary policy that was ambiguous, unfair, punitive, and unscriptural in favor of a policy based on love. They proposed that the act of removing a minister from the pulpit for one year would only serve to help Satan (p. 44) They argued that during the time not preaching, Satan would tell him that he did not deserve to minister and that he was worthless. The church would be telling the minister the same things Satan would say by the act of not allowing him to preach. Later in the book the authors said that two years of discipline would only remind a person of their guilt (p. 87). A policy based on love would only discipline unrepentant ministers. If, however, a minister said he has repented and there was no evidence to suggest he was insincere, then he should be restored to preaching immediately.

Hayford (1988) held a very different position on the meaning of the term "restore." He argued that restoration cannot be immediate, and restoring someone does not mean the same thing as returning them to their previous office in the church. He showed that the Greek word for "restore" was *katartidzo* which means "to mend, to fix or to thoroughly equip" (p. 25). He went on to show that the tense and mood of the word "dictate that the action is intended to be sustained in an ongoing, continual way" (pp. 25-26). This showed that to "restore" does not mean to return to office, it means to engage in the process of helping a fallen brother to be returned to a state of spiritual health. The fact that restoration is to take place in "an ongoing, continual way" shows that it cannot be an immediate event. It must take place over a significant period of time.

Another reason Hayford (1988) gave for restoration taking time was that it took time for him to fall (p. 34). In Swaggart's case, his moral failure took place over a long period of time, establishing habits and strongholds. It would only make sense that it would take some time to break those strongholds and be sure those habits had been changed. Hayford cited I Timothy 3:10 which says, "Let them be first proved" as a qualification for spiritual leaders (p. 35). He emphasized that this verse proves the need for patience in identifying spiritual leaders. Time must be taken to test them and let them prove that they are

spiritually healthy. He further cited I Timothy 5:22 where Paul cautions the church to not be hasty in appointing leaders.

In the case of sexual sin, which would apply to Jimmy Swaggart, Hayford argued that time was needed away from the pressures of ministry in order to allow the couple to work on their marriage. The biblical guidelines for spiritual leaders are that they “be faithful in all things...be the husband of one wife, ruling [leading] their children and their own houses well” (I Tim. 3:10-12). Hayford pointed out that in the case of sexual sin, the fallen brother has violated all of the above requirements. He was not faithful in all things, by committing sexual sin another “wife” came in to the marriage, and he did not rule his children well because the trust at home would have been broken (p. 42). All of this was given as evidence against arguments such as the ones proposed by Fontaine and Fontaine (1989).

Authority

Fontaine and Fontaine recognized authority as coming from four different places, the Bible, the Holy Spirit, people and God. Some of these sources have and can extend more authority than others. In the first few pages of the book *The Bible and the Holy Spirit* were recognized for their authority in the church and over the decisions and beliefs of Christians. “The Bible must be our final authority, even if it requires us to change our minds from what we originally thought” (p. xi). The recognition of the Holy Spirit as an authority was not quite as blatant; however, it was clearly visible in instances such as the quotes of direction from the Holy Spirit mentioned earlier that the authors believed the authority from the Holy Spirit to be generally accepted by their audience. It was on this basis of the authority of the Holy Spirit that Fontaine and Fontaine were able to claim authority in their argument. Their credibility as authors rested almost solely on the fact that they were the spokespeople for the Holy Spirit in this matter.

The final issue comes down to a question of spiritual authority given by people and spiritual authority given by God. When there is a disagreement, who has the authority to decide what should happen? According to Fontaine and Fontaine this question is best answered by looking to how the authority of each party was obtained. They argued that since the Presbyters were only voted into office, and Jimmy Swaggart was called by God, Swaggart clearly had spiritual authority from a higher source (p.

100). They argued that while the Presbyters were given authority by men, Swaggart was given authority by God!

Hayford (1988) acknowledged the fact that the Bible does not offer specifics on appropriate amounts of time; however, he argued that there are three guidelines that can be used. First, he said that people should “beware of any preoccupation with too quick a return” because this indicates a “resident presumption or shallow repentance” (p. 51). Second, he said to “beware of overlooking the depth of the fallen’s injury” (p. 51). This is because the damage done by sin is often deeper than the fallen person knows or is willing to admit. They need time be sure they have healed completely. Finally, he said to “beware of unilateral or ‘pop’ methods of reinstatement” (p. 52). Self – announcement is not a biblical method and “contains nothing of the spirit of submission which is at the foundation of all spiritual authority” (p. 52). Biblically, it is crucial that the fallen be willing to submit to the wisdom and authority of the church, rather than rely on their own insight as being superior.

Implications

This study was conducted from a generative perspective. Generative criticism was chosen for this study because it investigates how language and symbols work below the surface to shape our understanding of reality. It followed the work of Burke (1966) by using the concept of terministic screens to show how reality can be viewed differently based on one’s world view or perspective and the words used to frame it. It is an analysis not so much about how a person uses words, but about how words use that person. Rather than looking at what is actually said, generative criticism looks at the ideas that are under the surface. C.S. Lewis echoed this ideas when he noted, “The most dangerous ideas in society are not the ones that are being argued, but the ones that are assumed. Ideas debated in the public square are shaped by argument, but ideas that are assumed by the public shape us” (as cited in Godawa, 1999, p. 1).

Conclusion

The underlying assumptions and beliefs that form terministic screens have a great impact on society. This paper examined the way terministic screens were used by authors Fontaine and Fontaine in their book, *Jimmy Swaggart: To Obey God Rather Than Men*. Their beliefs on church discipline, attitude

toward the Bible, and views on authority and church discipline promoted a specific view of reality for their audience. Because their primary audience was Assemblies of God pastors, it can be assumed that they shared many of the same underlying beliefs, terministic screens, thus making the book more persuasive to them than it would have been to other audiences. Examining this book in light of Burke's theory of terministic screens offered insight into the role of words and symbols in shaping that audience's view of (1) theology including views of the Bible, Bible characters, and dreams, (2) anti-intellectualism including use of emotional appeals and doctrinal arguments, (3) problems with the disciplinary policy of the Assemblies of God, and (4) handling conflict in a biblical and God-honoring fashion including views of authority.

It further demonstrated how words and symbols can be used to symbolically reinforce ideas and beliefs within a religious community that might not have as much of an impact with other audiences. The arguments used in this book were indicative of how argument occurs in religious rhetoric. Studying Fontaine and Fontaine's use of terministic screens offers insight into how religious, particularly Pentecostal and Assemblies of God communities engage in rhetoric.

References

- Alexander, B. C. (1994). *Televangelism Reconsidered: Ritual in the search for human community*. Atlanta, Georgia: Scholars Press.
- Burke, K. (1950). *A rhetoric of motives*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.
- Burke, K. (1966). *Language as symbolic action: Essays on life, literature, and method*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.
- Church, L. F. & Peterman, G. W. (1992). *The NIV Matthew Henry commentary in one volume*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House.
- Fontaine, C. R. and Fontaine, L. K. (1989). *Jimmy Swaggart: To obey God rather than men*. Crockett, TX: The Kerusso Company, Inc.
- Frankl, R. (1987). *Televangelism: The marketing of popular religion*. Carbondale, IL: Southern Illinois University Press.
- Giuliano, M. J. (1999). *Thrice born: The rhetorical comeback of Jimmy Swaggart*. Macon, GA: Mercer University Press.
- Godawa, B. (1999, Spring). Postmodern movies: The good, the bad, and the relative, part I. *SCP Newsletter*, 23(3), 1-11.
- King, W. (1988, February 23) Nature of the incident unclear. *New YorkTimes*, p. A1.20
- Koppel, Ted (Host). (1987, March 24). *Nightline: ABC News* [television broadcast]. Washington, DC: ABC.
- Koppel, Ted (Host). (1988, February 19). *Nightline: ABC News* [television broadcast]. Washington, DC: ABC.
- Lundy, Hunter (1999). *Let us prey: The public trial of Jimmy Swaggart*. Columbus, MS: Genesis Press.
- Marsden, G. M. (1980). *Fundamentalism and American culture*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Noll, M. A. (1995). *The scandal of the evangelical mind*. Leicester, England: Inter – Varsity Press.
- Peck, J. (1993). *The gods of televangelism: The crisis of meaning and the appeal of religious television*. Cresskill, NJ: Hampton Press, Inc.

Pullum, S. J. (1990). The mass appeal of Jimmy Swaggart: Pentecostal media star. *The Journal of Communication and Religion*, 13(1), 39-54.

Seaman, A. R. (1999). *Swaggart: The unauthorized biography of an American evangelist*. New York: Continuum.

Steinfels, P. (1988, February 23) Emotion is key to Swaggart Church. *New York Times*, p. A20.

Swaggart, J. (1988) A personal message. *The Evangelist*, 20(4), 17-18.